



Planning Policy Statement 8 (PPS 8)

Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation



An Agency within the Department of the

Environment

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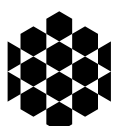
Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation

Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) set out the policies of the Department of the Environment on particular aspects of land-use planning and apply to the whole of Northern Ireland. Their contents will be taken into account in preparing development plans and are also material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.

This PPS sets out the Department's planning policies for the protection of open space, the provision of new areas of open space in association with residential development and the use of land for sport and outdoor recreation, and advises on the treatment of these issues in development plans. It embodies the Government's commitment to sustainable development, to the promotion of a more active and healthy lifestyle and to the conservation of biodiversity.

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An Agency within the Department of the

Environment

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Contents

	Page No.
Preamble	5
1.0 Introduction	7
2.0 Policy Context	9
2.1 Programme for Government	9
2.2 Regional Development Strategy	9
2.4 The Quality Initiative	10
2.5 Other Government Strategies	10
3.0 Policy Objectives	11
4.0 The Role of Development Plans	12
4.1 Introduction	12
4.3 Assessment of Open Space Provision	12
4.8 Zoning for Future Open Space Development	13
4.10 Open Space and Residential Zonings	13
4.11 Existing Open Space	14
5.0 Planning Policies	15
Policy OS 1 Protection of Open Space	16
Policy OS 2 Public Open Space in New Residential Development	19
Policy OS 3 Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside	24
Policy OS 4 Intensive Sports Facilities	29
Policy OS 5 Noise Generating Sports and Outdoor Recreational Activities	31
Policy OS 6 Development of Facilities ancillary to Water Sports	33
Policy OS 7 The Floodlighting of Sports and Outdoor Recreational Facilities	35
Annexes	
Annex A: Definition of Open Space	37
Annex B: Summary of the National Playing Fields Association Minimum Standard for Outdoor Playing Space	39
Annex C: Key Bodies which make a Valuable Contribution to the Development of Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation	41
Annex D: Divisional Planning Offices	45

Preamble

The Department of the Environment is responsible for planning control in Northern Ireland. The Planning Service, an Agency within the Department, administers its planning functions.

The Department has a statutory duty, laid down in Article 3 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991, to formulate and co-ordinate policy for securing the orderly and consistent development of land and the planning of that development. The Department is required to ensure that such policy is in general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy.

The Department's planning policies are normally issued through Planning Policy Statements and PPS 1 'General Principles' advises that:

"Planning Policy Statements set out the policies of the Department on particular aspects of land-use planning and apply to the whole of Northern Ireland. Their contents will be taken into account in preparing development plans and are also material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals."

This Planning Policy Statement, PPS 8 'Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation', sets out the Department's planning policies for the protection of open space, the provision of new areas of open space in association with residential development and the use of land for sport and outdoor recreation, and advises on the treatment of these issues in development plans. It embodies the Government's commitment to sustainable development, to the promotion of a more active and healthy lifestyle and to the conservation of biodiversity.

The PPS is of direct relevance to the public and those whose actions have a direct physical impact upon the natural or man-made environment. These include landowners, developers, government departments and agencies, district councils, other statutory undertakers, sports bodies and recreational organisations.

The policies of this Statement supersede the following provisions of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland:

REC 1 - Recreational Open Space

REC 2 - Outdoor Recreation

- REC 3 - Indoor Recreational Facilities**
- REC 4 - Informal Recreation**
- REC 5 - Water Recreation Uses**
- GB/CPA2 - Non-Residential Uses (insofar as it applies to outdoor sport and recreation).**

Where the above policies are referred to elsewhere in the Planning Strategy, the policies of this Statement take precedence. It should be noted, however, that Planning Policy Statement 8 does not supersede those policies of the Planning Strategy that relate to 'The Coast'. (See Paragraph 5.50)

The policies of this Statement also take precedence over provisions for open space, sport and outdoor recreation contained within existing development plans. Future development plans will take account of and be consistent with this Statement.

The PPS has been subject to an equality impact screening exercise in line with the statutory obligation contained in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The outcome of this exercise indicates that the PPS is unlikely to have any significant adverse implications for equality of opportunity or community relations.

Nothing in this document should be read as a commitment that public resources will be provided for any specific project. All proposals for expenditure will be subject to economic appraisal, other relevant assessments and will also have to be considered having regard to the overall availability of resources.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Open space, sport and outdoor recreation are important components of life. They provide many cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits and contribute positively to physical and mental health and a better quality of life. The Government considers everyone, particularly children, the elderly and those with disabilities, should have easy access to open space and the opportunity to participate in sport and outdoor recreational pursuits.
- 1.2 Sport has been defined as *“all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competitions at all levels”* (Council of Europe 1992). Participation in sport and outdoor recreation facilitates good health and physical development. It can also help foster a strong sense of civic pride and assist cross community relations.
- 1.3 Open space, for the purposes of this Statement, is defined as all open space of public value. The definition includes not just outdoor sports facilities, parks and gardens, amenity green space and children’s play areas, but also natural and semi-natural urban green spaces, allotments, cemeteries, green corridors and civic spaces. It includes not just land, but also inland bodies of water that offer important opportunities for sport and outdoor recreation and which can also act as a visual amenity. Further information on the range of open space of public value is set out in Annex A.
- 1.4 Open space can serve different needs depending on its size, location, accessibility, landscape design and facilities. For example, it is often the case that larger open spaces in urban areas successfully combine provision for physical recreation such as sports pitches and children’s play areas with amenity open space used by people primarily for exercise and relaxation purposes.
- 1.5 Open space, whether or not there is public access to it, is important for its contribution to the quality of urban life by providing important green lungs, visual breaks and wildlife habitats in built-up areas. Open space can enhance the character of residential areas, civic buildings, conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological sites. It can also help to attract business and tourism and thereby contribute to the

process of urban regeneration. The use being made of the countryside for a range of sporting and outdoor recreational activities, particularly where these are associated with farm diversification, can contribute to the process of rural regeneration and help promote natural resource tourism.

- 1.6 For all these reasons, the Government attaches great importance to the retention of our existing open spaces, the creation of attractive new spaces and the promotion of more opportunities to participate in sport and outdoor recreation in the future.

2.0 Policy Context

Programme for Government

- 2.1 The Programme for Government 2002–2005 promotes sustainable living to ensure that our society and economy develop in ways that meet our current needs, while ensuring that future generations can also meet their needs. It encourages a healthier lifestyle for all, promotes the benefits of sport and recreation and supports measures to conserve biodiversity.

Regional Development Strategy

- 2.2 The importance of open space, sport and outdoor recreation to health and the environment is acknowledged in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 (RDS). The RDS seeks to create healthier living environments and to support healthier lifestyles by facilitating access to a range of opportunities for recreational and cultural activities and by promoting physical recreation as a basis for good health for all.
- 2.3 A number of specific measures are highlighted and these include: -
- encouraging the protection and enhancement of open spaces and playing facilities for the long-term benefit of the whole community (ENV 6.4);
 - recognising the value of 'greenery' including community greenways, woodlands and landscape to health and well-being (ENV 6.4);
 - creating and managing green spaces in cities, towns and villages to serve multiple purposes and contribute to distinctive local character (ENV 3.3);
 - recognising the contribution which natural and semi-natural habitats can make to the character of urban spaces and promoting measures which will lead to the enhancement of biodiversity and the quality of our lives (ENV 3.3);
 - preventing town cramming and seeking the provision of adequate areas of open space, playing facilities, woodland and landscaping within easy walking reach of homes, for physical activity, rest and leisure use, especially in densely populated and disadvantaged communities, and in new developments (ENV 7.1);

- providing opportunities for more active lifestyles by maintaining and enhancing sporting facilities in the Region, creating networks of community greenways in cities and towns, developing cycle and pedestrian networks, and facilitating access to the countryside (ENV 7.1);
- enhancing the range of sports and leisure facilities enabling accessibility by all citizens (ENV 7.1);
- promoting a sporting culture, with international sporting events at venues of international standards (ENV 7.1) ; and
- promoting sustainable access to the countryside taking account of the Northern Ireland Countryside Recreation Strategy and continuing to develop the network of public open spaces including country parks, forest parks, forest recreation areas and nature reserves in association with public access routes (ENV 1.4).

The Quality Initiative

2.4 In January 1996, the Government introduced the Quality Initiative to Northern Ireland with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of good design and quality in the built environment, particularly in new housing developments. Quality development is now one of the key themes that defines the Department's approach to planning. Recent policy contained within PPS 7 – 'Quality Residential Environments' and associated planning guidance emphasises the importance of open space provision in new residential developments, and acknowledges how its provision can enhance the quality and sustainability of the residential environment and contribute to people's health, well-being and quality of life.

Other Government Strategies

2.5 In formulating the policies contained in this Statement, consideration has been given to a number of other Government strategies. These include 'Investing for Health' published by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the 'Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy'. Account has also been taken of the Government's commitment to the 'UN Convention on the Rights of the Child', in particular to those aspects that relate to a child's right to play.

3.0 Policy Objectives

3.1 The main objectives of this Planning Policy Statement are:

- to safeguard existing open space and sites identified for future such provision;
- to ensure that areas of open space are provided as an integral part of new residential development and that appropriate arrangements are made for their management and maintenance in perpetuity;
- to facilitate appropriate outdoor recreational activities in the countryside;
- to ensure that new open space areas and sporting facilities are convenient and accessible for all sections of society, particularly children, the elderly and those with disabilities;
- to achieve high standards of siting, design and landscaping for all new open space areas and sporting facilities; and
- to ensure that the provision of new open space areas and sporting facilities is in keeping with the principles of environmental conservation and helps sustain and enhance biodiversity.

4.0 The Role of Development Plans

Introduction

- 4.1 The preparation of a development plan provides the opportunity to assess existing open space provision within the plan area and to identify, where necessary, suitable locations for future open space development.
- 4.2 The primary responsibility for the provision of public open space facilities such as playing fields, parks and children's play areas rests with district councils. Accordingly, in assessing open space provision and considering future land needs, the Department will seek to work closely with district councils and take into account any local recreational strategies they may have. Where appropriate, the Department will also liaise with other interested bodies such as the Sports Council.

Assessment of Open Space Provision

- 4.3 The assessment of provision will commence with a survey of existing open spaces, both public and private, identifying the different needs they serve. This survey will generally focus on open spaces within or adjoining urban areas, but may also include outdoor recreation facilities in the countryside.
- 4.4 Based on the survey information, the Department will then assess provision against the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) recommended minimum standard of 2.4 hectares of 'outdoor playing space' per 1000 population (commonly referred to as the '6 acre standard'). This assessment will consider not just the absolute level of provision of 'outdoor playing space', but will also look at the distribution and accessibility of such facilities.
- 4.5 While it is recognised that provision of open space facilities can vary greatly from one area to another, the NPFA standard is intended to reflect a minimum level of provision of 'outdoor playing space' that the Department considers should be aspired to by district councils and exceeded wherever possible. Further information about the NPFA standard and the term 'outdoor playing space' is contained in Annex B.
- 4.6 Recognising that the NPFA standard is directed at 'outdoor playing space', the Department also considers it appropriate, as part of the

assessment of open space, to take account of the provision and role of other forms of open space and the availability of indoor sports facilities. Again it is important not only to consider the absolute level of provision, but the distribution and accessibility of the spaces and facilities together with the amenity value, environmental assets and linkages they may provide.

- 4.7 The assessment of open space will be carried out for all large settlements and where appropriate assessments may also extend to include the entire plan area.

Zoning for Future Open Space Development

- 4.8 Based on the assessment of open space provision, land may be zoned for future open space purposes in the development plan to help meet the needs of local communities. The amount and location of land to be zoned will be determined following consultation with district councils who have primary responsibility for provision within their areas.
- 4.9 In considering the location of land to be zoned, the Department will take into account:
- accessibility to and from existing and proposed housing areas, with particular attention being paid to the accessibility needs of young children, the elderly and people with disabilities;
 - the potential for any detrimental impact on biodiversity or on sensitive environmental areas and features;
 - the contribution that open space can make to the quality of the environment and community life; and
 - the importance of protecting linear open spaces such as pedestrian and cycle routes, community greenways, former railway lines and river and canal corridors many of which are valuable in linking larger areas of open space.

Open Space and Residential Zonings

- 4.10 Development plans will, where appropriate, contain key site requirements for zoned residential land which should include guidance on the provision of areas of public open space required as an integral

part of the development (see also Policy OS 2). Where residential zonings occur in close proximity to existing or zoned open space, plans will normally provide guidance on the need for linkages between the development and these areas in order to facilitate ease of access.

Existing Open Space

- 4.11 The Department will identify major areas of existing open space on development plan maps for information purposes. Within settlements these may include parks, playing fields and other sports and outdoor recreation facilities, both public and private. In the countryside this will normally include facilities such as regional, country and forest parks. Where proposals exist for the future development of existing open space as a recreational resource these will generally be highlighted in the plan. It should be noted, however, that existing open space, regardless of whether it is identified on plan maps or not, benefits from the protection afforded by Policy OS1 unless the site is identified for an alternative use in the plan itself.
- 4.12 Areas of existing open space within or adjoining settlements may also be designated as landscape wedges, in particular those larger areas which perform a strategic function (see Annex A). In addition, some smaller open spaces may merit designation as a Local Landscape Policy Area. Local policies will be included in the development plan for these designations.

5.0 Planning Policies

In exercise of its responsibility for planning control in Northern Ireland, the Department assesses development proposals against all planning policies and other material considerations that are relevant to it.

The planning policies of this statement must therefore be read together and in conjunction with the relevant contents of development plans and other planning policy publications, including the Regional Development Strategy. The Department will also have regard to the contents of published supplementary planning guidance documents.

The following policies set out the main planning considerations that the Department will take into account in assessing proposals for the use of land for sport and outdoor recreational activities, including the development of ancillary facilities, and for proposals affecting open space or sites allocated for such purposes. The policies also indicate the circumstances where the Department will require the provision of public open space as an integral part of residential development. The provisions of these policies will prevail unless there are other overriding policy or material considerations that outweigh them and justify a contrary decision.

Policy OS 1 Protection of Open Space

The Department will not permit development that would result in the loss of existing open space or land zoned for the provision of open space. The presumption against the loss of existing open space will apply irrespective of its physical condition and appearance.

An exception will be permitted where it is clearly shown that redevelopment will bring substantial community benefits that decisively outweigh the loss of the open space.

An exception will also be permitted where it is demonstrated that the loss of open space will have no significant detrimental impact on the amenity, character or biodiversity of an area and where either of the following circumstances occur:

- (i) in the case of an area of open space of 2 hectares or less, alternative provision is made by the developer which is at least as accessible to current users and at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness, safety and quality; or
- (ii) in the case of playing fields and sports pitches within settlement limits, it is demonstrated by the developer that the retention and enhancement of the facility can only be achieved by the development of a small part of the existing space - limited to a maximum of 10% of the overall area - and this will have no adverse effect on the sporting potential of the facility. This exception will be exercised only once.

Justification and Amplification

- 5.1 Open space is essential in any community for both amenity and recreation purposes and often contributes positively to the character, attractiveness and vitality of our cities, towns and villages. It provides areas for play - an essential element in the development of all children – and enhances the quality of the residential environment. It can also provide valuable areas for nature conservation and biodiversity, act as a buffer between conflicting land uses, help reduce flood risk, promote pedestrian linkages and provide ‘green lungs’ that can assist in meeting objectives to improve air quality. Ultimately open space and the use of such space contributes to the health and quality of life for all.

- 5.2 In recent years there has been growing public concern at the loss of open space to alternative uses. The use of land as open space, however, is no less important than other uses. It is a valuable resource and the Department attaches great importance to its retention, for once built on it is almost certainly lost to the community forever. Accordingly, the Department will operate a general presumption against the loss of open space to competing land uses.
- 5.3 The protection of open space is particularly important in urban areas where competing development pressures are greatest. Indeed, its retention and enhancement is now all the more important in support of the drive for urban renaissance. The aim of urban renaissance is to create a more sustainable form of development by encouraging compact urban forms and promoting more housing within existing urban areas without town cramming. This, however, should not lead to a loss of amenity and indeed places greater emphasis on the need to maintain a well-distributed, well-connected and accessible supply of open space. For this reason, open space of public value does not fall within the definition of 'brownfield / previously-developed sites'.
- 5.4 The protection and enhancement of sporting and outdoor recreational facilities in urban areas may also reduce the demand for such activities in the countryside. This can sometimes help provide relief for more fragile environments in the rural area.
- 5.5 The Department will permit an exception to the presumption against loss of open space where development would produce such community benefit that this would decisively outweigh its loss. In such cases, applicants will generally be expected to demonstrate that their proposals are supported by the local community.
- 5.6 It is also recognised that development can on occasion provide an opportunity to recreate open space or outdoor recreational facilities in an alternative location to substitute for the loss of an existing open space or facility. This approach will only be considered for areas of 2 hectares or less and a key factor in assessing proposals will be the accessibility of the proposed new space to all the users of the existing space. It should not be assumed, however, that the Department will automatically grant permission when alternative provision is proposed. Existing open space is often of considerable value to the amenity, character and biodiversity of a local area and therefore worthy of protection in its own right.

- 5.7 Where an exchange is acceptable in principle the Department will secure this through use of planning conditions or, where appropriate, a Planning Agreement under Article 40 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. This will tie redevelopment to the provision of the new facility and ensure that this is capable of being maintained adequately through appropriate management agreements.
- 5.8 In relation to playing fields and sports pitches in urban areas, there may be exceptional circumstances where it is demonstrated that the retention and enhancement of the facility can only be achieved by the redevelopment of a part of the area. This can, however, be detrimental to the quality and value of such facilities and call into question their overall viability. Consideration will therefore only be given to redevelopment proposals that are judged to have no adverse effect on the sporting potential or overall amenity value of the open space and which are restricted to an area no greater than 10% of the total site.
- 5.9 The above exception will be applied only once to guard against the piecemeal erosion of playing fields and sports pitches by a succession of small developments, possibly over a long period of time. In addition, the grant of planning permission will normally be reliant on the applicant entering into an Article 40 Planning Agreement tying the financial gain arising from redevelopment to the retention and enhancement of the open space facility.
- 5.10 All proposals for the alternative use of open space will be assessed with regard to their effect on the amenity, character and biodiversity of the area and the wider locality and taking into account the needs of future generations. Any deterioration in the appearance or condition of open space due to inadequate management or maintenance, however, will not be sufficient justification in itself for the loss of the open space to alternative uses.

Policy OS 2 Public Open Space in New Residential Development

The Department will only permit proposals for new residential development of 25 or more units, or on sites of one hectare or more, where public open space is provided as an integral part of the development. In smaller residential schemes the need to provide public open space will be considered on its individual merits.

An exception to the requirement of providing public open space will be permitted in the case of apartment developments or specialised housing where a reasonable level of private communal open space is being provided. An exception will also be considered in cases where residential development is designed to integrate with and make use of adjoining public open space.

Where the provision of public open space is required under this policy, the precise amount, location, type and design of such provision will be negotiated with applicants taking account of the specific characteristics of the development, the site and its context and having regard to the following:

- (i) A normal expectation will be at least 10% of the total site area;
- (ii) For residential development of 300 units or more, or for development sites of 15 hectares or more, a normal expectation will be around 15% of the total site area; and
- (iii) Provision at a rate less than 10% of the total site area may be acceptable where the residential development:
 - is located within a town or city centre; or
 - is close to and would benefit from ease of access to areas of existing public open space; or
 - provides accommodation for special groups, such as the elderly or people with disabilities; or
 - incorporates the 'Home Zone' concept.

For residential development of 100 units or more, or for development sites of 5 hectares or more, an equipped children's play area will be required as an

integral part of the development. The Department will consider an exception to this requirement where an equipped children's play area exists within reasonable walking distance (generally around 400 metres) of the majority of the units within the development scheme.

Public open space required by this policy will be expected to conform to all the following criteria:

- it is designed in a comprehensive and linked way as an integral part of the development;
- it is of demonstrable recreational or amenity value;
- it is designed, wherever possible, to be multi-functional;
- it provides easy and safe access for the residents of the dwellings that it is designed to serve;
- its design, location and appearance takes into account the amenity of nearby residents and the needs of people with disabilities; and
- it retains important landscape and heritage features and incorporates and protects these in an appropriate fashion.

Planning permission will not be granted until the developer has satisfied the Department that suitable arrangements will be put in place for the future management and maintenance in perpetuity of areas of public open space required under this policy. Arrangements acceptable to the Department include:

- (a) a legal agreement transferring ownership of and responsibility for the open space to the local district council; or
- (b) a legal agreement transferring ownership of and responsibility for the open space to a charitable trust registered by the Charity Commission or a management company supported by such a trust; or
- (c) a legal agreement transferring ownership of and responsibility for the open space to a properly constituted residents' association with associated management arrangements.

In all cases developers will be responsible for the laying out and landscaping of public open space required under this policy.

Justification and Amplification

- 5.11 Providing public open space as an integral part of a housing scheme contributes to the creation of a sustainable and quality residential environment. It has both recreational and social value, and helps to establish a sense of identity. The 'greening' of an area can also contribute to people's health, well-being and quality of life, particularly that of children, and can help promote biodiversity.
- 5.12 Through the Quality Initiative¹, it is the Department's stated objective to secure a high quality of design, layout and landscaping in new housing developments. It is considered essential, therefore, that areas of pleasant, attractive and landscaped public open space, including children's play spaces, are provided as an integral element of new residential development.
- 5.13 Public open space can be provided in a variety of forms ranging from village greens, kickabout areas and small parks through to equipped play areas and sport pitches. In addition, the creation or retention of woodland areas or other natural or semi-natural areas of open space can provide valuable habitats for wildlife and promote biodiversity. Through careful design, multi-functional areas combining activities and uses can often be successfully created. To provide for maximum surveillance areas of open space are best located where they are overlooked by the fronts of nearby dwellings.
- 5.14 A particularly important consideration in determining the layout of new housing developments is the provision of safe opportunities for children's play. The main place where young children play is adjacent or near to their homes as generally they are constrained in terms of the distance they are allowed to venture from their house for supervision and safety reasons. It is important, therefore, that children's play areas and facilities are located within a reasonable walking distance of where they live. However, they should not be located so close to dwellings as to cause noise or nuisance problems for residents.

¹ This encompasses the Ministerial Statement made by Malcolm Moss MP in January 1996 and Planning Policy Statements - PPS 1 General Principles (DOE, 1998) and PPS 7 Quality Residential Environments (DOE, 2001), as well as the guidance contained in the publication - Creating Places (DOE & DRD, 2000) and Development Control Advice Note 8 – Housing in Existing Urban Areas (DOE 2002).

- 5.15 In large developments, there may be a need to provide more formal outdoor recreation facilities, such as playing pitches, to meet the needs generated by the development. In such cases, the Department will consult closely with the recreation department of local district councils.
- 5.16 In calculating the precise amount of public open space provision needed in an individual development proposal, only space of demonstrable recreational or amenity value i.e. 'useable' open space, will generally be counted. Accordingly, verges and visibility splays, which form part of the adopted highway, will not normally count towards the open space provision.
- 5.17 Apartment developments and specialised housing will also require adequate provision of open space to meet the needs of future residents and to help integrate the development and promote a more attractive environment. In cases where private communal gardens are proposed as an integral part of the development, the Department will not require separate provision of public open space.

Management and Maintenance in Perpetuity

- 5.18 The provisions made for the management and maintenance of public open space required under this policy are a key material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The Department will not adopt such open space areas. The onus, therefore, will rest on developers to ensure that such land will be made available and subsequently retained, managed and maintained in perpetuity as public open space.
- 5.19 There are three approaches that the Department is satisfied provide reasonable assurance that such open space can be managed and maintained in perpetuity. These are :
- (i) A legal agreement transferring ownership and responsibility for the open space to the local district council. Applicants are therefore advised to consult councils about their adoption policies at an early stage in the design process.
 - (ii) A legal agreement transferring ownership and responsibility for the open space to a charitable trust registered by the Charity Commission, such as The Woodland Trust or the Greenbelt Foundation, or a management company supported by such a trust.

(iii) A legal agreement transferring ownership and responsibility for the open space to a properly constituted residents' association with associated management arrangements. In this case, the ownership of the open space is divided equally among incoming residents who then employ a management company on their behalf to maintain the open space. The developer will be responsible for setting up a resident's association, putting in place the initial management regime and ensuring this matter is clearly set out in the sale agreement. Any developer intending to follow this approach will also be required to demonstrate to the Department's satisfaction what alternative measures will take effect in the event that the residents' management arrangements were to break down.

5.20 If an applicant wishes to follow an alternative approach to those outlined above, it will have to be demonstrated how such an approach can meet the Department's policy requirement for the open space to be managed and maintained in perpetuity.

5.21 To ensure that planning applications are dealt with expediently and therefore avoid delays, the Department will expect full information on which of the above approaches that an applicant intends to follow to be provided as part of their application. This matter will need to be agreed in writing with the Department before full planning permission (or approval of reserved matters) is granted and any necessary legal agreements between the developer and third parties put in place before the development commences. A condition will be attached to planning permission tying the management and maintenance of the open space to the approach agreed with the Department.

5.22 The Department will also attach appropriate planning conditions to address the following matters:

- the laying out and landscaping of the open space;
- the timing of its implementation; and
- the permanent retention of the open space.

5.23 It should be noted that there may be occasions where the provision of open space in association with residential development can only be facilitated by the applicant entering into a Planning Agreement under Article 40 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. Where this is the case, the Planning Agreement will need to be completed before planning permission is granted.

Policy OS 3

Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside

The Department will permit the development of proposals for outdoor recreational use in the countryside where all the following criteria are met:

- (i) there is no adverse impact on features of importance to nature conservation, archaeology or built heritage;**
- (ii) there is no permanent loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land and no unacceptable impact on nearby agricultural activities;**
- (iii) there is no adverse impact on visual amenity or the character of the local landscape and the development can be readily absorbed into the landscape by taking advantage of existing vegetation and/or topography;**
- (iv) there is no unacceptable impact on the amenities of people living nearby;**
- (v) public safety is not prejudiced and the development is compatible with other countryside uses in terms of the nature, scale, extent and frequency or timing of the recreational activities proposed;**
- (vi) any ancillary buildings or structures are designed to a high standard, are of a scale appropriate to the local area and are sympathetic to the surrounding environment in terms of their siting, layout and landscape treatment;**
- (vii) the proposed facility takes into account the needs of people with disabilities and is, as far as possible, accessible by means of transport other than the private car; and**
- (viii) the road network can safely handle the extra vehicular traffic the proposal will generate and satisfactory arrangements are provided for access, parking, drainage and waste disposal.**

Justification and Amplification

- 5.24 The Countryside Recreation Strategy for Northern Ireland² highlights the importance of the countryside for recreation, and acknowledges the contribution this can make to the rural economy and the promotion of tourism. This strategy advises that the spatially extensive and diverse nature of the Northern Ireland countryside lends itself to the provision of opportunities for a wide range of countryside recreation activities for both the local population and for an increasing number of tourists.
- 5.25 Hill walking, rambling, cycling and angling are among the most popular countryside recreational pursuits. There is also a growing number of people now taking part in activities such as horse riding, golf, orienteering, mountain biking, rowing, sailing and canoeing. Such activities often bring with them a resulting need for ancillary facilities.
- 5.26 Government policy seeks to encourage farm diversification and thereby strengthen the rural economy. In recent years this has generated an increasing number of proposals for sporting and outdoor recreational activities in the countryside. There is, however, growing concern regarding the environmental impact of certain countryside pursuits and their related developments. The Department is aware of these concerns and wishes to ensure that new recreational development in the countryside is sustainable and does not conflict with the need to preserve, and wherever possible, enhance our environment for future generations.
- 5.27 In locations designated for their landscape, nature conservation or heritage importance, special care is needed in assessing proposals. It may be possible to meet the demand for outdoor recreation use so far as this is consistent with the conservation or enhancement of the interest for which the site or area is designated. The Department's policies for the protection of sites of nature conservation importance are set out in PPS 2 'Planning and Nature Conservation', while policies to protect our historic environment are contained in PPS 6 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage'.

² A Countryside Recreation Strategy for Northern Ireland, A Report by the Countryside Recreation Working Group co-sponsored by the Sports Council for NI and the Environment and Heritage Service, 1998

- 5.28 In assessing proposals, the Department will take account of the nature of the sporting or outdoor recreational activity and the ability of the land or the landscape to sustain that activity in the long term. The natural qualities inherent in certain areas, notably their silence, solitude or remoteness, also need to be considered. One location may be suitable for some pursuits but not others, while others may be suitable for a cluster of activities.
- 5.29 The impact of development associated with certain outdoor recreational uses can be reduced by careful attention to scale, siting, layout, design and landscaping details. Any proposed activity or development should not, however, become a dominant feature in the landscape. In some cases, therefore, the provision of ancillary facilities may need to be severely limited or even prohibited.

Golf Courses

- 5.30 The development of golf courses can facilitate agricultural diversification and encourage tourism, but can also have a detrimental impact on the environment particularly because of the scale of such development. Golf courses and ancillary development associated with them can have a significant visual impact on the countryside. Poor siting, design and management can lead to loss of valuable landscapes or habitats. Golf courses should be located in harmony with the local landscape and designed to conserve the natural environment. Existing tree cover should be integrated into schemes and where additional planting is proposed preference will be given to native species. In addition attention should be given, where possible, to habitat creation and the management and protection of wildlife networks.
- 5.31 The Department will carefully consider the impact of proposals for the development of golf courses on the landscape and wider environmental qualities of the countryside. Each proposal should contain full details of the site and its immediate environs, including the effect on any public rights of way together with information on potential adverse impacts or environmental benefits associated with the development. These details should include information on landscaping and land levels, both existing and proposed, access arrangements, car parking and ancillary facilities such as a clubhouse. Where appropriate the Department will use its powers contained in the General Development Order to request applicants to supply such additional information on the proposed development as is considered necessary to allow proper determination.

Golf Driving Ranges

- 5.32 Golf driving ranges are generally more intensive land uses than golf courses with different visitor patterns and potentially higher levels of traffic generation. The buildings or the galleries, especially if they are two-tier, can be particularly intrusive unless sensitively sited and designed. Driving ranges often need high safety fencing and generally seek floodlighting to permit evening use. These features mean that driving ranges will generally only be acceptable where they will not be detrimental to the natural environment, the local landscape setting and the general character of the locality. Policy OS 7 sets out the Department's policy on the floodlighting of recreational facilities.

Equestrian Uses

- 5.33 The keeping and riding of horses for recreational purposes is increasingly popular in many parts of the countryside. Outdoor participatory recreational uses such as riding schools will normally be considered acceptable in principle, provided the scale of ancillary buildings is appropriate to its location and can be integrated into their landscape surroundings. Wherever possible, consideration should be given to the reuse of existing traditional or redundant farm buildings in association with such proposals.

Noisy Sports

- 5.34 Some outdoor recreational activities have the potential to generate high levels of noise and it is therefore necessary to pay special regard to the siting and location of such activities. Policy OS 5 sets out the Department's policy on noise generating sports and recreation activities.

Temporary Recreational Uses

- 5.35 Part 4 of the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 provides rights for the temporary use of land for a specified number of days each year. These rights are often used to facilitate certain sporting and outdoor recreational activities, such as clay pigeon shooting and certain equestrian activities. On occasion proposals are submitted to develop permanent buildings or structures in support of such temporary uses. Generally these will only be acceptable where the Department considers use of the site on a permanent basis would of itself be acceptable.

Additional Development based on Recreational Use

- 5.36 Certain sports or outdoor recreation activities may on occasion create a demand for additional development, such as holiday chalets or a hotel. While it is acknowledged that such facilities can improve the attractiveness of an area to tourists and in turn bring employment benefits, they must be considered on their own planning merits. The existence of an outdoor recreational use, such as a golf course, will not therefore in itself provide the justification for approving an associated development if this would not be acceptable in its own right.

Policy OS 4 Intensive Sports Facilities

The Department will only permit the development of intensive sports facilities where these are located within settlements.

An exception may be permitted in the case of the development of a sports stadium where all the following criteria are met:

- (i) there is no alternative site within the settlement which can accommodate the development;
- (ii) the proposed development site is located close to the edge of the settlement and can be clearly identified as being visually associated with the settlement;
- (iii) there is no adverse impact on the setting of the settlement; and
- (iv) the scale of the development is in keeping with the size of the settlement.

In all cases the development of intensive sports facilities will be required to meet all the following criteria:

- there is no unacceptable impact on the amenities of people living nearby by reason of the siting, scale, extent, frequency or timing of the sporting activities proposed, including any noise or light pollution likely to be generated;
- there is no adverse impact on features of importance to nature conservation, archaeology or built heritage;
- buildings or structures are designed to a high standard, are of a scale appropriate to the local area or townscape and are sympathetic to the surrounding environment in terms of their siting, layout and landscape treatment;
- the proposed facility takes into account the needs of people with disabilities and is located so as to be accessible to the catchment population giving priority to walking, cycling and public transport; and
- the road network can safely handle the extra vehicular traffic the proposal will generate and satisfactory arrangements are provided for site access, car parking, drainage and waste disposal.

Justification and Amplification

- 5.37 Intensive sports facilities, for the purposes of this PPS, include stadia, leisure centres, sports halls, swimming pools and other indoor and outdoor sports facilities that provide for a wide range of activities. Apart from facilitating sport such facilities often serve as a focus for the community and are therefore best located in settlements where they can be accessed most easily by a significant local catchment population.
- 5.38 The precise location of intensive sports facilities can be contentious. They can attract large numbers of people, particularly in the evenings and at weekends. They can also generate increased noise levels, operate long hours, attract a large number of vehicle movements and can require large car parking areas. Specific problems may also arise where floodlighting is proposed (see also Policy OS 7).
- 5.39 The Department wishes to ensure that development of intensive sports facilities takes place in appropriate locations, are of good design and apply the principles of sustainability. Factors which are important in assessing development proposals include the need for the facility, the size and make up of the proposed catchment population, accessibility to this population in terms of walking and cycling distances, proximity to public transport, the impact on the local environment and residential amenity, traffic generation and, where appropriate, the proximity to existing facilities of a similar size and nature. Detailed information on these matters should accompany proposals for intensive sports facilities to enable the Department to make a full assessment of the development.
- 5.40 It is acknowledged that specific difficulties may arise in seeking to locate a sports stadium within a settlement, particularly larger scale proposals. Exceptionally, the Department may be prepared to accept such development at the edge of a settlement. In such cases applicants will need to provide, as part of the application, specific justification for the choice of site together with details of what alternative sites were considered and the reasons these could not accommodate the development. Ease of access will be a key issue in assessing such proposals, in particular, the availability of public transport.

Policy OS 5 Noise Generating Sports and Outdoor Recreational Activities

The Department will only permit the development of sport or outdoor recreational activities that generate high levels of noise where all the following criteria are met:

- (i) there is no unacceptable level of disturbance to people living nearby or conflict with other noise sensitive uses;**
- (ii) there is no unacceptable level of disturbance to farm livestock and wildlife; and**
- (iii) there is no conflict with the enjoyment of environmentally sensitive features and locations or areas valued for their silence and solitude.**

Justification and Amplification

- 5.41 The impact of noise is an important issue in assessing proposals for activities such as motorsports, shooting, water-skiing and paintball adventure games. The noise associated with such activities can cause disturbance to local residents and conflict with nearby noise sensitive uses such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes and places of worship. These sports or activities can also be disruptive to livestock and wildlife and have a detrimental effect on the natural environment.
- 5.42 Appropriate sites for regular use by noise generating sports are not easy to identify. Much will depend on the type of activity, the tone, level, frequency and duration of any noise generated, the design of facilities, the nature of the local topography and the amount of existing and proposed screening. While measures can sometimes be taken to reduce noise at source, only those locations where the impact of noise can be effectively contained and minimized by the use of features such as landform or woodland should generally be considered.
- 5.43 Suitable sites for noisy sports may include former mineral workings or locations where the ambient noise level is already high and the tone of noise produced by the proposed sporting or recreation activity will not appear dominant. There may be occasions where the Department may

only consider it appropriate to grant a planning permission for a limited period to allow the impact of noise levels and any potential disturbance or nuisance to be assessed.

- 5.44 The development of noisy sports or outdoor recreation activities will generally be inappropriate in or near environmentally sensitive features or locations, such as sites of nature conservation importance or historic parks, gardens and demesnes. Such activities can significantly, and sometimes irreversibly, harm these valued environments. Particular care will also be necessary in assessing proposals in areas of high landscape quality such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and there will be a presumption against noisy sports in areas valued for their silence and solitude.
- 5.45 Where appropriate the Department will liaise with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland or the governing body of a particular noise generating sport to ascertain if the activity is subject to a code of practice or other means of control such as licensing conditions.
- 5.46 It should be noted that a number of noise generating sports, such as clay pigeon shooting and motor racing, which may only function infrequently, operate within the confines of the temporary use rights currently provided by the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 (see paragraph 5.35).

Policy OS 6 Development of Facilities ancillary to Water Sports

The Department will permit the development of facilities ancillary to water sports adjacent to inland lakes, reservoirs and waterways where all the following criteria are met:

- (i) it is compatible with any existing use of the water, including non-recreational uses;
- (ii) there is no adverse impact on features of importance to nature conservation, archaeology or built heritage;
- (iii) there is no adverse impact on visual amenity or the character of the local landscape;
- (iv) it will not result in water pollution or an unacceptable level of noise or disturbance;
- (v) buildings or structures are designed to a high standard, are of a scale appropriate to the local area or townscape and are sympathetic to the surrounding environment in terms of their siting, layout and landscape treatment;
- (vi) the proposed facility takes into account the needs of people with disabilities; and
- (vii) there is no conflict with the provisions of any local management plan.

Justification and Amplification

5.47 Water based sports in Northern Ireland are an increasingly popular activity and our rivers, reservoirs, lakes and canals are an important recreational resource. Water sports range from tranquil uses such as angling, sailing, canoeing, rowing and sail-boarding, to powered activities such as water-skiing, jet-skiing and other power boat uses. Management plans drawn up for particular water areas seek to address the compatibility of such varying demands.

- 5.48 The development of ancillary facilities to support water sport uses, such as slipways, jetties, boat houses, toilet and changing facilities, parking areas and access, generally requires planning permission. In considering such development proposals, the Department will assess the impact on the visual amenity and character of the area. Particular attention will be paid to the potential for development to result in over-intensive use of a site especially in or adjacent to sites of nature conservation importance, or areas designated for their landscape quality. It is the general intention of the Department to conserve the environmental quality and character of inland bodies of water and to protect them and their surroundings from harmful development.
- 5.49 The need for and impact of access across land to inland bodies of water will be addressed when considering proposals for water sports. Ancillary space requirements for launching, mooring and car parking can vary from modest dimensions to large compounds. Proposals for facilities must therefore demonstrate that they will not damage the wider environment. Noise, erosion of shorelines or river banks and the potential loss of amenity for other users will be considered. The Department will require good design in terms of layout, buildings and other structures and high quality treatment for boundaries either adjacent to the road or the actual waterway. Proposals should include details of all landscaping and surface treatments.
- 5.50 Proposals for recreational development affecting the coastline of Northern Ireland will continue to be determined in line with the policies contained in the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland.

Policy OS 7

The Floodlighting of Sports and Outdoor Recreational Facilities

The Department will only permit the development of floodlighting associated with sports and outdoor recreational facilities where all the following criteria are met:

- (i) there is no unacceptable impact on the amenities of people living nearby;
- (ii) there is no adverse impact on the visual amenity or character of the locality; and
- (iii) public safety is not prejudiced.

Justification and Amplification

- 5.51 There has been an increasing trend in recent years towards the provision of floodlighting at sports and outdoor recreational facilities. This can extend the hours of operation of such facilities, thereby creating greater flexibility and potential for enhanced use by more people, both as participants or spectators. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that such development will not cause unacceptable harm to amenity or prejudice public safety.
- 5.52 Where floodlighting is proposed as part of a new sports or recreational development or in association with an existing facility, a number of issues need to be considered. These include the potential for increased use of the facility, light pollution and increased traffic and noise generation. Such issues are particularly relevant where the proposed floodlighting is close to residential properties. The impact of the design and size of the floodlighting structures on visual amenity and their use on the character of the wider area are also important considerations. Particular care needs to be exercised in the countryside and those areas identified for their landscape, townscape or heritage value.
- 5.53 In assessing the impact of floodlighting on public safety, the Department will have regard to its effect upon the safe use and operation of any form of traffic or transport on land, on or over water or in the air. For example, glare from excessively bright or poorly aimed floodlighting

can cause dazzle with implications for transport users and pedestrians, particularly the elderly. The alignment and brightness of the lights are important considerations, therefore, in determining proposals for floodlighting.

- 5.54 In certain cases it may be possible to permit proposals subject to the imposition of conditions limiting the hours during which the floodlights may be operated and/or the frequency of their use, restricting the luminance or brightness of the lights or requiring the installation of appropriate shielding.

Annex A: Definition of Open Space

- A1 For the purposes of this Planning Policy Statement, open space is taken to mean all open space of public value, including not just land, but also inland bodies of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and outdoor recreation and can also act as a visual amenity.
- A2 The following typology illustrates the broad range of open spaces that are of public value:
- (i) parks and gardens – including urban parks, country parks, forest parks and formal gardens;
 - (ii) outdoor sports facilities (with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned) – including tennis courts, bowling greens, sport pitches, golf courses, athletic tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas;
 - (iii) amenity green space (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) – including informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing, and village greens;
 - (iv) provision for children and teenagers – including play areas, kickabout areas, skateboard parks and outdoor basketball hoops;
 - (v) green corridors – including river and canal banks, amenity footpaths and cycleways;
 - (vi) natural and semi-natural urban green spaces – including woodlands, urban forestry, grasslands (eg. meadows), wetlands, open and running water, and rock areas (eg. cliffs);
 - (vii) allotments and community gardens;
 - (viii) cemeteries and churchyards; and
 - (ix) civic spaces, including civic and market squares and other hard surface areas designed for pedestrians.

- A3 The Department recognises that most areas of open space can perform multiple functions. These will be taken account of when applying the policies of this Statement. These include:
- (i) strategic functions - defining and separating urban areas; providing community greenways, 'green lungs' or landscape buffers within urban areas; better linking of town and country; and serving recreational needs over a wide area;
 - (ii) urban quality - helping to support regeneration and improving quality of life for communities by providing visually attractive green spaces close to where people live;
 - (iii) promoting health and well-being - providing opportunities to people of all ages for informal recreation, or to walk, cycle or ride within parks and open space or along paths, bridleways and canal banks. Allotments may provide physical exercise and other health benefits;
 - (iv) havens and habitats for flora and fauna – sites may also have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another and may contribute towards achieving objectives set out in the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy;
 - (v) as a community resource – a place for congregating and for holding community events; and
 - (vi) as a visual amenity – even without public access, people enjoy having open space near to them to provide an outlook, variety in the urban scene, or as a positive element in the landscape.

Annex B: Summary of the National Playing Fields Association Minimum Standard for Outdoor Playing Space

- B1 The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) recommends a minimum standard for 'outdoor playing space' of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 population. This is commonly referred to as the '6 Acre Standard'. The NPFA does not regard 'outdoor playing space' to be the same as public open space, rather it is space that is safely accessible and available to the general public, and of a suitable size and nature, for sport, active recreation or children's play. Accordingly it is a significant component, but not the only form, of open space.
- B2 'Outdoor playing space' is made up of two main components. The first of these is land provided for outdoor sport, principally for adults and youths. The second is playing space for children.
- B3 Following a recent review, the NPFA maintains that its recommended levels for the allocation of 'outdoor playing space' are justified. Furthermore it confirms that these are minimum standards and advises that they should be exceeded whenever possible. The NPFA commends these standards to all local authorities throughout the United Kingdom.
- B4 The following facilities are excluded from the definition of 'outdoor playing space', although the NPFA recognises that there are circumstances where some of them can make a valuable contribution to the total recreational provision of communities. They are not however regarded as substitutes for elements of the NPFA standard:
- (i) outdoor sports facilities which are not as a matter of policy and practice available for public use, such as professional sports stadia;
 - (ii) grounds of Her Majesty's Services, unless as a matter of policy and practice and by formal agreement they are made available for public use;
 - (iii) verges, woodlands, commons, the seashore, nature conservation areas, allotments, ornamental gardens and parks (except for clearly defined areas within them for sports, games, practice and play);
 - (iv) golf facilities;
 - (v) water used for recreation, except where it forms an interactive feature of an outdoor play area;

- (vi) sports halls or leisure centres;
- (vii) commercial entertainment complexes and theme parks; and
- (viii) car parks for non-recreational use.

B5 The total NPFA standard should be met by ensuring land is available for outdoor sport and children's play in the manner set out below.

(A) Outdoor Sport: 1.6 hectares

- (i) Facilities such as pitches, greens, courts, athletic tracks and miscellaneous sites such as training areas in the ownership of councils;
- (ii) Facilities as described in (i) above within the educational sector which are available for public use by written agreement; and
- (iii) Facilities as described in (i) above within the voluntary, private, industrial and commercial sectors, which serve the leisure time needs for outdoor recreation of their members, or the public.

Note: - Included within the standard for outdoor sport is a specific allocation of 1.2 hectares per 1000 people for pitch sports.

(B) Children's Playing Space: 0.8 hectares

- (i) Designated areas for children and young people containing a range of facilities and an environment that has been designed to provide focussed opportunities for outdoor play; and
- (ii) Casual or informal playing space within housing areas.

B6 Further information can be found in the publication "The Six Acre Standard: Minimum Standards for Outdoor Playing Space", NPFA, 2001.

Annex C: Key Bodies which make a valuable contribution to the development of Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation

District Councils

- C1 District councils are key enablers in the development of sport and physical recreation and have the primary responsibility for the provision of public open space facilities within their areas. Their statutory powers to provide for and facilitate recreation are considerable, ranging from leisure and tourism promotion, acquisition of land for recreational use and provision of facilities, to securing public access to the countryside. It should be noted, however, that many of the powers of councils are discretionary, some are limited by legislation while others have been used infrequently due to the resources required.
- C2 The statutory responsibility for district councils to secure the provision for their area of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities is set out in the Local Government Order 1972 and the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986. Specific functions regarding the adoption and subsequent maintenance of open space by councils are contained in the Open Spaces Act 1906.
- C3 Under the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983, district councils have a duty *“to assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment, any public right of way...”* They are also given discretionary powers to repair and maintain rights of way, to create, divert or close public paths and to make access agreements or orders to open land.

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland (www.sportni.org)

- C4 The Sports Council for Northern Ireland is responsible for promoting the furtherance of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. Its role includes encouraging participation in sport, raising standards of performance, fostering the provision of new facilities and encouraging the use of existing facilities. It provides advice to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and other bodies on sports matters.

- C5 In 1997 the Sports Council published the first strategy for the development of sport in Northern Ireland: *Starting Well, Staying Involved and Striving for Excellence 1997-2005*. The following year, together with Environment and Heritage Service, it co-sponsored publication of the first Countryside Recreation Strategy for Northern Ireland.
- C6 In 1999 the Sports Council adopted a revised policy to generally oppose development that would lead to the loss of playing fields or prejudice their use as this would permanently reduce opportunities for participation in sporting activities.
- C7 The Sports Council also has distinct responsibilities as a distributing body for the Lottery Sports Fund in Northern Ireland. Since 1995, approximately £50 million has been allocated to some 1000 individual sports projects. In all, over 50 sports and all 26 district council areas have benefited from Lottery Sports Fund support.

Countryside Access and Activities Network (www.countrysidecreation.com)

- C8 The Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN) is an umbrella organisation which brings together all groups and bodies which have an interest in, or involvement in countryside recreation in Northern Ireland.
- C9 The Network was established in 1999 in response to the publication of the Countryside Recreation Strategy the previous year. It is charged with the strategic development and management of countryside recreation across Northern Ireland.

Environment and Heritage Service (www.ehsni.gov.uk)

- C10 The Environment and Heritage Service, an agency within the Department of the Environment, manages seven country parks and two countryside centres and maintains a number of historic monuments that provide formal access to the countryside and attract large numbers of visitors each year. EHS also advises on the management of public land for nature conservation, heritage protection and informal recreation and seeks to encourage the use of public land for informal access wherever practicable. It has discretionary powers to give grant aid to local councils for the development of access opportunities.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (www.nihe.gov.uk)

- C11 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive owns and manages some 106,000 properties in Northern Ireland and is responsible for the management of approximately 1,350 hectares of green space in and around its housing estates. This land takes the form of larger strategic areas and smaller spaces and provides for general amenity, recreation and community use. Some of this land has been transferred to the Woodland Trust to help establish Community Woodlands.
- C12 There are some Housing Executive estates, usually dating from the 1960's and 1970's, where the design has resulted in large areas of ill defined open space - typically taking up to 60% of the estate. Many of these areas have become problematic and difficult to manage. The Housing Executive is continuing to develop a strategic approach to the improvement of these estates through broad stakeholder involvement and by employing the design principles advocated by the Department's Quality Initiative.
- C13 In such cases it is considered that there can often be substantial community benefit in permitting the appropriate redevelopment of a part of the open space provision where this forms part of a package of measures aimed at restructuring the remaining areas and improving the overall estate layout. Such an approach could bring the following benefits:-
- The enhancement of strategic quality spaces, promoting improvements in the amenity, character and biodiversity of the area;
 - Improvements to the layout, giving better defensible space and community safety, thereby enhancing the long term viability and sustainability of the estate;
 - The provision of more social housing or specialised housing in cases where a strong local need may exist;
 - The facilitation of private and affordable housing, thus increasing tenure diversification; and
 - The facilitation of other appropriate uses, such as local community facilities.

Forest Service (www.dardni.gov.uk)

C14 Forest Service, an agency within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, operates a policy of open access and encouragement of the use of the forest estate for public recreation, outdoor pursuits and education. Forest recreation provides for a wide variety of interest groups, ranging from day trippers, walkers and caravanners, to those involved in more specialised activities such as orienteering and car rallying. During 2002-03 there were an estimated 2 million day visits made to Forest Service woodlands and almost 460,000 visitors to charged recreational areas.

The National Trust (www.ntni.org.uk)

C15 The National Trust is the single largest private landowner in Northern Ireland. It owns and cares for over 40 square miles of scenic countryside, 60 miles of local coastline, 15 major coastal and countryside estates, including the Giant's Causeway and Slieve Donard, and 9 major historic mansions and houses. The vast majority of the Trust's sites can be visited and enjoyed by the public.

The Woodland Trust (www.woodland.trust.org.uk)

C16 The Woodland Trust is a charity dedicated to the preservation and creation of woodlands. It owns and manages some 50 woodland sites of varying size throughout Northern Ireland covering approximately 290 hectares. Most of these woodlands are open to the public.

Playboard (www.playboard.org)

C17 Playboard is an agency that provides advice on children's play in Northern Ireland. Its aim is to improve the quality of children's lives by increasing their opportunity to play. Playboard is working in partnership with a number of voluntary, public and private sector organisations to further this aim and has developed a number of area based play strategies.

Annex D: Divisional Planning Offices

District Council	Divisional Planning Office
Antrim Ballymena Carrickfergus Larne Magherafelt	Ballymena Divisional Planning Office County Hall 182 Galgorm Road BALLYMENA, BT42 1QF Tel No: (028) 2565 3333 Fax No: (028) 2566 2127 E-mail: divisional.planning.office.ballymena@nics.gov.uk
Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Newry & Mourne	Craigavon Divisional Planning Office Marlborough House Central Way CRAIGAVON, BT64 1AD Tel No: (028) 3834 1144 Fax No: (028) 3834 1065 E-mail: divisional.planning.office.craigavon@nics.gov.uk
Derry Limavady	Londonderry Divisional Planning Office Orchard House 40 Foyle Street LONDONDERRY, BT48 6AT Tel No: (028) 7131 9900 Fax No: (028) 7131 9777 E-mail: divisional.planning.office.londonderry@nics.gov.uk
Belfast Castlereagh Newtownabbey	Belfast Divisional Planning Office Bedford House 16-22 Bedford Street BELFAST BT2 7FD Tel No: (028) 9025 2800 Fax No: (028) 9025 2828 E-mail: divisional.planning.office.belfast@nics.gov.uk
Ards Down Lisburn North Down	Downpatrick Divisional Planning Office Rathkelter House Market Street DOWNPATRICK, BT30 6EJ Tel No: (028) 4461 2211 Fax No: (028) 4461 8196 E-mail: divisional.planning.office.downpatrick@nics.gov.uk

District Council**Divisional Planning Office**

Cookstown
Dungannon
Omagh
Strabane

Omagh Divisional Planning Office
County Hall
Drumragh Avenue
OMAGH, BT79 7AE
Tel No: (028) 8225 4000
Fax No: (028) 8225 4011
E-mail: divisional.planning.office.omagh@nics.gov.uk

Sub-Divisional Planning Office

Ballymoney
Coleraine
Moyle

Coleraine Sub-Divisional Planning Office
County Hall
Castlerock Road
COLERAINE, BT51 3HS
Tel No: (028) 7034 1300
Fax No: (028) 7034 1434
E-mail: divisional.planning.office.coleraine@nics.gov.uk

Fermanagh

Enniskillen Sub-Divisional Planning Office
County Buildings
15 East Bridge Street
ENNISKILLEN, BT74 7BW
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