

APPENDIX Dvii

**ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL – INTERNAL
CONSULTATIONS**

Rother District Council Internal Consultations

Many internal officers have been contacted with regards to the current and potential future needs of open space and indoor sports provision.

The following points summarise the main issues:

General

- Around 80% of the district is designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- There are ten conservation areas identified in the Local Plan with potential for a further six.
- Around 50% of the population live in the towns of Bexhill, Rye and Battle and the remaining in the more rural part of the district.
- Although Bexhill has an aging population there is a focus on young people's needs and ensuring they are engaged in recreational activities that are not pushed to peripheral locations.
- District Council provision tends to focus on the main population centres with parish councils left to look after the rural needs.
- The 2003 triennial survey resulted in 75% of the population being either satisfied or very satisfied with parks and gardens; the median for the country was 74%.
- Regeneration and the attraction of new businesses into the area are seen as vital to the future of the district. The provision of an attractive neighbourhood with a high standard of recreational, sports and open space provision is seen as an important part of the "feel good factor", to make Rother a good place to live and work thus ensuring the economic success of the district.
- The officers were satisfied and in general quite proud of the level of and standards of provision.

Quantity

- The current provision of outdoor space appears to be sufficient to meet local needs.
- The district has some major sites that attract tourists as well as local visitors; these include Camber Sands, the seafront at Bexhill, Battle and Rye town and harbour. Camber Sands especially gets very busy during the Summer months.
- Allotments are spread district wide with varying levels of use. Some sites have waiting lists for example, Broad Oak Park, Collington Hall, Barrack Hall.
- Teenage provision was identified as an area where there is a potential weakness. Plans for future developments are being assessed through the Play Strategy work currently underway.
- Sports pitch provision is felt to be about right for the teams that are currently competing.

Quality

- In general the standard of open space provision is felt to be good. Maintenance standards are high, although there are fears of having to compromise on standards due to budget issues in the future.
- The flagship park in Bexhill, Egerton Park, which is felt to be below standard, is being addressed.
- The seafront at Bexhill is also being addressed, parts of it are considered dated and plans include updating it in a sympathetic way.
- Camber Sands is a unique part of the coastline with many opportunities for recreational activity and public enjoyment. Although visitor numbers are very high

during the summer months the off-season months are much quieter and there is scope to improve the year round facilities on offer.

- Some sports pavilions in the villages are past their best and raising funds for replacement or refurbishment is difficult.
- The quality of sports pitches is felt to be quite good across a variety of sports; bowls, cricket, football. There are some problems with drainage at certain sites for example Rye Salts and Little Common.
- Although well maintained the age of some of the equipment in children's' play area will need addressing.
- The location of some young people's recreational areas was not conducive to encouraging children to gather there, for example cliff top site in Bexhill rather than seafront.

Accessibility

- In the rural part of the district there were issues around accessibility. Public transport links are not particularly good making it difficult for some of the population to travel to some of the larger facilities. Out of necessity many rural villages have developed their own smaller scale facilities being supported by Rother DC. The growth of community halls with a multi purpose function demonstrates this. Most parishes also have their own recreation grounds.
- The poor accessibility makes sports development initiatives hard to introduce in the rural part of the district.
- In the north of the district many individuals will travel to Tunbridge Wells or other Kent towns for their recreational needs.
- Parking during the summer months at Camber Sands can be problematical.

Strengths

- Outdoor informal recreational opportunities are very strong. This includes countryside paths and the coastline. Opportunities for developing these open spaces taking into account educational, historical, environmental and economic factors is very positive in order that the maximum benefit for users can be achieved. For example developments proposed at Camber Sands, 1066 Walk which passes across the district through Battle and future plans at Pebsham. Working in partnership is seen as key to the maintenance and future development of the open spaces in the district.
- The level of general maintenance of council owned sites across the district is felt to be good.
- Most parishes have good levels of provision including recreation grounds and access to the footpath network.
- Appointment of Parks Development Officer who can concentrate on proactive development of opportunities and facilities rather than reactive maintenance issues.

Weaknesses

- Fears of budgets cuts may lower current standards of maintenance of open spaces
- Although the rural network of paths is seen as a strength it was felt better signage of some routes could significantly improve the area.

- Providing suitable activities and equipment for the young people of the district is seen as problematical. There are difficulties with installing appropriate equipment in a short enough time frame to keep the interest of the young people and making sure its physical location in the neighbourhood ensures good use without unduly affecting other residents or businesses.
- The rural nature of the district and relatively poor road and public transport provision makes accessibility to open space difficult.

Suggestions for the future

- Plans for future provision need to be inclusive and involve major partnership working. For example housing developments in North Bexhill give an opportunity for new open space provision and the broad range of types of open space from allotments through to formal sports pitches needs to be discussed carefully.
- Although in the early stages of development Pebsham Countryside Park is seen as an exciting opportunity. Links between recreation, environment, economics and education need to be fully explored to make the most of this special area.
- The District Council needs to be able to react quickly to the needs of the youth and use them to help plan for the future. There is a need to understand the different types of youth activities for example street sports or more traditional skateboard ramps.
- Requirement to balance a variety of needs when looking at open space provision; conservation, regeneration, health, crime prevention etc.
- The rural parishes need assistance with maintaining their facilities especially clubhouses and pavilions.
- Indoor sports provision in Bexhill could be improved with a single wet and dry major facility.
- Future developments that involve relocation of open space need to be carefully planned so that no loss of accessibility is experienced during development phases.
- Open space provision needs to be well publicised to encourage more use by a wider market. Families need extra encouragement as good experiences at a young age at quality venues will help safeguard open space provision for the future.
- Developing the coastline with centres of excellence for watersports.

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