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# Health, culture and communities

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## 4 Health, Culture and Communities

**Community facilities, including indoor and outdoor sports facilities, schools, health care, libraries, children's day-care nurseries, children's centres, children and family centres, community buildings and other education facilities, are important to the way in which we live. How we develop, promote and protect our 'social infrastructure' is therefore important to communities across Stockport.**

**Stockport has an important built heritage which it has sought to protect and enhance. As pressure comes to redevelop or to change the way buildings are used, we will need to make sure that our historic buildings and environments are managed positively for the future. New buildings provide the opportunity to minimise their long-term impacts on the environment, and should also be well designed in terms of their appearance.**

### Community needs

#### Current context

**4.1** A core planning principle of the NPPF is to take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.

**4.2** As a local authority we need to:

- plan positively for the provision and use of community facilities and sports venues to enhance the sustainability of communities;
- safeguard valued facilities and services, ensuring they are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community; and
- ensure an integrated approach in considering the location of housing, economic uses and community uses relative to each other.

**4.3** The NPPF attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available and sets out criteria for safeguarding sports and recreational buildings.

#### Planning for the future

**4.4** Current policy aims to ensure that schools are close to the communities that use them for ease of access. Larger community development is encouraged in Stockport town centre and the district centres, with 'edge of centre' sites as a fall back, followed by other sites that are easily accessed by a range of transport means. Any other sites where community development could be located are usually required to be positioned alongside other services.

**4.5** Current policy also attempts to protect community uses where they already exist. This way, local centres are likely to remain well-used and provide the full range of services that a community might need as well as supporting the health of the town, district and local centres. Where such centres are underutilised, the plan should consider whether and how their futures should be secured.

**4.6** Public health is a key issue to consider, and the land-use planning system should consider this matter as a central issue, through both sound planning in terms of the areas where people live and how they travel and in terms of helping to make sure that the right health facilities can be provided to support existing and new development.

**4.7** We already know that there is significant pressure on our schools in different parts of the borough, in terms of the number of places available. We also need to ensure that we are meeting the varying needs of pupils. Therefore provision of sufficient school places in buildings of the right quality and in the right areas of the borough are also vital to meet the existing and future need.

**4.8** There are issues affecting a wide range of community uses in the future. For example, how will libraries best function and meet the needs of their local areas in the future? How can the Council and NHS in Stockport deliver the best care across a range of services? Where can nursery spaces be provided? How can community buildings be best located and used to provide a wide range of facilities whilst still meeting the needs of the community?

**4.9** The modernisation of existing buildings is an issue which is related to these questions. It may not be financially viable for the council to safeguard the existing buildings used for a variety of community uses, but instead it may be possible to deliver the same types and level of services at fewer locations.

**4.10** If sites are allocated for community hubs/indoor sports facilities/new schools, then such sites would need to be relatively large-scale, which raises the matter of where such sites are to be found.

## Playing pitches and educational playing fields

### Current context

**4.11** Playing fields provide the space which is required for the playing of team sports and have a key role to play in promoting health and well-being as well as community life. Sport contributes to a wide range of planning issues including regeneration, health, crime reduction and quality of life.

**4.12** The NPPF recognises the role of sport and recreation as a fundamental part of sustainable development, and expects local authorities to plan positively for these needs and demands accordingly. The protection and provision of opportunities to participate in sport is seen as fundamental to the health and well-being of communities.

### Planning for the future

**4.13** The Local Plan needs to consider the use of existing sports pitches, which is often restricted by the quality of the playing surface, inadequate changing provision, restricted parking and limited hours of use. The introduction of improvements such as floodlighting and all-weather surfaces can extend their use but may have detrimental impacts on local residents, for example light spillage from floodlights, and increased traffic. It is therefore important that the advantages to be gained from their more intensive use are balanced against the impact on local residents. In addition, in the context of healthy planning, the ability to access such facilities encourages people to lead more active lifestyles.

**4.14** A significant proportion of playing pitch provision is found on educational land, which is designated as Local Open Space and is therefore given protection by existing policies. As noted elsewhere in this document our educational facilities are struggling to meet current demand and the pressure for school places will rise with more development in the borough. Existing educational sites may therefore need to be redesigned, whilst taking account of outdoor curriculum needs.

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**4.15** The protection of open space currently offered by existing policy can limit the ability of schools to fulfill their requirement to meet the educational needs of the borough. Balanced against that is the fact playing fields associated with education sites play a fundamental part of the curriculum and the well-being of the children. Playing fields on education sites also offer benefits to the wider community in terms of meeting recreation needs and contributing to the wider green infrastructure network.

### **Food growing, allotments and community gardens**

**4.16** The inclusion of food growing areas in new developments extends beyond the conventional provision of gardens and allotments. For example, it might include the creative use of roofs, walls and balconies where external space is limited. It might also include landscaping with edible plants rather than ornamental trees and shrubs.

**4.17** Allotments and community gardens are an extremely popular form of recreation. Within Stockport there are 32 sites administered by the council. However, the majority of these plots are occupied and there is an increasing waiting list. New provision, either through the splitting of existing plots or the identification of new sites, is required if Stockport is to meet the national standard. It is important to provide such facilities as they encourage a healthy lifestyle and social interaction and can be an important part of the eco-system. National guidance advises planners to support people in making healthy choices, including promoting access to healthier food.

### **Agricultural land**

#### **Current context**

**4.18** The NPPF sets out that local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

**4.19** The Government has also re-affirmed the importance of protecting our soils and the services they provide in the Natural Environment White Paper and 'The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature', including the protection of BMV agricultural land.

#### **Planning for the future**

**4.20** Virtually all BMV agricultural land in Stockport is currently within the Green Belt where policy limits the types of development possible on agricultural land. However if the designation was to change on agricultural land, the number of cases where agricultural land quality will be the deciding factor in determining development proposals will increase.

## Heritage

### Current context

**4.21** The NPPF requires the conservation of heritage assets so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life for this and future generations. Local plans should develop policies to conserve, enhance and enjoy the historic environment as a strategic priority.

**4.22** The NPPF states the Local Plan should provide a positive strategy setting out: the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring; the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

**4.23** The Draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework also recognises the important contribution heritage assets make to local identity and requires that new development takes this into account.

### Planning for the future

**4.24** Existing local policies seek to protect and enhance the historic environment, including conservation areas, listed and locally listed buildings, and historic parks and gardens.

**4.25** There are nearly 40 conservation areas in Stockport and each has a 'Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan' that is reviewed and updated on a 5 yearly basis. However, national policy can potentially leave locally listed buildings and buildings of heritage interest, such as churches and community buildings, more at risk from eventual demolition than statutorily listed buildings.

**4.26** Stockport has six scheduled monuments and two registered parks and gardens and these are subject to the statutory provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as well as local policy. Stockport also has a number of listed buildings and locally listed buildings.

**4.27** Linking policy in the Local Plan to 'heritage at risk' surveys would assist the council in taking action to protect those 'at risk' heritage assets and for them to be reviewed on a regular basis.

**4.28** Mills are an example of the important heritage assets Stockport has across the borough. They were built as employment sites and their potential future uses are covered in3 'Jobs and the Roles of Town and District Centres'of this document.

## Landscape

### Current context

**4.29** Landscape has been defined by the European Landscape Convention (ELC) as "An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors." An overview of landscape can be found in Figure 3 'Components of a 'Landscape'"below.

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**4.30** Our landscapes are extremely important to us and they are part of our cultural heritage. With sympathetic planning and design they offer an opportunity to provide a more harmonious link between people and the natural world, for the benefit of both. Sensitive, informed, and integrated approaches should help us all to conserve, enhance, restore and regenerate landscapes that are attractive, diverse and publicly valued, showing that environmental, social and economic benefits can go hand in hand.

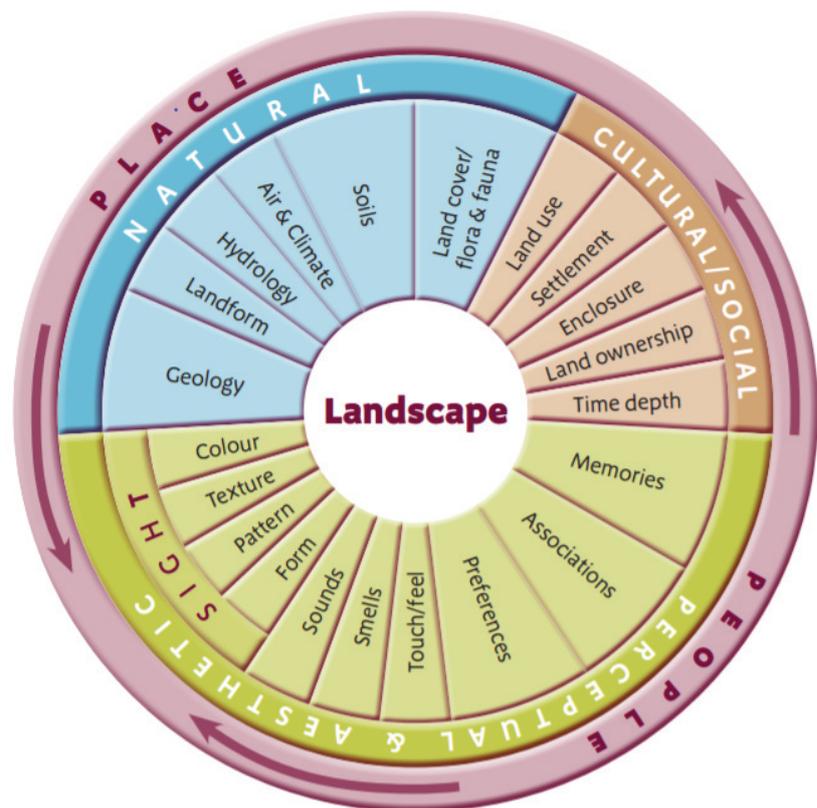
**4.31** The NPPF states that local plans should take account of landscape and also sets out that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and 'enhancing valued landscapes', geological conservation interests and soils 'recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem service'. It goes on to say that local authorities should set criteria-based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting landscape areas will be judged.

### Planning for the future

**4.32** Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is an accepted and recognised method for understanding the landscape. The landscape character approach considers that all landscapes are valued. The values people place on their landscape will vary and will reflect the benefits they receive from the landscape or features within it.

**4.33** There are currently 13 Landscape Character Areas in Stockport and a review of the existing landscape character evidence and a comprehensive assessment of the borough's landscape character, sensitivity and capacity is being undertaken in conformity with national guidance. Development that takes place within the borough can change its landscape character, either by way of a single development or the impact of several developments.

Figure 3 Components of a 'Landscape'



### Question 5

What facilities do think are most important to have in your local area to help support a good quality of life?

**Question 6**

How and where do you think those important uses and facilities should be provided?

**Question 7**

How can the Local Plan balance the need to ensure land is available for development with the need to create places where people want to live?

**Question 8**

Do you have any other comments about the various types of community facilities in Stockport?