

Government policy gives strong emphasis to the importance of open space provision: *it is important that people - particularly children and elderly people - should have access to open space close to where they live. Open space, whether or not there is public access to it, is also important for its contribution to the quality of urban life. It enhances the character of conservation areas, listed buildings and historic landscapes; it can attract business and tourism; it is part of the urban regeneration process. Use of land as open space is no less important than other uses. (PPG17).*

Policy HD12 of the Harrogate District Local Plan states that amenity open space should be protected from development where it contributes to visual amenity and character.

The Harrogate District Local Plan requires new housing development to contribute towards provision of public open space (Policy R4). Guidance on the type and amount of open space required for housing development is set out in the Council's leaflet *Provision of Open Space in connection with New Housing Development* revised April 2001.

Public open space may also be provided as a development in its own right, for example by a community group or a school or in relation to a commercial development.



Within Harrogate District, most existing public open space is adopted by the Council and managed by the Department of Leisure and Amenity Services (DLAS); a commuted payment by the developer to the Council helps towards the costs of maintenance. Where unusual or high-maintenance features are included in the open space, the Council may require a separate commuted sum to cover replacement parts or specialist management e.g. for a water feature. For further

information contact the Commuted Sums Officer tel: 01423 556758.

In some cases a local community group or Parish Council may elect to maintain the open space themselves for example at Tockwith; alternatively a management company may be set up for the open space and structure planting of a new housing estate.

Open space requirements fall into three categories :-

- formal recreation needs (fully equipped children's play areas, kickabout spaces, youth and adult play areas);



- informal amenity open space (an attractive space for people to enjoy rather than for active recreational use);
- open space as an integral part of the development.

Open Space proposals should be submitted to the planning authority as part of the planning application. The Council will comment on the proposed design on a case-by-case basis: every site is different with differing recreational needs, but there are some general principles which should be considered at the outset:-

- respect local distinctiveness and landscape character, reflecting key characteristics of the neighbourhood: locally characteristic plants such as lime-tolerant species in Boroughbridge and Ripon; generous lawns echoing the Stray in Harrogate; "borrowing" views of the Nidd Gorge in Knaresborough;
- include specified features within the site (where required by DLAS): kickabout space, seating area, children's play area, teenagers' meeting place;

- consider the form and layout of the open space as an integral part of the overall site design and layout and in the context of public open spaces within the neighbourhood;



- ensure safe construction and maintenance (in accordance with CDM Regulations): to be safe and effective at all times of year, without unnecessary financial or skills burden (e.g. ensure mown grass areas are of a size and shape to facilitate ease of maintenance, choose non-invasive shrub species which will fit the space available without onerous maintenance, allow machinery room to manoeuvre, make sure site is safe and accessible for grounds maintenance staff, use bark mulch for better plant establishment, reduced water-loss and improved weed control);
- carefully assess safety of any water features: existing or new water bodies should have shallow margins, gently sloping sides and good visibility (see *Ponds* design guidance sheet for further information).
- consider wild spaces such as reed beds, species-rich grassland and native woodland.

For further information or general advice contact the Play Areas and Open Spaces Officer tel: 01423 528102.



- protect public safety: good visibility especially at entrances, along paths and for children's play areas; reduce conflict between different users e.g. cyclists and children; provide safe water features;
- respect neighbouring properties: achieve specified distance between residential properties and formal play areas, design distinctive boundaries between private and public spaces;

Open space can be multi-functional: planting can look good and provide visual or noise screening and be beneficial to wildlife; low-lying grassy areas can provide areas for water to percolate into the ground during exceptionally wet weather (in accordance with Sustainable Drainage Systems) and be used as an informal kickabout area the rest of the time.

