

Open Spaces and Recreation

A series of meetings were held January to April 2013 to establish the measures necessary to preserve and enhance the quality of life for Alresford residents, for village residents in those respects for which they rely on Alresford, and for the new residents arising from the houses to be built by 2031.

This report covers the needs for Open Space and Recreation.

Summary

The needs of the town, as regards open space land, can be summarised as follows:

- One or more allotments sites to the extent of 0.5 ha
- A dedicated cricket ground that could also provide facilities for runners 1.5 ha
- Assuming two rugby pitches are completed in the near future there will be a need for rugby pitch facilities particularly for youth and mini-rugby purposes. 2.0 ha
- Additional tennis Courts 0.5 ha
- There is a need for better cycling paths and routes but this will not have an impact on open space requirements.
- Further housing development will demand a new Equipped Children's Play area
- A BMX Park

Alresford satisfies the current policy for open space provision but with the changes announced in LP1 this will not be the case from April 2014. It is expected that any new housing development will, in the main, bring open space to satisfy the new standards but Alresford will still have a major deficiency based upon the current population and the new policies. It is estimated that this could be between 10 and 15 ha depending on whether Perins School field is included or not.

The Open Space policy provides a framework to improve the amount of Open Space available for residents in the future, however there are serious impediments to acquiring that land and protecting it for posterity, unless local government is supported in protecting that land from development, and given the means to acquire the land. This will probably involve, in the case of Alresford, acquiring agricultural land on or adjacent to the town boundary at agricultural values. It will be difficult to acquire any land within the town boundary at prices in excess of £250k per hectare unless existing agricultural land is 'zoned' for open space to hold land values at agricultural levels.

The Open Space Standard

The proposed open space standard for the District, set out in Policy CP7 of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 – Joint Core Strategy, is 4.00 Ha per thousand people (compared to the current Local Plan standard of 2.8 Ha). This new open space standard is broken down into the following 5 categories;

Type of open space	Quantity per 1000 people	Access
Allotments	0.20 Ha	480m
Equipped Children's & Young People's Space	0.50 Ha	480m / 650m
Informal Green Space	0.8 Ha	400m
Natural Green Space	1.0 Ha	700m
Parks, Sports & Recreation grounds	1.5 Ha (0.75 ha for outdoor sport)	650m
Total	4.00 Ha	

The latest population statistics for the market towns are set out in a 2011 background paper to the LDF entitled "Market Towns and Rural Area Development Strategy". The population of the settlement of Alresford is 5591.

Informal Green Space is land that is open to the public but not allocated to any specific activity or purpose. Benenden Green is an example of Informal Green Space.

Natural Green Space is land that is completely accessible to the public. Medstead Woods would be an example of Natural Green Space. Clearly there are no such areas within the New Alresford parish boundaries.

Current Open Space Provision in Alresford

Winchester City Council has conducted an assessment of the current open spaces provision. The assessment has identified shortfalls in all categories except sports.

Type of open space	Policy CP7 requirement	Existing provision	Surplus / shortfall
Allotments	1.12 ha	0.59 ha	- 0.53ha
Equipped Children's & Young People's Space	2.80 ha	0.90 ha	-1.90 ha
Informal Green Space	4.47 ha	2.26 ha	- 2.21 ha
Natural Green Space	5.59 ha	0	- 5.59 ha
Parks, Sports & Recreation Grounds	4.19 ha parks/recs	2.09 ha	- 2.10 ha
	4.19 ha sports	5.39 ha	+ 1.2 ha

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Population Growth Prediction

New Alresford's population is predicted to grow as shown below:

Year	Age 0-4	Age 5-15	Age 16-44	Age 45-64	Age 65-74	Age 75+	TOTAL POP.	TOTAL DWELLINGS
2011	276	631	1657	1594	591	661	5410	2476
2031	315	820	1912	1814	807	1207	6874	2976
% Increase	13.99	29.93	15.41	13.79	36.47	82.63	27.07	

The requirement to build 500 houses within the plan period will lead to an increase in population of between 1250 (based on current occupation levels) and 1460 (based on WCC's population estimate for 2031 above).

This will result in an open space requirement and projected shortfall of:

Type of open space	Quantity per 1000 people	Access	2031 requirement	2031 shortfall
Allotments	0.20 Ha	480m	1.38 ha	-0.78
Equipped Children's & Young People's Space	0.50 Ha	480m / 650m	3.45 ha	-2.53
Informal Green Space	0.8 Ha	400m	5.52 ha	-3.24
Natural Green Space	1.0 Ha	700m	6.9 ha	-6.88
Parks, Sports & Recreation grounds	1.5 Ha (0.75 ha for outdoor sport)	650m	10.35 ha	-1.93
Total	4.00 Ha		27.6 ha	-15.37

It is expected that the development of sites of greater than five units will provide onsite and adjacent open space of between 4 - 5ha dependent on final occupancy levels. See appendix C. Therefore the actual shortfall will be nearer 10 hectares as there will be a requirement, under the new policies, for the developer to provide actual land for open space This is not optional and there will not be a way of making a financial contribution in lieu of the land.

Although the total shortfall figure seems high, much of it can be attributed to the need for Natural Green Space, which is clearly not going to be available within the parish boundary. However, NATC will apply these needs when assessing sites put forward for development, (SHLAA sites) for future use for open space. Developers may also be asked to meet an existing shortfall, and it is possible, although difficult,

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given proximity requirements, to identify land outside the parish boundary to meet these needs. Persuading land owners to make it available to us may be another matter, however.

The need for Informal Green Space and Equipped Children's and Young People's space will largely be met by the requirement for developers to provide these as part of the development of larger sites. The Town Council will, however, have to insist that appropriate land is allocated to each category and that the land provided is of sufficient size and quality to be used in these categories.

The allocation of the land to activities will require liaison with the community and, in particular, the local sports clubs.

Sports Clubs in Alresford

Football

New Alresford Town Football Club has 62 playing members spread across a number of senior and junior teams, 25 committee members and helpers and 102 registered supporters. The senior first team is currently enjoying spectacular success in both league and club competitions and this success is, in turn, attracting new members and interest in the game. The club currently has a main pitch at Arlebury Park, while the youth teams train and play at Stratton Bates. The Arlebury Park pitch is mostly flat and floodlit and the changing facilities are adjacent to the pitch. Stratton Bates is more sloping and the changing facilities are in a smaller and less well-equipped building.

Cricket

There is an artificial cricket strip at Arlebury Park that is used by the cricket club for matches during the summer. The outfield is formed of the main football pitch and the football training area. It is therefore quite rugged and difficult to play on. Cricket as a whole in Alresford is not well served and a strong case could be made for a dedicated cricket field and amenities in order to encourage a more active club aimed at building the profile of the game in the town. The club currently has 60 senior members and 50 colts members and it is the colts that predominantly use the pitch at Arlebury Park. Provision of dedicated facilities would increase the appeal for younger players to remain with the club after formal education.

Tennis

There are three artificial courts at Arlebury Park. An active club with 150 members use the courts throughout the year. Court usage is mainly on weekday evenings and throughout the weekend, with the courts frequently being booked to capacity at these times. The three courts currently support two teams, although more teams could be fielded if more courts were available.

As resident numbers grow and if the popularity of tennis increases there could be requirements for additional courts and facilities. Planning permission has been given for a pavilion, it is expected that this will be finished during 2013. Any additional courts need not necessarily, and perhaps should not, be located in or close to Arlebury Park as the Tennis Club does not make use of the existing facilities at the Alresford Recreation Centre.

Rugby

The Rugby Club currently train and play on a farm field in Bighton. The recent acquisition of the West Field, at Arlebury Park, has been designated for development as a rugby pitch. This development will allow the club to train and play in the centre of Alresford and make better use of the facilities at Arlebury Park. The pitch will be used by the club and by Perins School with the intent of raising the profile of the game and building club numbers. The club currently suffers from many youth players joining the more active and

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better equipped clubs in Winchester and Alton. If the rugby club develops as projected, there may be a requirement in later years for another pitch.

Bowls

Alresford has an active bowling club that play on a privately owned facility in Sun Lane. The land itself has some considerable development potential and value. If the club did decide to relinquish the land for development, they would need to seek an alternative location, ideally within the town boundary and with appropriate access for the club members. However in the wider scheme of things this would not entail much land, perhaps only .25 of a hectare.

Petanque

There is a Petanque terrain at Arlebury Park. Although there is no formal club, the terrain is well used during the summer and the users liaise with the Town council over the maintenance of the site.

Skatepark

There is a skatepark at Arlebury Park. The site is very well used and extremely popular with both young and more mature skateboarders. A group has approached the Town Council to extend the site to include facilities for BMX cycling (a popular Olympic sport).

Golf

The Alresford Golf club have an excellent 18 hole course and facilities on the southern edge of the town, although it does lie outside the parish boundary. It is unlikely that additional facilities will be required as part of the development activities.

Running and Athletics

There is a very active running community in Alresford, although no formal club exists. The Rotary Club organise the annual 10k Road Race and Fun Runs which attract over 400 runners each year, the majority being from within the town. There is a strong case for more facilities to support a dedicated running club; this could be combined with the need for cricket facilities, with the two activities complimenting each other. Future developments should make provision for safe, circular and crossing routes (a 'Green Network') around and through the town and the connection of these routes with the footpaths into the local countryside.

Cycling

The 2012 Olympics raised the profile and popularity of cycling in all its forms: road, off-road and BMX. Alresford's position in the heart of the Hampshire countryside makes it an ideal location for all forms of cycling. The quiet country roads and the extensive network of bridleways are suitable for both road and off-road routes. Allied to the 'Green Network' need for circular pedestrian routes around the town and for cycle paths connecting outlying areas of the two into the main shopping centre, new developments should ensure that there is easy access from the town to the surrounding countryside enabling residents, and younger people in particular, safe and easy access to the bridleways. There is a lack of circular paths to the east & west of the town.

BMX cycling is not catered for with the current facilities, although the Town Council are considering plans to extend the skatepark at Arlebury Park to accommodate BMX cycling.

Gym Facilities

There is a gym at Perins School. Membership is by subscription and numbers are good for the size of the population. An outdoor gym site was opened in 2012 and is freely available for use by the population.

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Aligned with the need for dedicated exercise routes through and around the town is the need to develop the outdoor gym facilities enabling all residents to benefit from their use.

Fishing

The river Alre provides trout fishing for private fishing clubs, but the river is owned and maintained by a local land-owner. The ponds at the Northern end of Arlebury Park also provide high quality coarse fishing for private individuals and clubs. Alresford Pond is not suitable for fishing being very shallow, muddy, privately owned and with poor access.

Children's and Young People Play Areas

Alresford currently has three equipped play areas at Arlebury Park, Stratton Bates and Sun Hill. Any new developments would have to include additional play areas to maintain the provision in line with the guidelines.

The equipped areas provide well for younger children, but there is little or no provision for older children and teenagers. With the predicted number of 5-15 year olds reaching over 800 by 2031, a case can be made for the inclusion of designed 'wild play' areas where children can play safely unsupervised in areas with no formal play equipment but with managed natural green spaces providing opportunities for exploration and constructive activities. These areas would include woodland, ponds, grassy banks and ditches that would not only enhance play opportunities but would also serve to attract wildlife, insects and birds. As fertile chalkland, natural planting could also be maintained.

Allotments

The current provision of allotments on the southern edge of the town means that the accessibility requirements for allotments is not met for the majority of the town. Future developments anywhere around the periphery of the development boundary would necessitate the provision of allotments as part of those developments. This requirement has become more pressing as new developments make little provision for gardens that allow the growing of vegetables or fruit trees. The allotment provision requirements are not onerous and can easily be met through appropriate consideration at the planning stage of any development.

Open Space Policy Considerations

By 1 April 2014 it is estimated that approximately 100 of the required 500 houses will have been built or approved under existing Planning Policy (79 as at 1 April 2013). This will leave 400 houses to be built under the new policies. It is estimated that will increase the population by between 1000 and 1250 thus generating an open space contribution of 4 – 5 ha.

Within this 4 – 5 ha, we would be able to provide 0.5 ha for allotments, 1.75 ha Children's and Young People's space and 1.75 ha for Parks and Recreation grounds, as open space must be provided as land (since there can be no financial contribution in the future) This will bring us within 0.5 ha of meeting the new standards for these facilities.

Based on the existing Open Space policies, with the recent acquisition of the West Field at Arlebury Park, we meet the required standard of that policy. However, based on the new policy, if there were no further development in Alresford, after 1 April 2014, we will be 5.5 ha short based upon the existing population. Any new housing development will bring open space land at the new policy level which means that, if no more land is acquired we will still be 5.5 ha short in 2031. The position is further complicated as a result of Perins School becoming an Academy because arguably the 4.5 ha of playing fields within the school is no longer public open space. If this is excluded we will be 10 ha short in April 2014.

This shortfall is almost entirely represented by a deficit in Informal Green Space and Natural Green Space.

Availability of Open Space Land

Virtually all the remaining undeveloped land in Alresford is the subject of a SHLAA which by definition increases the 'hope value' of the land. The estimated value of this land will be between £250k to £1.5m per hectare. (WCC Land Valuation officer 2010) This means that to meet the open space requirements being laid upon us 'development land' will have to be acquired at a total cost of between £2.5m and £15 million. Even the lowest of these numbers is outside the scope of the town and it will therefore be necessary to consider other options which may include:

1. Increase the amount of land required from developers until the shortfall is fulfilled. There is allowance to do this within the draft paper on CIL levies, but there would be a corresponding reduction in the CIL to be paid. See page 18 of CAB 2246. NB This paper has not yet been adopted by WCC.
2. Increase the funding to Town and Parish Councils to enable them to purchase land.

The Open Space policy provides a framework to improve the amount of Open Space available for residents for the future, however there are serious impediments to acquiring that land, particularly of making Natural Green Space available within 700m, and protecting it for posterity, unless local government is supported in protecting that land from development, and given the means to acquire the land. The only practical way of fulfilling the Natural Green Space requirements, which make up the bulk of the deficiency, is to identify green corridors around the boundary of the town, currently agricultural land, and 'zoning' them for Open Space purposes. This change in policy will, over time, allow the Town Council the possibility of acquiring such land at agricultural values. Any such land acquired would have to be protected against any future development by a Deed of Dedication or restrictive covenants against development. Alternatively, if the policy is changed to require developers to make up the deficiency this would provide a practical solution that would not make the project financial not viable.

Open Space Policy

Significant additional funding will have to be made available from the Community Infrastructure Levy. The preferred solution would be for existing agricultural land to be 'zoned' for open space to hold land values at agricultural levels.

Appendix C

Funding Move to an appendix, to be carried forward as such to NATC consolidated report.

The current proposals for the Community Infrastructure Levy may well improve the funding arrangements at a District and County level but they are a retrograde step in respect of Town and Parish Councils and do not reflect the spirit of the Localism Bill.

The amount of funding available to Town and Parish Councils is actually reduced, not increased as a result of these proposed policies. At the present time these Councils receive an average of £2000 per new dwelling for open space requirements and often twice this amount towards local highways projects under the Section 106 agreements.

Example

S106 system

Open Space

400 houses at an average of £2000 per house = £800,000

Highways

400 houses at an average of £3000 per house = £1,200,000

CIL

400 houses less 160 (exempt affordable) = 240

240 houses on average - 125sq m(125 x £80) = £2,400,000

15% allocated locally = £360,000 divided by 400 houses = £900 per house

This is less than half of what we receive today just for open spaces alone and is set against a policy that requires the acquisition of more open space land as well as providing Equipped Play Areas and BMX Parks.