

TOPIC PAPER 10: Green Infrastructure

The way that the whole town develops in the future will be affected by planning decisions. Crawley Borough Council has started work on a new local plan that will help to guide development in Crawley over 15 years from 2014-2029.

This consultation period forms part of the early engagement, and further consultation stages are planned before the document is adopted in 2014. Comments received to earlier consultation periods, including to the Topic Papers in 2009, the Town Centre North Supplementary Planning Document and the Manor Royal Masterplan, will continue to be taken into consideration, alongside the technical evidence base, when formulating the Local Plan Preferred Strategy. The Preferred Strategy will be made available for a further period of consultation later in 2012.

This is your opportunity to shape the way the town develops and the council would appreciate and value any comments you have on this Topic Paper or any of the others that form part of this consultation.

Consultation Questions:

- GI1. What types of development should be encouraged in the countryside?
- GI2. What are the specific needs and priorities of Crawley's countryside that require further detailed policy development and expression?
- GI3. Do you agree with the proposed policy approach for the countryside and Built-up Area Boundary principles?
- GI4. What are the other issues and options that should be explored with regards to the countryside and is further evidence required?
- GI5. Is the current policy approach to open space provision of protecting sites unless proven to be surplus still relevant?
- GI6. Should the council consider a limited release of some of the lower quality and poorly used sites to help meet our need for development land?
- GI7. Are there any particular areas/types of open space/recreation facilities that are of particular importance to you?

Summary of Current Context:

Green infrastructure (GI) is the network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of the population. For Crawley this means the landscape of the urban/rural fringe, areas of nature conservation, open space and routes that link these assets together. This topic paper explores the key elements of green infrastructure, setting out the current policy context, the locally specific issues, and previous comments on this topic and where we are now.

The Urban/Rural Fringe

National countryside policy requires local authorities to:

- protect and enhance the quality and character of the countryside;
- support traditional land based activities whilst making the most of new leisure and recreation opportunities that require a countryside location;

- provide access to the countryside, and;
- be aware of the specific circumstances, needs and priorities in the countryside,

The built-up-area boundary is drawn around the urban area of Crawley to clearly define the urban area from the countryside. This identifies where national and local countryside policy is applied and also maintains the sense of separation between urban area and the countryside.

The adopted Core Strategy designates 'strategic gaps' which are areas where most types of development are not permitted. This is to maintain the separate identity of settlements such as Pease Pottage, Charlwood and Crawley itself. However, national policy now prefers a more flexible approach that focuses on the role of areas and the use of criteria based policies to ensure that the area fulfils that role. The use of a landscape character assessment is a way of developing this approach.

Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

National policy on biodiversity requires local authorities to:

- maintain, and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests
- prevent harm to biodiversity and geological conservation interests.
- plan policies on the form and location of development should take a strategic approach to the conservation, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity and geology, and recognise the contributions that sites, areas and features, both individually and in combination, make to conserving these resources.
- promote opportunities for the incorporation of beneficial biodiversity and geological features within the design of development.
- base policies on up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas.

The adopted core strategy specifies the location of designated sites of importance for biodiversity and seeks to protect them in accordance with national policy. Opportunities to secure new areas and features to enhance nature conservation and for education and interpretation are sought.

Open space, Sport and Recreation

National policy requires local authorities to undertake an assessment of the existing and future needs of the community for open space, sport and recreation facilities.

The adopted core strategy 2007 seeks the retention and active improvement of open spaces, sport and recreational facilities within the town and subsequently an assessment of existing and future needs of the community for open space, sport and recreation facilities was completed in 2008.

Key Issues:

The Urban/Rural Fringe

Crawley borough is a predominately urban area surrounded by countryside. Approximately 25% of land within Crawley's borough boundary is currently designated as Countryside although much of this is in the area safeguarded from development which would be incompatible with a second runway at Gatwick Airport. Much of the countryside within the boundary is also protected for its own sake as 'strategic gap' to help enhance the setting of the urban area.

Crawley's urban/rural fringe is important for the health and wellbeing of Crawley

residents. It is also a gateway to the town giving people their first impressions, a nature reserve and also for environmental education, renewable energy and sometimes as a sustainable place to provide housing immediately around the existing urban area.

Crawley is a single settlement with strong development pressures. As such, there is a clear need for a distinction between the urban area where certain forms of development are likely to be appropriate and the countryside, where protection and enhancement are of most importance. It will be important for the Local Plan to recognise the role of the urban/rural fringe and make the most of the wide ranging opportunities to meet the needs of residents, visitors and for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment.

Providing access to the countryside is important for the health and well being of residents and visitors to Crawley as well as a corridor for wildlife. An extensive network of public rights of way and cycle paths provide a framework for pedestrian access and recreation to and within the countryside. Links are particularly strong to the west and north west sides of Crawley where public rights of way run directly from the urban area out into the open countryside. Access to the east and south is more limited as the M23/A264 creates a physical and perceived barrier.

Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

Crawley has a number of sites both within and outside the built up area which are important to nature conservation. The Borough has 12 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) which are designated for their local flora and fauna interest and value. There are also 3 Local Nature Reserves in Crawley, which have wildlife and / or geological features that are of local importance. There are 193 hectares of Ancient Woodland within the Borough and a significant amount of large environmentally valuable trees scattered throughout the town.

With an increasing population and the need for development, the impact on the natural environment is a key issue. The Natural Environment White Paper has highlighted that nature in England is highly fragmented and unable to respond effectively to pressures such as climate and demographic change. The government target is to move from net biodiversity loss to net gain, by supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and coherent ecological networks.

Open space, Sport and Recreation

In Crawley, the network of green spaces, corridors, and sport and recreational facilities often perform a fundamental structural, amenity and biodiversity role for the town, adding a degree of local distinctiveness and identity. These spaces mostly resulted from the master planning of the town, where the best elements of the countryside upon which the neighbourhoods were built, were retained. They also contribute to the quality of life provided in the local area through their contribution to a range of social issues.

In recent years, the number and quality of these sites has come under increasing pressure from both new development and maintenance budgetary constraints. In addition, some of the sites are positioned poorly, for example too near to similar facilities, or in inaccessible locations, leading to poor usage and in some cases, anti-social behaviour. With the need for new housing, Crawley's growing role as a sub-regional hub within the Gatwick Diamond and a limited supply of development land, these sites potentially form a supply of developable land.

Options:

The Urban/Rural Fringe

The Local Plan will need to develop policies on:

- The unique areas of Crawley's countryside either because of their intrinsic value, or because of the role they play in defining the setting of the town.
- The type and location of development that should be encouraged in the countryside, or alternatively resisted to protect and conserve valued countryside.
- The extent and circumstances in which new development would be harmful to valued countryside and the setting of the town.
- Defining the where the built-up area boundary lies to define the urban area from the countryside.

Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

The council will need to:

- Decide how we plan for future development with no net loss of biodiversity.
- Assess the risk to the natural environment from future development.
- Develop a more strategic and integrated approach to protecting, conserving and enhancing biodiversity.
- Decide whether to seek contributions from development to prioritise enhancement of existing local wildlife areas, developing new wildlife areas and/or seeking biodiversity measures as part of new development such as green roofs/landscaping.
- Identify places of wildlife value in Crawley that are special to the community and of particular local significance that should be protected from development.
- Investigate ways of enabling habitats and wildlife to adapt to climate change.

Open space, Sport and Recreation

National planning policy in the form of PPG17, requires local authorities to undertake local assessments of their open spaces, sport and recreational facilities and to set local standards based upon local provision and need. The guidance is seeking the preservation of the open spaces by allowing local authorities to develop a set of provision and quality standards that represent local issues. Crawley's PPG17 assessment was completed in 2008 and broadly recommends the retention of all open spaces, sport and recreational provision. This recommendation is broadly in line with adopted Core Strategy policies, but will need consideration against the wider development objectives for the Borough, the needs of local residents and housing requirements.

Indication of Potential Direction:

The responses to the councils' previous consultation on countryside issues supported the option of landscape characterisation and highlighted the benefits of integrating the topic into a wider consideration of green infrastructure including biodiversity and open space.

Since then the Landscape Character Assessment (part one) has been completed which is an assessment of the landscape surrounding Crawley with the purpose of identifying and understanding what makes a particular landscape unique. The next stage of this study is to identify the role/objective of each area and guidelines and opportunities for enhancement. To do this we need residents and stakeholders to tell us what they think about the countryside surrounding Crawley to build on the

assessment

The Landscape Character Assessment is a basis for stimulating debate on the vision for the countryside surrounding the town. The outcome could be the formulation of area/location specific policies as part of the wider green infrastructure network, setting out where certain types of development would be appropriate and to develop policies that are appropriate to the varying character of Crawley's landscape including areas no longer covered by the strategic gap designation.

The responses to the councils' previous consultation on open space, recreation, leisure and greenways issues supported the current approach of retaining green space unless proven to be surplus and also that the council could consider a limited release of sites deemed surplus to meet the need for development land, but only after thorough investigation and consultation. Since this consultation the council have begun a partial review of outdoor sports facilities and will consult on specific sites as part of the next stage of consultation.

Biodiversity as an issue was also raised in the previous consultation highlighting that more could be done to conserve and enhance biodiversity through a more strategic and integrated approach recognising the urban nature of the borough. It was also highlighted that the public rights of way around Crawley are becoming increasingly fragmented.

It is felt that these issues can be addressed through preparation of a green infrastructure plan as part of the Local Plan 2014 which brings together the above issues and looks at them in an integrated way.

Evidence Base:

- Crawley Borough Playing Pitch Strategy for Outdoor Sports (2005)
- Crawley Borough Play Strategy and Development Plan (2007-2010)
- Crawley PPG17 Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment (2008)
- Urban Rural Fringe Study for Crawley (Aug 2006)
- Crawley Landscape Character Assessment Part1 (CBC 2010)
- Review of CBC's Sites of Nature Conservation Importance Management Plans (CBC 2010)
- Crawley Borough Council Built-up Area Boundary Guiding Principles
- PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (CLG, Aug 2004)
- PPS9 Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (CLG 2005)
- Biodiversity Action Plans – Woodland, Urban (Sussex Wildlife Trust)
- Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open space, Sport and Recreation (CLG 2002)
- Natural Environment White Paper *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature* (DEFRA 2011)
- Draft National Planning Policy Framework (CLG July 2011)
- A Strategy for West Sussex Landscape (WSCC, 2005)
- West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment, (Land Management Guidelines for Northern Vales, High Weald Forests and adjacent High Weald) (WSCC, 2003)
- South East Green Infrastructure Framework (June 2009)