



Public Open Space in New Housing Development

This is one of a series of local planning guidance notes amplifying development plan proposals in a clear format, with the objective of improving design standards. Public open space makes an important contribution to people's quality of life, providing opportunities for informal recreation and enhancing the visual appearance of an area. The proposal and guidelines which follow have therefore been prepared and adopted by the Council to foster a better standard of design and to clarify methods of financing future maintenance costs. By taking note of the advice contained in this leaflet it is hoped that developers will have a better understanding of public open space requirements and funding. These guidelines cannot cover all situations and applicants and agents are advised wherever the circumstances are unusual to discuss their proposals with a planning or landscape officer prior to the formal submission of an application.

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Available in alternative formats

The National Playing Field Standard

The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) has proposed a standard of 6 acres (2.43 hectares) of public open space per 1000 population comprising:

- 4 acres (1.62 ha) of playing fields. *These should be suitable for youth and adult use; facilities include pitches, bowling greens, tennis courts and athletics tracks.*

- 1.5 acres (0.61 ha) of informal public open space, such as informal play space and landscaped amenity areas.
- 0.5 acres (0.20 ha) of children's equipped playground facilities.

Local Requirements

A recent survey of public open playing space in Wrexham County Borough revealed that there is a shortage of public open space (particularly playing fields and playgrounds) in the majority of communities when compared with the NPFA standard.

The local Planning Authority is therefore keen to ensure that:

- a) adequate public open space is provided within new housing developments.
- b) developers should enter into legal agreements in order that funding can be provided for the future maintenance of open spaces and play equipment.
- c) exceptionally, in suitable limited cases where new developments are in close proximity to existing council owned play and amenity provision, developers should enter into legal agreements in order that funding can be provided to enhance, upgrade, augment and maintain the existing facilities in lieu of providing provision on site.



In all cases public open space should:

- *be well related to dwellings but not so as to cause nuisance to residents (e.g.kicking of balls against a dwelling).Furthermore, location, design, layout and lighting should seek to ensure peace of mind for users and to minimise creating opportunities for vandalism and crime;*
- *be designed and laid out for easy maintenance;*
- *be usable. The provision of small pieces of land resembling vacant building plots has little value either in recreational or visual terms and are often difficult to maintain. Of greater value is the provision of one structured and reasonably sized informal open space supplemented, where appropriate, by minor landscaped areas;*
- *incorporate existing public footpaths or rights of way or establish new public rights of way;*
- *incorporate and where possible enhance existing site features such as landforms, trees, hedgerows, vegetation, water features and wildlife habitats;*
- *except in exceptional circumstances, be contained within the site and designed as an integral part of the development. It is essential that the open space contributes to the character of the development and does not represent merely a grassed area tacked onto the development as an afterthought;*
- *in the case of children's play equipment, should be visible and well located, with safe pedestrian access, to ensure that small children can play in safety. Play equipment and surfaces should be designed and installed to the relevant safety standards, B.S.E.N.1176/1177; and*
- *be of an acceptable standard of design and layout to enable future maintenance by the Council.*

Off Site Provision and Funding

In suitable developments of less than 20 dwellings the local Planning Authority may agree that there is adequate equipped council owned play and amenity provision in close proximity to the proposed development, which could be used by the new residents rather than having provision supplied on site. The existing provision must be safely and easily accessible, not involving the crossing of main roads. In such cases the developer must enter into a legal agreement with the Council to pay the commuted sum referred to above. This money would then be used to upgrade, enhance, augment and maintain the agreed existing provision.

Design Brief

In some instances, particularly where sites have been allocated in the development plan, it may be the case that the Planning Department has produced a design brief for the site indicating the type, contents, position, size etc of the open space required. In these cases it is vital that early discussions between the applicant and the Planning Department are undertaken. This may help to speed up the determination of applications which may otherwise be delayed should the proposals for public open space be deemed unsatisfactory. Irrespective of whether a design brief has been prepared, the Council will look favourably upon any imaginative and innovative schemes which are presented and which broadly satisfy the standards outlined above.

Standard of Provision

The following Council standards will assist in working towards a level of provision of public open space in new housing developments in line with the NPFA standards outlined above.

- *Public open space should be provided in all new housing developments at a minimum level of **0.4 hectares per 50 dwellings**, for all schemes of 10 dwellings or more.*
- *Provision should include an equipped children's play area(s), and/or informal open spaces, and, where the necessary open space requirements is 0.6 hectares or more, a playing field(s).*

Financing and Future Maintenance

Developers will be required to maintain the public open space provided on their sites for a period of twelve months from satisfactory completion, and as a condition to any approval, must enter into a legal 'commuted sums' agreement with the Council for the future maintenance of the site, for a ten year period. The current charge is £1000 per dwelling to cover maintenance costs for a ten year period which was set in August 2008.

Where developers would like to increase the number of dwellings at a later stage, the amount of public open space and commuted sum required will be increased accordingly. The commuted sum figure of £1000 per dwelling will be subject to an review, to ensure that it keeps pace with real current costs. It is likely that this figure will rise with the rate of inflation. The Planning Department should be contacted to see what the current figure is at the time of the planning application. Some developers prefer to make their own arrangements for the maintenance of open space. Typically, these involve the establishment of a company to carry out the maintenance work, and residents of the development become shareholders. Whereas there is no objection in principle to such arrangements, each case will be considered on its own merits and in particular provision for future maintenance must be demonstrated to the Council's satisfaction. Where such arrangements are approved an appropriate agreement with the Council will be required incorporating the arrangements which have been approved.



For further information contact:

Chief Planning Officer
Lambpit Street, Wrexham.
LL11 1AR
Telephone: (01978) 292013
Fax: (01978) 292502
www.wrexham.gov.uk

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