

REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 20 FEBRUARY 2008

SUBJECT: OPEN SPACE AUDIT & STRATEGY

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To make the Committee aware of the requirements of the new SPP11: Open Space and Physical Activity, in relation to the preparation of an Open Space Audit and Strategy, and to advise of the programme of work that has already commenced in order to meet this commitment.

1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section E(2) of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to preparation of Strategic documents in support of the Local Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note:

(a) that SPP11: Open Space and Physical Activity (November 2007) requires local authorities to prepare an Open Space Audit and Strategy for their Local Plan area. This excludes the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) area – the CNP planning authority has advised they will prepare their own Open Space Audit and Strategy for their Local Plan area;

(b) that the Strategy will be developed by a corporate Steering Group, involving external stakeholders, where necessary, and will be made available for public consultation. The final version will be approved by this Committee and will be used as Supplementary Planning Guidance in determining planning applications;

(c) that work has already commenced on an Audit, funded by Greenspace Scotland and building on work already undertaken through the Local Plan Review. Further funding opportunities to undertake Open Space Strategy development works are currently being made available through, for example, Scottish Natural Heritage;

- (d) that although the Strategy will be a corporate exercise, a primary aim will be to secure through the planning process:
- Protection of open space from inappropriate development
 - New open space through conditions attaching to planning permissions; and
 - Developer contributions towards identified shortfalls of open space provision; and
- (e) that the Strategy will provide a basis for securing funds from external sources to:
- Provide new, or upgraded, open space; and
 - Secure maintenance bonds for the upkeep of new open spaces.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 SPP11: Open Space and Physical Activity

- 3.1.1 The Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)11: Open Space and Physical Activity was published in November 2007 to supersede NPPG11: Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space. A report on the consultative draft was considered by the Environmental Services Committee on 25th October 2006 (Section 6 of the minute refers).
- 3.1.2 The SPP sets out how the planning system should help safeguard and create new open spaces and places where people can take part in sport and recreation. The SPP requires local authorities, however, to take a corporate, strategic, long-term approach to managing the open space within their areas, objectively assessing both current and future needs and protecting all spaces that can help to meet those needs.
- 3.1.3 The primary implication is that it requires the Council to conduct an Open Space audit of settlements in the Local Plan area; prepare an Open Space Strategy and advise the Scottish Executive Development Department when the audit is complete and once the strategy is finalised.
- 3.1.4 The rationale behind the new SPP's emphasis on having an Open Space Strategy, is that it links in to the wide-ranging objectives identified in other national policy guidance and legislation:
- Climate Change – *Choosing Our Future (2005)*
 - Health & Wellbeing – *Let's make Scotland More Active (2003)*
 - Sports & Recreation – *Reaching Higher (2007)*
 - Access – *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003*
 - Biodiversity – *Scottish Biodiversity: It's in your hands (2004)*

3.2 Preparation of an Open Space Audit and Strategy

- 3.2.1 The Audit and Strategy is to cover all types of open space and its linkages within and immediately outwith settlements identified in the Local Plan:
- public and privately owned, including spaces owned by schools and voluntary clubs;
 - informal open space as well as parks and formal facilities; and
 - access and paths networks.
- 3.2.2 The Open Space Audit will comprise:
- a map of open space, (using GIS) categorised according to the typology set out in PAN 65 (categories of EN sites);
 - an analysis of existing open space provision, in terms of size, function, level of use, catchment, accessibility, and community perspectives;
 - An evaluation of areas (or types) of deficiency or surplus.
- 3.2.3 Given the outputs required, there are two distinct stages in the audit process: a quantitative audit (an inventory/map of existing open space and its intrinsic features) and qualitative audit (an assessment of the functionality, usability of individual open spaces). The overall evaluation of the open space resource, based on the audit findings, will form a sound platform for producing an open space strategy.
- 3.2.4 Drawing upon the findings of an open space audit, the purpose of the strategy would be to:
- Identify deficiencies of open space available and accessible to the community.
 - Set out a vision for new and improved open space which is appropriate to the Moray Council area, in consultation with key stakeholders and the community;
 - Safeguard valued open space and identify surplus open space;
 - Guide the allocation of resources for investment, ensuring Best Value;
 - Ensure that there is a firm basis for developer contributions, with respect to new development applications, and that these are used to best effect in terms of identified local need and strategic priorities; and
 - Draw together, and add value to, other relevant strategies and plans within the community planning framework, ensuring an agreed approach to open space provision across Council and its partners.
- 3.2.5 Public and targeted stakeholder consultation will be required at key stages of the strategy's development.
- 3.2.6 The strategy, once adopted, will become one of a suite of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents that are 'material considerations' in the assessment of development applications.

3.3 Benefits for Moray

- 3.3.1 The Open Space Strategy should provide a clear, community-endorsed basis for directing investment and securing funding for open spaces (e.g. through Scottish Natural Heritage; and developer contributions) and instil a sense of community ownership.
- 3.3.2 By establishing priorities for action and directing resources the Strategy will ensure that the right mix of attractive, welcoming and functional open spaces are accessible to all in the community, thereby contributing to the quality of life and health of Moray residents and visitors (a stated aim of the Community Plan 2006-2010).
- 3.3.3 Open spaces that enhance our townscapes benefit their promotion for tourism and investment.

3.4 Work on Open Space Audit & Strategy to date

- 3.4.1 Progress to date includes:
- The environmental classifications (ENV designations) used in the new Local Plan, which follow the national Planning Advice Note 65 (PAN65) advice.
 - The "Natural Grass and Synthetic Turf Pitches Strategy 2007-2013".

3.5 Proposed Work Program for Open Space Audit and Strategy

- 3.5.1 SPP11 recommends that local authorities should use a similar methodology in classifying their open space, in order to promote consistency and the development of national sustainability indicators.
- 3.5.2 Greenspace Scotland has received funding to develop an open space audit methodology (quantitative element). It has also funded the cost of consultants undertaking the quantitative element of such open space audits for 'urban areas' (settlements with over 3000 people) in 10 of the 20 local authority areas that have undertaken auditing so far.
- 3.5.3 Greenspace Scotland has confirmed it will fund consultants to undertake a quantitative audit (GIS mapping) of Moray's three largest settlements - Elgin, Forres and Buckie. This work is planned for completion by April 2008. They are also investigating the possibility of extending this funding to include the mapping of Lossiemouth and Keith.
- 3.5.4 Mapping of the open space in the remaining smaller settlements is planned to be undertaken in-house, using the same methodology used by the consultants. Once this quantitative audit has been undertaken, the Council will have a clear map and inventory of the open space resource within the Local Plan area.

- 3.5.5 A corporate Steering Group will then be set up to oversee the qualitative element of the audit and the development of the Open Space Strategy. Along with key departmental representatives (e.g. Parks and Education), other key stakeholders who will be invited to participate in the Steering Group include: Scottish Natural Heritage, Sportscotland, Historic Scotland, Forestry Commission, HIE Moray, Joint Community Council, Homes for Scotland and National Health Service.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

The undertaking of an Open Space Audit and preparation of an Open Space Strategy will support strategic priorities across all themes of the Community Plan.

The development of an Open Space Strategy will contribute to the achievement of social, environmental and education corporate priorities.

(b) Policy and Legal

Under the new SPP11, all local authorities are required to produce an Open Space Audit and Open Space Strategy to feed into the Local Plan Review process.

The preparation of an Open Space Strategy ('Greenspace Strategy') is required to satisfy Policy IMP4 of the Finalised Local Plan – it is listed in the Council's Action Plan (Table 1 of the Finalised Local Plan). In the Action Plan, the Council has committed to preparing the Strategy within a 0-3 year time scale from implementation of the new Local Plan.

The Finalised Local Plan open space policies (E4 and CF2) make reference to the future development of an Open Space Strategy to support the implementation of these policies and to provide an overall context for the Council's "Natural Grass and Synthetic Turf Pitches Strategy 2007-2013". The Council has been criticised by stakeholders for not developing an Open Space Strategy in time for it to be available for consideration during the Local Plan Review process.

Under the terms of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, the Council will be required to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Open Space Strategy.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

It is anticipated that facilitation of the open space audit and strategy can be undertaken within existing budgets and accommodated within the staff workload for Planning & Development. Input/assistance from other Council departments during consultation and through Steering Group participation, will also be required.

Greenspace Scotland will fund the cost of consultants to undertake the open space mapping (quantitative audit) of the three largest settlements (Elgin, Forres, Buckie).

(d) Consultations

The Environmental Protection Manager, Chief Housing Officer, Head of Estates Service, Educational Resource Manager (Sports and Recreation) and Health Improvement Officer have been consulted on this report. Reference to the Council's Pitch Strategy has been included in the report as a result of feedback from the Educational Resource Manager. A comment was received from the Head of the Estates Service that a minimum size should be specified for the parcels of land to be examined throughout the Strategy process. It is intended that the Steering Group will address the issue of setting such a threshold.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The new SPP11: Open Space and Physical Activity places a requirement on Councils to undertake Open Space Audits and prepare Open Space Strategies for their Local Plan areas to tie in with their 5-yearly cycle of the Local Plan review.**
- 5.2 Anticipating this new requirement, Moray Council has already undertaken preliminary work on classifying existing open space through the ongoing Local Plan Review. It has also committed to the preparation of an Open Space (' Greenspace') Strategy within the next three years through Policies E4, CF2 and the Action Plan in the Finalised Local Plan.**
- 5.3 An Open Space Strategy will implement a range of Local Plan policies affecting open space. It will meet Community Plan objectives, across all themes, by providing a clear, community-endorsed basis for directing investment and securing funding and developer contributions toward open space provision. Funding and advice is currently being made available through Scottish Natural Heritage and via Greenspace Scotland and the Council is well-placed to make use of the support of these organisations.**

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Background Papers: SPP11: Open Space and Physical Activity
Ref: AH