

ASSESSMENT OF NEED  
– COUNTRY PARK

Hart District Council

June 2011

*Prepared by Strategic Leisure, part of URS/ScottWilson*

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## 1. Executive Summary

### The Project

### The Project

- 1.1 Strategic Leisure, (a part of the Scott Wilson Group), was appointed by Hart District Council (HDC) in January 2011, to undertake a needs assessment for the provision of a potential new Country Park in the District.
- 1.2 The requirement for the needs assessment was identified by HDC in relation to the overall development proposed at Hitches Lane, Fleet, and the potential for drawing down some S106 funding as a contribution towards the capital costs of developing a new Country Park.

### Project Background

- 1.3 The context for this study is provided specifically by the planned development at Hitches Lane, Fleet, and overall by the population increase that will be seen in Hart District over the next 17 years. This increase is based on the fact that Hart DC needs to build around 4,400 new homes by 2028; given that 660 new homes have been constructed between 2006/7 – 2009, a further 3,740 should be built by 2028, to meet the Local Development Framework (LDF) targets. This equates to the development of around 200 new homes per annum.
- 1.4 A significant number, of the homes being built will be located at Hitches Lane, Fleet, where planning permission already exists, and some new residences have already been constructed.

### The Case for a new Country Park in Hart District

- 1.5 The contents of this needs assessment report demonstrate that there is substantial existing and latent (potential) demand for the proposed Country Park, which will serve a catchment of 255,000 people. Latent demand refers to both existing, identified demand, and that which will be created as a result of the increased population derived from considerable housing growth the District will experience in the next few years. The relevant drive times are identified in the report.
- 1.6 The visitor modes of travel, distances concerned, reasons for visiting this type of site, and comparison with other similar sites in the UK quoted in this study evidence the potential for significant annual attendances.
- 1.7 In addition to the evidence of demand, the study sets out the supporting and complementary expectations of visitors to Country park sites. Given that these are specifically the views of Hart residents who will be major users of the Country Park, the drawing down of further S106 contributions, or the allocation of additional capital finances towards the enhancement of the park facilities should be considered.
- 1.8 The location of a leisure centre on the same site as the Country Park would positively address some areas of visitor concern, such as safety and security, vandalism, and management; operating a leisure centre on the same site will mean there are staff around for long periods of time, and the site will be supervised. This will benefit users of, and visitors to, the Country Park.
- 1.9 The combined demand for car parking spaces which will be created by the level of visitors to the leisure centre, outdoor sports facilities and country park will need to be given serious consideration in the overall planning and design of the site, particularly given there is potential to generate revenue through car park charges.

## 2. Introduction and Background Context

- 2.1 Strategic Leisure, (a part of the Scott Wilson Group), was appointed by Hart District Council (HDC) in January 2011, to undertake a needs assessment for the provision of a potential new Country Park in the District.
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- 2.3 The context for this study is provided specifically by the planned development at Hitches Lane, Fleet, and overall by the population increase that will be seen in Hart District over the next 17 years. This increase is based on the fact that Hart DC needs to build around 4,400 new homes by 2028; given that 660 new homes have been constructed between 2006/7 – 2009, a further 3,740 should be built by 2028, to meet the Local Development Framework (LDF) targets. This equates to the development of around 200 new homes per annum.
- 2.4 A significant number, of the homes being built will be located at Hitches Lane, Fleet, where planning permission already exists, and some new residences have already been constructed.
- 2.5 As a result of the Hitches Lane development, the population increase, and the consequent higher demand for provision of a wide range of community facilities – sport, leisure, amenity space, dedicated open space, transport networks and education facilities, HDC is developing proposals to address both current and future needs and demand.
- 2.6 Of specific relevance to this study, HDC is developing proposals for a new leisure centre to replace the existing Hart Leisure Centre; the new facility will be constructed across the road, opposite the current centre, which may well become part of an extended secondary school campus.
- 2.7 It is proposed that a Country Park with outdoor sports facilities will also be developed across the road from the existing Hart Leisure Centre, adjacent to the new leisure facility. Together, these new developments would comprise an iconic sport and leisure facility within Hart District.
- 2.8 Current proposals are for the outdoor facilities to consist of:
- Outdoor changing facilities to serve the external sports pitches
  - 2 x junior football pitches
  - 2 x floodlit artificial grass pitches suitable for both full sided games, or 3 x 5-a-side games per pitch
- 2.9 The proposed Country Park would encompass these sports facilities, plus a large area of informal and more formal provision, providing at both local and districtwide level for recreational needs. The Country Park will contain 24 ha of countryside and 22 ha of sports and amenity space. This needs assessment relates to both elements of the Sports and Country park.

## Country Park Needs Assessment – Aim and Objectives

### Aim

2.10 The aim of undertaking the needs assessment is twofold:

- i) To develop irrefutable evidence that there is a need for a Country Park, and that therefore requests for developer contributions ie S106s are justified
- ii) To demonstrate and evidence the likely catchment area for a Country Park in Hart District

### Objectives

2.11 Given this aim, the objectives of the Needs Assessment are:

- 3 To identify the likely catchment area for a new Country Park in Hart District
- 4 To identify all existing similar provision, including that in neighbouring authorities, and any 'gaps' that exist
- 5 To identify and assess current and future demand for a Country Park
- 6 To identify likely modes of travel to a Country Park
- 7 To identify the likely visitor numbers for a Country Park in Fleet who will specifically come from elsewhere in the district, based on industry accepted modes of travel
- 8 To identify and assess the range and nature of activities in which visitors to the Country Park would want to participate
- 9 To identify the range of facilities visitors would expect to find in a Country Park
- 10 To identify the likely catchment area for a new Country Park in Hart District

### Approach to Country Park Needs Assessment

2.12 Given the requirements of this needs assessment, the approach taken has involved:

- A residents' questionnaire promoted across the District, to which 315 responses were received
- An audit of Country Park and similar provision around Hart District
- An audit of similar open spaces in Hart District
- A review of population growth estimates, and new housing development
- Identification of the catchment area for a new Country Park within the District
- Identification of the demand for a new Country Park and what facilities it should include
- Identification of likely visitor numbers to a new Country park, and their modes of travel

2.13 The findings of the research and assessment of need are set out in the subsequent sections of this report, and summarised in the Executive Summary.

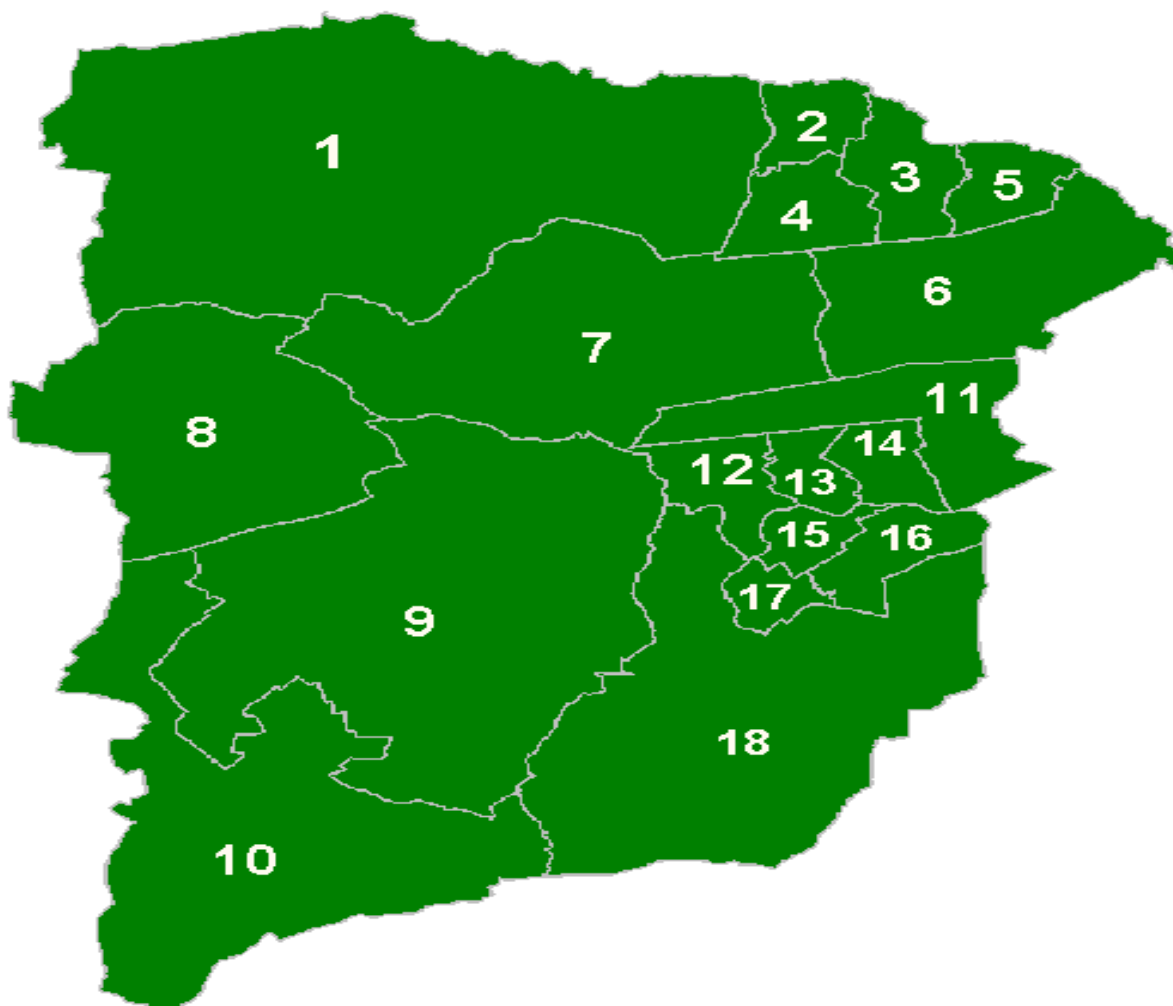
### 3. Assessment of Need

#### Local Strategic Context

#### Demographic Review

- 3.1 Hart District covers an area of approximately 21,500 hectares (83 sq. miles) and is situated in north-east Hampshire, bordering both Surrey and Berkshire. The main centres of population are in the north and east, with the area being characterised by its wide variety of largely rural landscapes.
- 3.2 The main towns are Fleet and Church Crookham, Blackwater and Hawley, and Yateley. Hook, Odiham, Crondall and Hartley Wintney are the larger villages in the district whilst other settlements are mainly small, dispersed villages and hamlets.
- 3.3 The district comprises both rural and urban areas; over 80% of the area of the district is classified 'rural' and 19% 'urban' (based on geographical relationship to settlements of 10,000 people or more). However, 70% of the total population lives in urban areas.
- 3.4 For reference, a map of Hart, by ward, is shown, with a key, is shown below.

**Map 1: Hart Ward Map**



**Map Key: Hart District Wards**

Key	Ward	Key	Ward
1	Eversley	10	Long Sutton
2	Yateley North	11	Fleet North
3	Yateley East	12	Fleet West
4	Yateley West	13	Fleet Central
5	Frogmore and Darby Green	14	Fleet Pondtail
6	Blackwater and Hawley	15	Fleet Courtmoor
7	Hartley Wintney	16	Church Crookham East
8	Hook	17	Church Crookham West
9	Odiham	18	Crondall

- 3.5 Fleet is the largest administrative, retail and commercial centre within Hart District. The town has evolved from its main street and railway station in the late 19th century to include large residential areas on all sides, most of which have been built in the last 25 years. It has some important open spaces, including the Canal and Fleet Pond. Access to its facilities, some of which are peripheral to the centre, is very reliant on car travel.
- 3.6 Hart has a large working age population, mostly made of those in the mid-latter half of their working lives. Hart has a slightly higher percentage of people aged 15 and under and of working age and a lower percentage of people aged 65 and over when compared with the average for England. Residents are generally affluent and enjoy a high standard of living.
- 3.7 Hart District has the second lowest unemployment rate in Hampshire having a rate of only 0.4%. Education standards, health and life expectancy are above the national average. Hart is regularly highlighted as one of the least deprived local authority areas in England.
- 3.8 While the child and young adult populations are forecast to decline, the number of over 65s is set to grow. The Council's 2008 Housing Needs Survey states that 24.9% of heads of households are retired, and that this number will increase.
- 3.9 If this aging projection is accurate, services/facilities will increasingly need to take account of these demographic changes when planning, delivering and financing future priorities. This trend will have implications in terms of the demand for specific types of leisure and open space provision/sports facilities.
- 3.10 Both formal and informal leisure and recreation facilities are important to local people and are well-used; quality of life is an important issue for local residents.

### Population Projections and Housing Development

- 3.11 The 1991 National Census Population Data showed a total population figure for Hart District of 83,505. The Office of National Statistics Sub National Population projected the population for Hart District in 2010 to be 92,700.
- 3.12 HDC has a target to supply 4,400 new homes 2006 – 2028. The number of homes that have been constructed 2006/7 until 2009/10 is 660.
- 3.13 There are outstanding planning permissions (minus 10% for non delivery) of 654. There are 1066 sites without planning permission (minus 10% for non delivery of those not allocated in the Local Plan. Developable sites of 20. This provides a total supply of 2,400 with a residual target of 2000.

- 3.13 The residual target is what the emerging LDF will have to address. The HDC target is 200 dwellings per annum.
- 3.14 The number of new homes that will provide additional population from 2010 is the supply target (4,400) minus the number of homes that have been constructed 2006/7 until 2009/10 (660). This equates to 3,740. An increase in population will be an obvious outcome.
- 3.15 An exact figure cannot be calculated due to the number of variables such as life expectancy, birth rates, inward and outward migration and the availability of affordable housing. However, if houses are built on average to provide for 3 people per dwelling then the population in Hart District will increase by a minimum of  $3740 \times 3 = 11,220$ .

### Quality of Life, and Health

- 3.16 The Health Profile for Hart 2010 ([www.healthprofiles.info](http://www.healthprofiles.info)) shows that indicators of health for people in Hart, when compared with the England average, are good. Over 90% of local residents live in areas classified as among the least deprived in England. Hart has very low levels of child poverty, homelessness and violent crime. Life expectancy for men and women is higher than the England average.

### Existing Participation and Latent Demand – Physical Activity

#### Existing Participation

- 3.17 The proportion of physically active adults in Hart is higher than the England average. This means there is already high demand for, and use of, both informal and informal sport, leisure and recreational facilities/open space areas.

#### Latent Demand

- 3.18 In Active People Surveys 2 and 3, additional questions were added to try and better ascertain levels of latent demand – i.e. identify how many people wanted to do more physical activity, and which activity they were most interested in.
- 3.19 When asked, 62% of the respondents in Hart (the AP3 sample was half of the overall 500) stated that they would like to do more physical activity. This information is useful because it can begin to show a picture of what type of future provision is most relevant for local people.
- 3.20 Based on the responses received, the most popular activities that Hart residents would like to undertake are shown below in Table 3.1 in order of priority interest.

**Table 3.1: Most popular activities – latent demand**

Activity	Percentage Response
<b>Swimming/Diving</b>	<b>18.92%</b>
<b>Gym</b>	<b>11.75%</b>
<b>Cycling</b>	<b>9.55%</b>
<b>Football</b>	<b>8.96%</b>
<b>Golf</b>	<b>8.22%</b>
<b>Tennis</b>	<b>6.52%</b>
<b>Running (road)</b>	<b>5.66%</b>
<b>Jogging</b>	<b>4.48%</b>
<b>Badminton</b>	<b>3.98%</b>

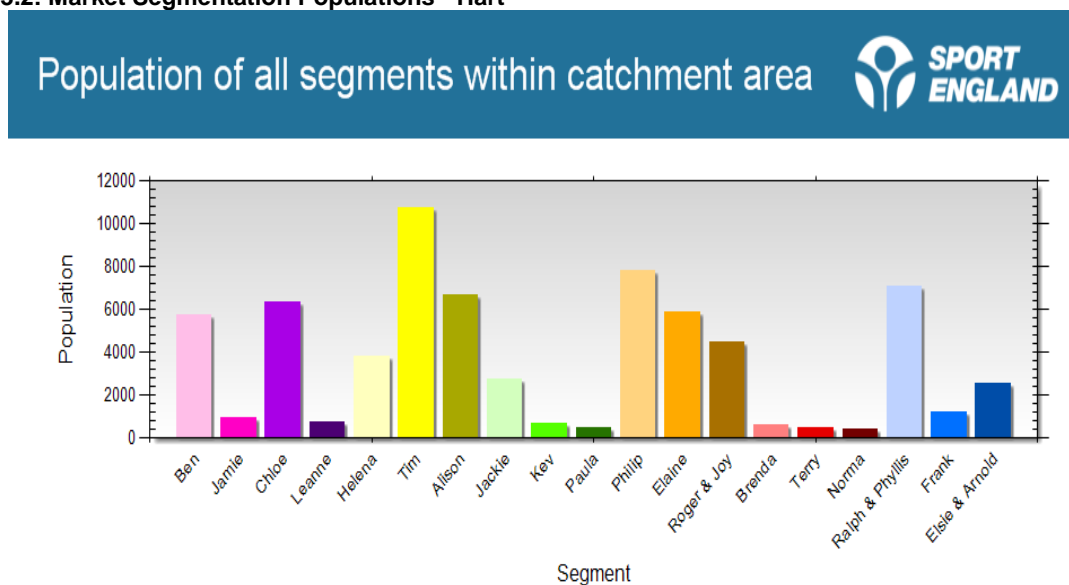
Activity	Percentage Response
<b>Keep fit/sit ups etc</b>	<b>3.1%</b>

- 3.21 As the table above illustrates, there are a number of activities which are shown to be of particular interest to the current population of Hart. Those highlighted in red are activities which could take place in a Country Park. It has been assumed that keep fit/circuits could be undertaken in an ‘outdoor’ gym, as well as inside a leisure facility.
- 3.22 While there are clearly many and varied reasons why respondents might not be participating in these activities currently, the evidence can at least be used to show the type of provision within a Country Park which might theoretically be of interest to the largest number of Hart residents.

### Market Segmentation

- 3.23 Sport England has developed a segmentation model, made up of 19 ‘sporting’ segments to break down the population which are aimed to help understand the attitudes, motivations and perceived barriers to sports participation. Based on an Experian model, the segmentation tools aim to help develop tailored interventions, communicate more effectively with target markets and to better understand participation in the context of different stages of life.
- 3.24 The total populations of the 19 segments (each of which has a given ‘name’) are shown below as Figure 3.2. This demographic profile has implications because certain activities and sports are typically more popular with certain groups. Therefore there is a relationship between the market segments and the kinds of facilities which might help to service demand and cater for the local population’s interests

**Figure 3.2: Market Segmentation Populations - Hart**



- 3.25 An analysis of this data for Hart District shows the following notable trends in terms of comparison with the regional and national picture:

Higher than average numbers of:

- **Segment 1 – competitive male urbanites (Ben)**
- **Segment 3 – fitness class friends (Chloe)**
- **Segment 6 – settling down males (Tim)**

- **Segment 7 – stay at home mums (Alison)**
  - **Segment 11 – comfortable Mid –Life Males (Philip)**
  - **Segment 12 – empty nest career ladies (Elaine)**
  - **Segment 17 – comfortable retired couples (Ralph & Phyllis)**
- 3.26 Overall, the data is reflective of a generally affluent demographic area, with large percentages of groups which are typically sporty, with a higher propensity to participate than other groups which may be of a comparable age.
- 3.27 The key activities which are typically associated with the main groups (shown in the figure above) are highlighted in Table 3.3 below:

**Table 3.3: Typical activity – dominant social groups in Hart**

Segment	Popular activities
<b>Segment 6 – settling down males (Tim)</b>	<b>Cycling; Keep fit/Gym; Swimming; Football; Athletics; Golf</b>
<b>Segment 11 – comfortable mid life male (Philip)</b>	<b>Cycling; Keep fit/Gym; Swimming; Football; Golf; Athletics</b>
<b>Segment 17 – comfortable retired couples (Ralph &amp; Phyllis)</b>	<b>Keep fit/Gym; Swimming; Golf; Bowls</b>
<b>Segment 7 – stay at home mums (Alison)</b>	<b>Keep fit/Gym; Swimming; Cycling; Athletics</b>
<b>Segment 3 – fitness class friends (Chloe)</b>	<b>Keep fit/Gym; Swimming; Athletics; Cycling</b>
<b>Segment 1 – competitive male urbanites (Ben)</b>	<b>Most sporty of the 19 segments – Football; Keep fit/Gym; Cycling; Athletics; Swimming; Badminton and Squash.</b>

- 3.28 As Table 3.1 illustrates, there are some consistent messages in terms of the kinds of outdoor activities which are most popular with these social groups (although clearly each has different levels and intensities of participation), and those which could take place in a Country Park eg – cycling, keep fit, golf.
- 3.29 It is therefore clear that there is both significant existing participation, and identifiable latent demand for the kinds of activities requiring open space, and which could take place in a Country Park.

### Open Space and Corporate Priorities

- 3.30 In assessing the need for a country park, it is critical to be clear where green and open space ‘fits’ within the HDC corporate policy, to understand how such provision would contribute to identified local

priorities.

- 3.31 A summary of the key strategic points relating to the future provision of open space in the District is shown below in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4: Strategic context review**

Document	Key Findings/Issues
<p><b>HDC Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2007-2011</b></p>	<p>The document builds on the first Corporate Plan (published in 2005) and also the first Medium Term Financial Strategy, the idea of which is that a single integrated document be provided, which represents a 'more realistic assessment of the Council's priorities, its resources and its ability to achieve its aspirations'</p> <p>The essence of the plan is to:</p> <p><b><i>Prioritise ambitions; maximise income; make the most efficient and effective use of resources possible; allocate resources strictly in accordance with strategy priorities; and reduce or cease priority activities.</i></b></p> <p>The plan and financial strategy fully supports the Community Strategy for the District (reviewed below) and its vision. The relevant key priorities 2007-2011 are enhancing the natural and built environment and ensuring clean, green and safe streets and public spaces.</p> <p>The plan references the use of the Local Development Framework (LDF) to channel development and the provision of infrastructure.</p>
<p><b>Hart District Sustainable Community Strategy (2008-2018)</b></p>	<p>The Community Strategy sets out the following vision: 'To improve, sustain and promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the communities in Hart District'.</p> <p>Six strategic priorities for the district are identified, with the following key considerations/objectives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>An environmentally conscious community and a sustainable district</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Secure an infrastructure-led approach to new development</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Encourage people to shift away from car use to sustainable forms of transport including higher rates of walking and cycling and public transport use</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reducing carbon output and improving energy efficiency are identified as key objectives.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Affordable, safe, well-maintained, sustainable housing</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>One of the safest districts in the South East</b></p> <p>It is clear from the above that provision of additional open space could contribute significantly to sustainability in the district – of housing, the environment and transport infrastructure, as well as improve individual and community health.</p>

Document	Key Findings/Issues
<p><b>Hart District Leisure Strategy 2007-2017</b></p>	<p>Sets out a mission statement for the provision of leisure: “HDC aims to enable the provision of a range of high quality and accessible facilities, services and opportunities which meet the leisure, sport, health and physical activity needs of the District’s communities.</p> <p>The component parts are Indoor sport and leisure; outdoor sport and play; parks, open spaces and commons; inland waters; aesthetic and performance”.</p> <p>Several key areas are used as a framework under which other priorities and aims are positioned. These include overall Strategic Direction; Partnerships; Sport and Art Development Resources; Facility Development and Infrastructure; Planning Standards; Financial and Physical Resources; and Leisure and the Wider Agenda.</p> <p>Particularly relevant elements highlighted in the strategy include:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SD2 - Planning strategically across the District whilst taking account of provision beyond the District’s boundaries</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SD3 - Linking leisure provision into the evolving development planning framework for the District</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SD4 - Optimising the funding and delivery opportunities provided by “Section 106” developer contributions for investment in leisure provision.</b></p> <p>as well as the identified need to provide quality open space, appropriate to the needs of the District.</p>
<p><b>HDC Core Strategy (Preferred Options)</b></p>	<p>The spatial planning vision for the District, as set out in the Core Strategy is that ‘Hart will apply policies and will develop and use relationships with others to champion and improve the quality of life for its communities through allowing sustainable development, conserving the local environment, enabling access to services and amenities and promoting the best use of resources.’</p> <p>The council aims to attempting to meet local needs through affordable housing, high quality open space, relevant and valued services, employment options, community facilities and leisure opportunities.</p>

3.32 The above demonstrates that open space is a recognised priority in the district; its potential for contributing to sustainability, community provision and health is reflected in the above corporate policies.

### Need for more Open Space in Hart District

3.33 In assessing the need for a potential new Country Park, it is important to consider previous relevant studies undertaken in respect of the district’s current open space provision.

3.34 The Hart PPG17 (2007), suggested that there was no demand for additional space

## Hart District Council

### Country Park – Assessment of Need

other than as a result of new dwellings. The study found there was no shortfall in volume against the then existing (2006) number of dwellings but the quality was below what could reasonably be expected.

- 3.35 However, subsequent to this study, the Council adopted two policy priorities in 2008 as part of its Community Strategy:

**1. Affordable Housing; green space was perceived as required to supplement high density housing developments**

**2. Improved Environment. The concept of a proposed Country Park was developed in response to the number of houses to be built in the coming years and the Council's commitment to (a) improvements in community access to open space and outdoor sports facilities, (b) provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) (part of the proposed Hitches Lane Country Park would be SANGS) to mitigate against the Special Protection Area in the Thames Basin Heathlands) and (c) environmental bio diversity in the countryside.**

### Existing Open Space in, and close to, Hart District

- 3.36 Assessing the need for a new Country Park in Hart also needs to take into account the range and nature of existing open space in and around the District.

### Open Space in Hart District

- 3.37 Although there is no other existing Country park in the District, there are a number of other existing green and open spaces, to which there is public access, and current community use. Relevant existing open spaces include:

**Table 3.5 Existing open space in Hart District**

<b>OPEN SPACE IN HART MANAGED BY HDC</b>	<b>OPEN SPACE IN HART MANAGED BY OTHER AGENCIES</b>
Fleet Pond	Pondtail
Elvetham Heath Nature Reserve	Ansells farm
Hazeley Heath Common	Hook Common
Odiham Common	Bartley Heath
Phoenix Green Common	Velmead Common
Royal Oak Valley	Oakley park
Ashwells Copse	Basingbourne Heath
	Basingstoke Canal
	Yateley Common Country Park (predominantly a SSSI, and has a SPA)

### Open Space in close proximity to Hart District

- 3.38 There are also a number of open spaces in close proximity to Hart District; these include:

**Table 3.5 Existing open space in close proximity to Hart District**

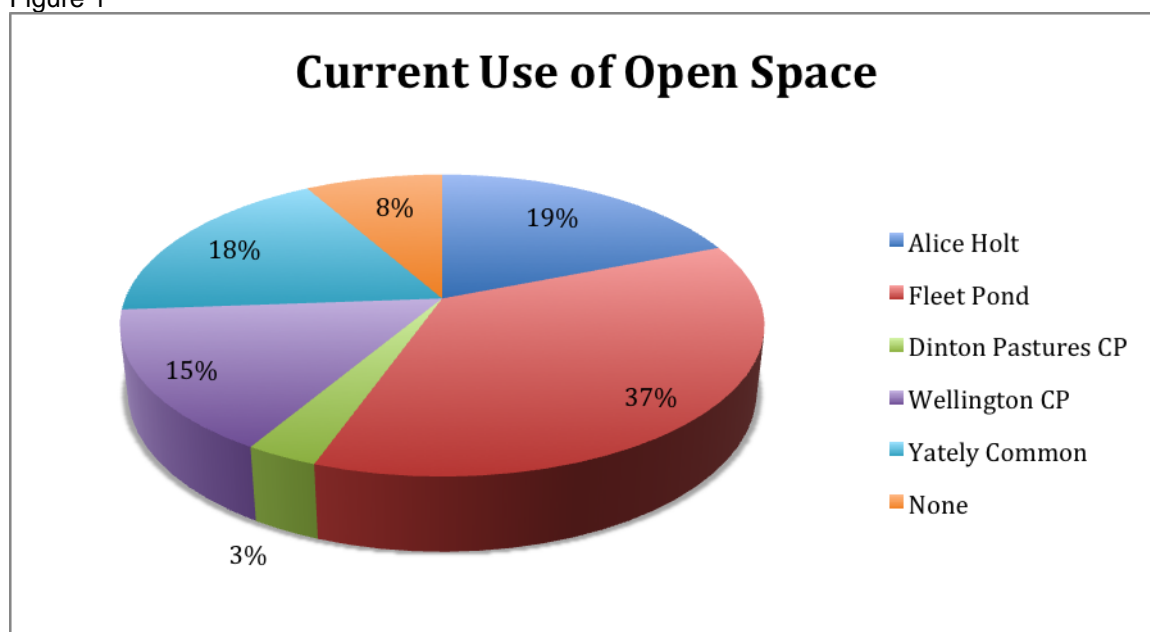
<b>OPEN SPACE IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO HART DISTRICT</b>
Alice Holt Woodland Park, midway between Fleet and Bordon
Thames Basin Heath (Area of special protection – SPA), near Reading
Dinton Pastures Country Park, Wokingham
Wellington Country Park, midway between Fleet and Reading

- 3.39 It is clear that there is already a significant amount of open space in and around Hart District; some of this is owned privately and there is a charge to access it, whilst parts of other sites are designated SSSIs or SPAs. Generally, however, the existing open space is accessible, without charge, although the level of amenities on each site varies considerably, with many not having toilets, or cafes, and variation in the quality and scale of car parking provision.
- 3.40 Some of the sites identified above are also the locations for a range of events, particularly in the Spring and Summer months. This type of use can at times restrict community access to all, or some of an open space site.

### Analysis of Hart Residents' Country Park Survey

- 3.41 In order to inform the assessment of need for the proposed new Country Park, a residents' survey was undertaken in Hart District. A total of 315 survey responses were returned.
- 3.42 Responses to the Country Park survey were received from across the district, predominantly from those aged 30-44. Two thirds of responses were from males, and the majority of the returned surveys were from white British residents, without a disability. Appendix 1 summarises the resident respondent information which underpins the above feedback.
- 3.43 The following analysis relates to the 315 responses received.
- 3.44 Residents were asked to identify their usage of some identified existing open space sites (Figure 1).

Figure 1

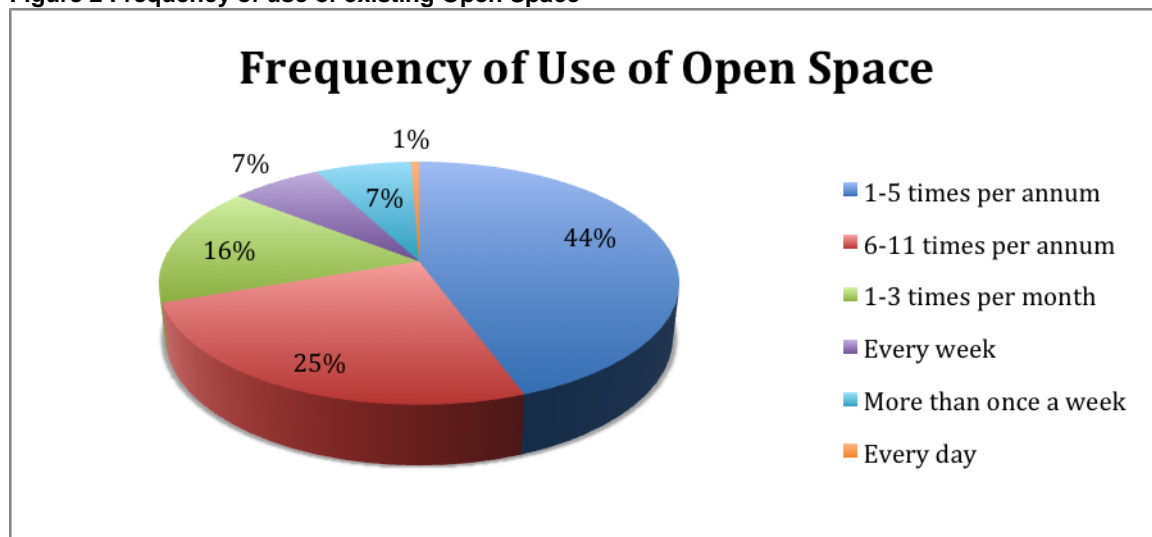


**Key:**

Alice Holt	19.00%
Fleet Pond	36.50%
Dinton Pastures CP	3.10%
Wellington CP	15.30%
Yately Common	18%
None	8.20%

- 3.45 Based on the residents' responses received, Fleet Pond is visited most often. Only 8% of respondents stated that they never visit an open space site.
- 3.46 Figure 2 overleaf illustrates the frequency of use of existing open space by responding hart residents. This illustrates the regularity of current use.

**Figure 2 Frequency of use of existing Open Space**

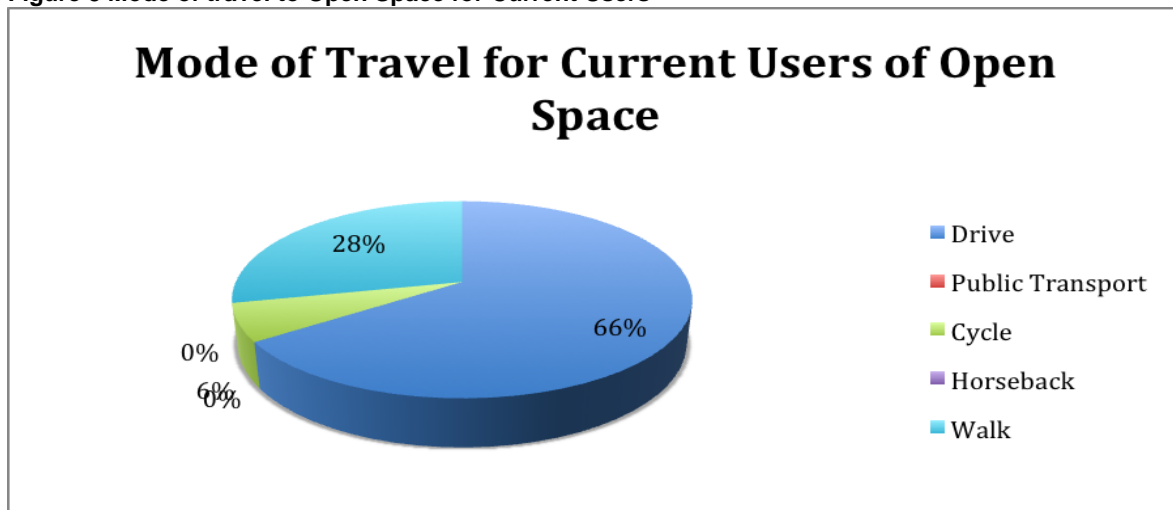


Key

1-5 times per annum	44.50%
6-11 times per annum	25.20%
1-3 times per month	16%
Every week	6.70%
More than once a week	7.10%
Every day	0.60%

- 3.47 The responses above need also to be considered in the context of the feedback in figures 3 and 4; if good quality open space was available in a new country park in Hart there is potential that residents would use it more often because their journey times would be less, and they may have the option of walking or cycling to the site, as opposed to driving, which is clearly the main mode of transport of existing users of open space.
- 3.48 Figure 3 illustrates clearly that the majority of residents responding to the survey travel to open space by car; this maybe because they tend to visit sites some distance from their homes, or may relate to other factors such as lack of cycle paths, perceptions of road safety etc.
- 3.49 The fact that travel by car is the most used means of transport to access open space also emphasises the fact that open space, and particularly large sites like Country Parks have a wide catchment area. Figure 4 highlights this as the majority of resident responses state they travel for between 11-20 minutes to access open space.

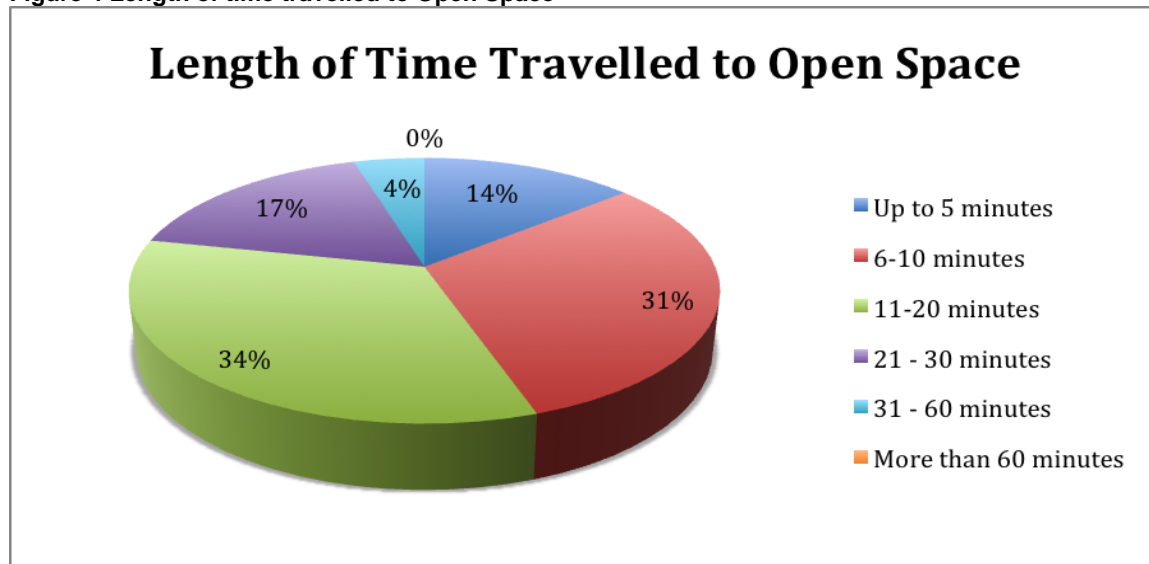
Figure 3 Mode of travel to Open Space for Current Users



Key

Drive	65.40%
Public Transport	0%
Cycle	6.20%
Horseback	0.00%
Walk	28.40%

Figure 4 Length of time travelled to Open Space

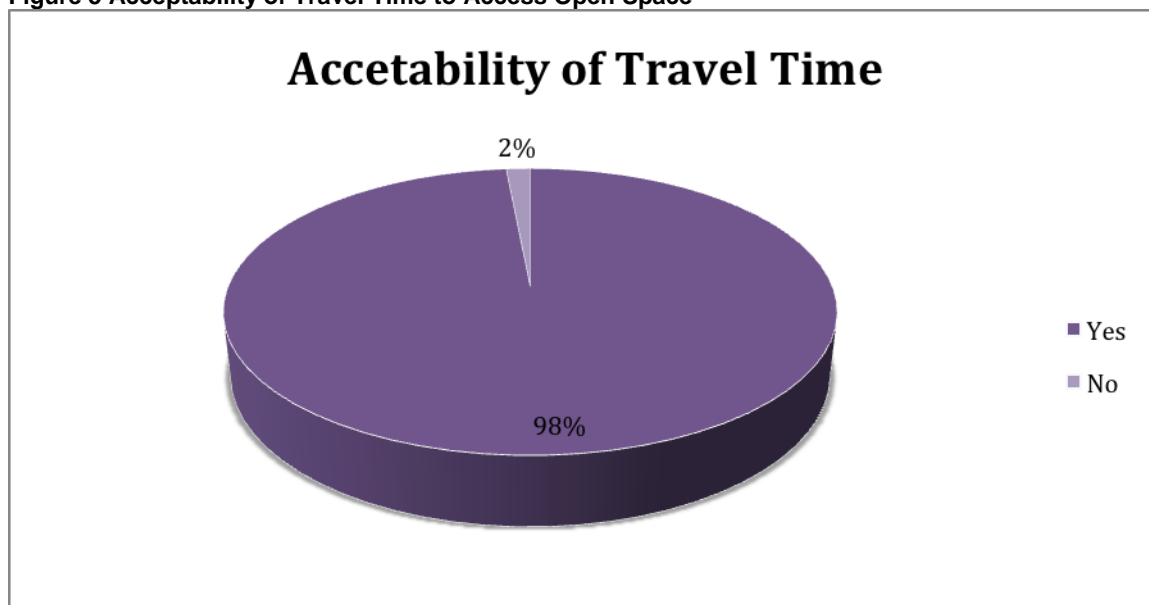


3.50 As can be seen from Figure 5, the distance currently travelled by residents of Hart using open space is acceptable to the majority of respondents. This does not however mean that provision in the District would not be welcomed.

**Key**

Up to 5 minutes	13.90%
6-10 minutes	30.90%
11-20 minutes	33.60%
21 - 30 minutes	17.00%
31 - 60 minutes	4.60%
More than 60 minutes	0.00%

**Figure 5 Acceptability of Travel Time to Access Open Space**



3.51 Residents were asked to state the ideal features they would most like to see in a Country Park; respondents were asked to identify all priority features, so responses total more than 100%. The feedback from this question is as shown in Table 3.6:

**Table 3.6 Ideal Features to be Provided in a Country Park**

IDEAL FEATURES TO BE PROVIDED IN A COUNTRY PARK	RESPONSE RATES IN DESCENDING ORDER %
Toilets	72.8
Car Parking	55.2
Café Facilities	47.5
More Picnic Areas	34.3
Visitor Centre	21.3
Better Signage	21.3
Better Play Facilities	20.1
Barbecue Areas	13.9
On site staff	10.2

3.52 Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the majority of respondents drive to use open space, car parking is a very important feature they would like to see in any new Country Park. Other priority features include toilets, a café, picnic areas, better play facilities, better signage and a Visitor Centre.

3.53 This feedback will be important to reflect in any new Country park developed in Hart District.

3.54 The reasons given by respondents (residents were asked to state all reasons for visiting a park) for visiting open space are set out in Table 3.7 below.

**Table 3.7 Reasons for visiting a Country Park**

<b>REASONS FOR VISITING A COUNTRY PARK</b>	<b>RESPONSE RATES IN DESCENDING ORDER %</b>
To go for a walk	87.3
To take the family	46.3
To watch wildlife	46.3
To go cycling	24.1
To feed the birds/ducks/squirrels	23.5
To walk the dog	21.0
To go for a barbecue/picnic	20.4
To meet friends	13.9
To attend guided walks	6.8
To attend events	5.2
To play sport	3.4
To watch sport	0.9
To go horseriding	0.3

- 3.55 The main reasons given for visiting a Country Park accord with the aims of HDC’s community plan in terms of sustainable transport ie increasing opportunities for walking and cycling. Other key reasons for visiting a country park relate to social interaction with friends and family; this is important for both existing and potentially new residents given the extent of new housing which will be developed in Hart District over the next few years. Residents were asked to state all the reasons that applied to them, so responses total more than 100%.
- 3.56 Residents gave a wide range of reasons for liking the current open space sites they use most. These included access to green space, peace and tranquillity, the opportunity to see nature/wildlife, opportunities for dog walking, cycling/walking and picnics/barbecues.
- 3.57 Residents were very clear in their responses (see Table 3.8) as to the barriers affecting them visiting open space in Hart District. Residents were asked to state all the reasons that applied to them, so responses total more than 100%.

**Table 3.8 Reasons for not visiting existing open space in Hart District**

<b>REASONS FOR NOT VISITING EXISTING OPEN SPACE IN HART DISTRICT</b>	<b>RESPONSE RATES IN DESCENDING ORDER %</b>
Lack of information	36.5
Dog Fouling	30.0
Lack of facilities	18.8
Fear of Crime and Anti Social behaviour	16.5
Too far away	15.9
Quality of facilities	15.9
Vandalism and graffitti	14.7
Poor signage	12.9
Lack of transport	9.4
Too remote	4.1

- 3.58 The barriers cited could all be overcome, particularly through the provision of good quality, well-managed open space, such as a Country Park. The location for the proposed country park would be close to residential areas, and would therefore be well supervised and monitored; in addition, the inclusion of sports facilities in the Country Park would increase the user flow and extend the hours during which individuals accessed the Country Park, thereby addressing some of the issues raised over safety and remoteness. Ensuring information about a new Country park is available and accessible would be key to facilitating its maximum use by, and benefits to, the local Hart community.
- 3.59 Respondent residents identified that they think there is sufficient open space currently provided in the District (Figure 6), and that it currently meets their needs (Figure 7).

Figure 6 Sufficiency of Open Space in Hart District

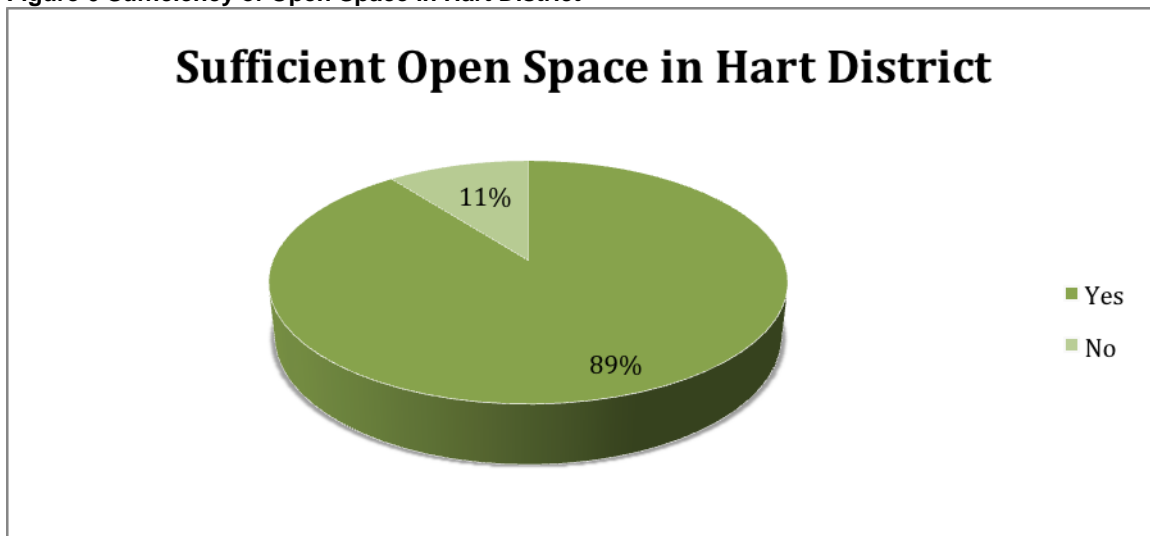
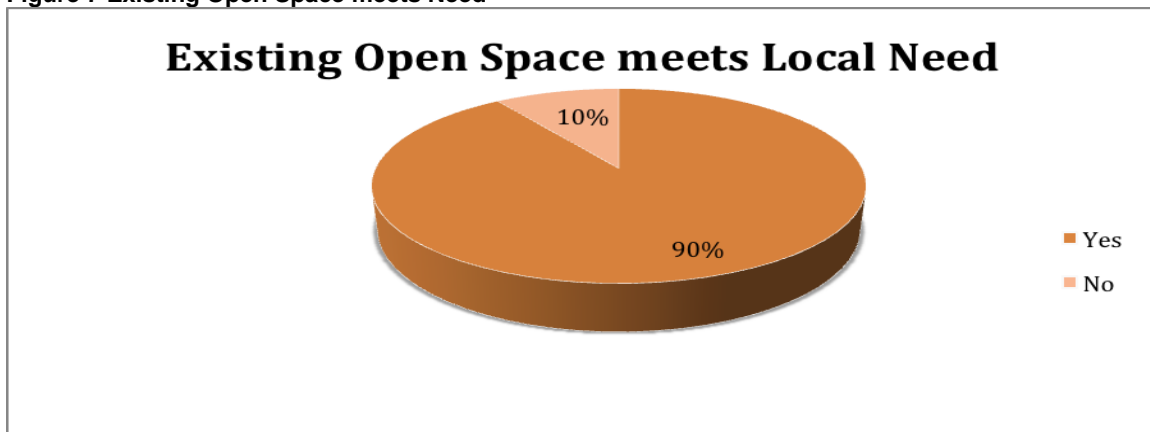


Figure 7 Existing Open Space meets Need



3.60 This feedback relates only to current use, and users and does not reflect the impact of a significantly increased population in the District, which will generate additional demand for access to open space. The information identified above through the assessment of need is analysed in more detail in Section 4.

## 4. The Case for a new Country Park in Hart District

4.1 In developing the case for provision of a country park in Hart District, it is important to accurately reflect the findings of the assessment of need. These are summarised below in Table 4.1.

### Country Park Assessment of Need – Summary Findings

- 4.2 The assessment of need clearly shows that there is significant strategic and policy support for the creation of a Country Park in Hart District, specifically linked to the development of new housing and the consequent increase in population. Further, a Country Park is considered to have potential to contribute to corporate priorities of sustainability, community cohesion and health, plus it would assist in mitigating the impact of new residential development on the existing environment and specifically SPAs/SSSIs.
- 4.3 In addition the current high physical activity levels of the Hart population, plus the latent demand for outdoor activities support the case for additional provision of open space.
- 4.4 Interestingly, although local residents responding to the survey state there is sufficient open space in the District and that it meets their needs, their feedback does not take account of the increasing population, nor the impact of a more densely built environment. Respondent residents also raise their desire to do more cycling and walking, and identify the key amenities they would expect to see in a Country Park. Although there is significant open space already in the District, some is perceived to be of poor quality, and there are myriad other reasons eg safety, remoteness, vandalism, lack of information cited as but a few examples, as to why local people do not currently use their local open space. None of the existing open spaces in the District provide all the priority amenities identified by respondent residents; this supports the case for a high quality open space like a Country Park, which also serves as local open space for the Hart community.
- 4.5 Although responding residents state they are happy with current drive times to open space, they also identify that they would like to do more cycling and walking; the provision of a Country park, within a 20 minute drivetime of the majority of the District's residents, and within cycling/walking distance of many, could encourage increased activity, and contribute to a more sustainable transport infrastructure.

**Table 4.1 Assessment of Need Summary Findings**

<b>FACTORS TO CONSIDER in RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW COUNTRY PARK IN HART DISTRICT</b>	<b>SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW COUNTRY PARK IN HART DISTRICT</b>
<b>Demographics</b>	Hart's population is generally affluent, with good access to private transport; the population is ageing, and therefore has a need for both formal and more informal provision, to enable activities such as walking and cycling. 70% of the population live in urban areas.
<b>Housing Growth</b>	HDC has to facilitate the provision of a further 3,740 new homes by 2028. The HDC Local Development Framework target for new housing is the development of 200 new homes per annum.
<b>Population Increase</b>	Based on the development of these new homes, and assuming a minimum of 3 people per new household, the population of Hart District will increase by 11,220 by 2028.
<b>Health and Quality of life</b>	Both formal and informal leisure and recreation facilities are important to local people and are well-used; quality of life is an important issue for local residents.
<b>Current Participation</b>	The proportion of physically active adults in Hart District is higher than the England average. This means there is already high demand for, and use of, both informal and formal sport, leisure and recreational facilities/open space areas.

**Hart District Council**  
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<b>FACTORS TO CONSIDER in RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW COUNTRY PARK IN HART DISTRICT</b>	<b>SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW COUNTRY PARK IN HART DISTRICT</b>
<b>Latent Demand</b>	There is clear latent demand amongst existing Hart residents for walking, cycling, running, jogging and outdoor sports, which could take place in a Country Park. Given the local catchment area population of 5,728 and the rest of the District catchment population of 87,422, significant latent demand already exists. Assuming this demands extends to only 20% of the population, latent demand would equate to 17,484 people. This is likely to increase as the local population grows (population growth of 11,220 anticipated).
<b>Corporate Priorities</b>	The provision of good quality open space is identified as a priority in corporate documents, and is recognised as being a contributor to sustainability and quality of life.
<b>Corporate Policy</b>	<p>The Council adopted two policy priorities in 2008 as part of its Community Strategy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Affordable Housing; green space was perceived as required to supplement high density housing developments</li> <li>2. Improved Environment. The concept of a proposed Country Park was developed in response to the number of houses to be built in the coming years and the Council's commitment to (a) improvements in community access to open space and outdoor sports facilities, (b) provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) (part of the proposed Hitches Lane Country Park would be SANGS) to mitigate against the Special Protection Area in the Thames Basin Heathlands) and (c) environmental bio diversity in the countryside.</li> </ol>
<b>Hart District Council PPG17 Assessment</b>	The PPG17 assessment identifies the need to provide additional open space if new housing is developed in the District.
<b>Audit of existing Open Space</b>	There is a significant amount of existing open space in and around the district; however, there are few large areas, such as a Country Park, other than the commons in the District which provide open space together with a range of amenities eg toilets, café, etc. The country parks outside the District provide such visitor facilities.
<b>Survey of existing Open Space users</b>	The residents' survey identifies that local people want to be able to access good quality open space, served by car parking, toilets, signage, picnic areas, play provision and café facilities. There is already high usage of existing open space. The majority of users travel up to 20minutes to access open space, by car, which suggests a large catchment area for a potential new Country Park. Most users access open space for the purpose of walking or to socialise, to feed wildlife or to picnic/barbecue. The main reasons for not using existing open space were given as lack of information, safety, vandalism, dog fouling and a lack of facilities. The provision of a high quality, well planned and managed country park with a wide range of amenities could address the issues raised and would also be beneficial for local people because of its location within Hart District.

**Addressing the Study Aim and Objectives**

## Hart District Council

### Country Park – Assessment of Need

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- 4.6 The aim of this study is to research, identify and provide irrefutable evidence for a new Country Park in Hart. This aim is to be achieved through addressing a number of objectives, based on the findings of the assessment of need.

#### Addressing the Study Objectives

- 4.7 The study objectives are set out in the paragraphs and Table 4.4 below, together with the findings that specifically address them.

#### To identify the likely catchment area

- 4.8 Based on the fact that the majority of respondent residents travel between 11-20 minutes, by car to access open space, we have calculated a potential local catchment area for the proposed Country Park of a 20 minute drive time, calculation of this catchment area and its population is based on the approach taken within the recent Hart Leisure Centre feasibility study (2011).
- 4.9 The 20 minute drive time Table 4.2 illustrates a potential catchment area population of 255,040.

**Table 4.2: 20 minute drive time catchment for a potential Country park, located at Hitches Lane**

Gender	Total Population
Males	127,973
Females	127,067
<b>Total</b>	<b>255,040</b>

- 4.10 This potential catchment area excludes those who are happy to drive further to access a Country Park; it is the case that people are happy to drive for between 30 minutes to an hour to access good quality Country parks, particularly for events, the range of amenities offered in one location, and the opportunity to enjoy well-managed green open space. Examples of destination type country parks which cater for their local community, the events market and a sub-regional/regional catchment area include Manchester's Heaton park, Cheshire's Tatton Park, Rother Valley Country Park, Rotherham and Lee Valley Regional Park.
- 4.11 Whilst a new Country Park in Hart District may not be as large as some of the above examples, it definitely has potential to attract a significant number of visitors per annum, based on the population within an immediate 20 minute drive time, and the wider sub region. This reflects the current pattern of use as highlighted by respondent Hart residents; they are currently accessing Country Parks and other large open spaces outside Hart, so it can be assumed that this same pattern would occur in terms of use by people living outside Hart District, if a Country Park was developed at Hitches Lane.
- 4.12 As examples, Ben Lomond, which is part of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, attracts over 30k visitors per annum, some local but also from all over the UK. In 2009, Thetford Forest Park attracted 120k visitors per annum, Willen Lake and Park, Milton Keynes and Malvern Hills, Worcestershire both attracted 100k visitors each per annum. It is considered that a new Country park in Hart could attract between 30k – 50k visitors per annum as a minimum, based on a comparison with other similar existing provision.
- 4.13 Based on the fact that HDC wishes to increase opportunities for both walking and cycling in Hart District, it is also worth considering the population of a 20 minute walktime, which is roughly equivalent to a 10 minute cycle ride; in other words very local access times to open space.
- 4.14 The 20 minute walk time catchment Table 4.3 highlights that there is a potential local catchment population of 5,728, who might be encouraged to walk/cycle to a new Country park, particularly if the Park was to be linked/connected to a wider network of cycle and walking paths in the District. This approach would contribute significantly to sustainable transport in the District.

**Table 4.3: 20 minute walk time catchment for a potential Country park, located at Hitches Lane**

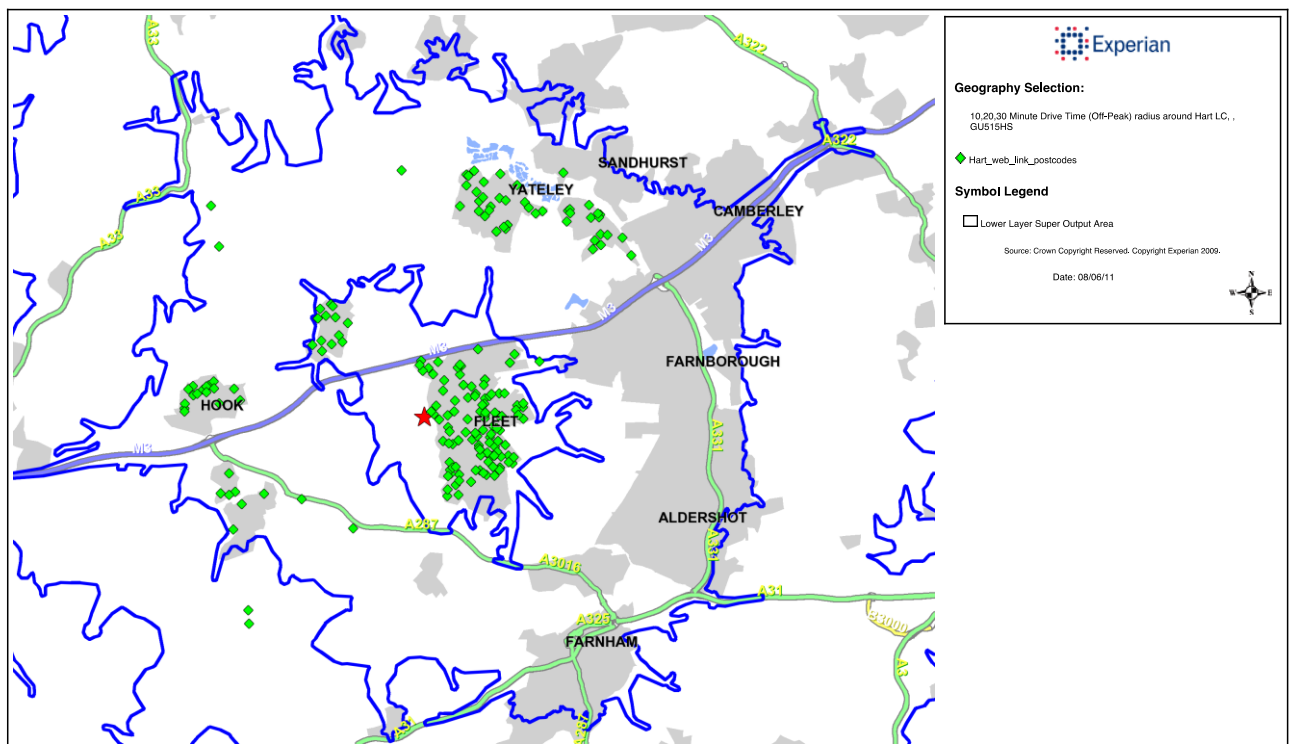
**Hart District Council**  
Country Park – Assessment of Need

Gender	Total Population
Males	2,827
Females	2,901
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,728</b>

4.14 In terms of these catchment areas, the District scatter maps shown in Maps 2, 3 and 4 below, illustrate that the majority of the District’s urban population would be within the 20 minute walktime, and 10 minute cycling catchment area of the proposed Hitches Lane location for the new Country Park (relates to wards 11,12,13,14,15). Other urban and rural populations would be within the 20 minute drivetime catchment area, along with some areas immediately adjacent to Hart’s boundaries. Maps 2, 3 and 4 are shown below.

4.15

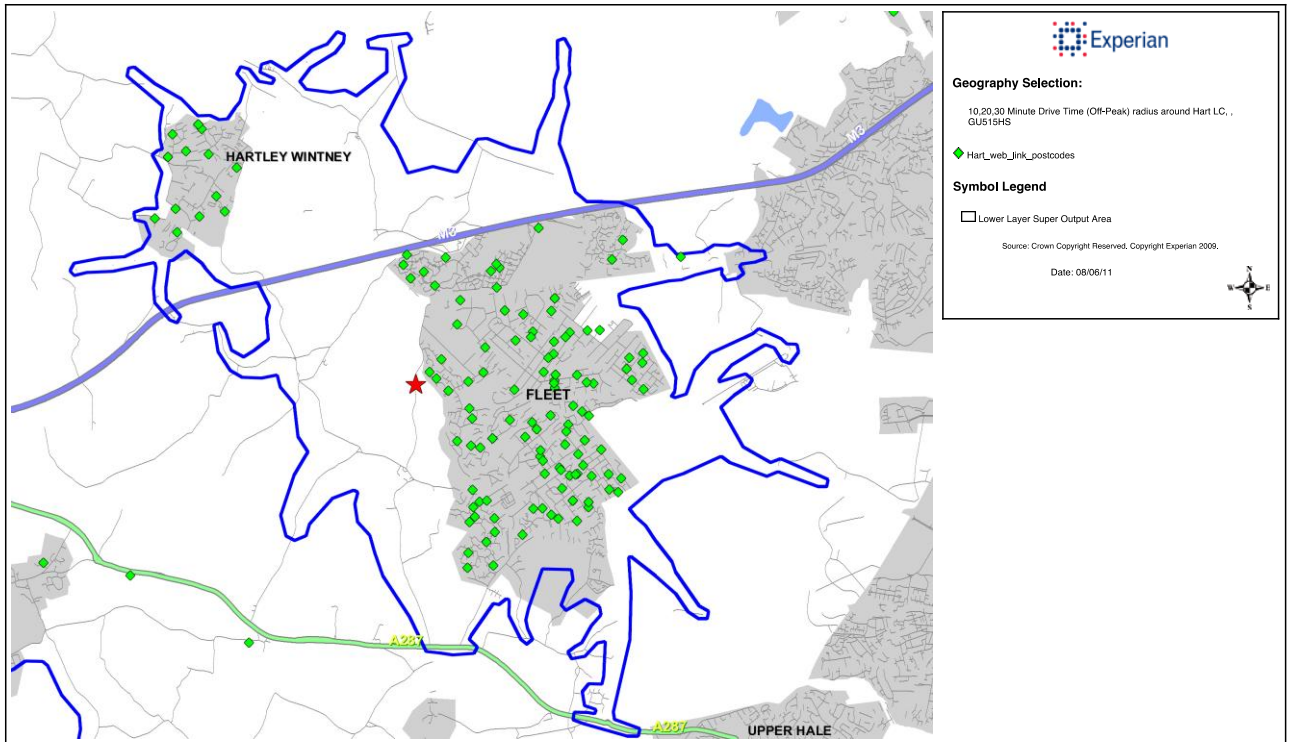
Map 2



# Hart District Council

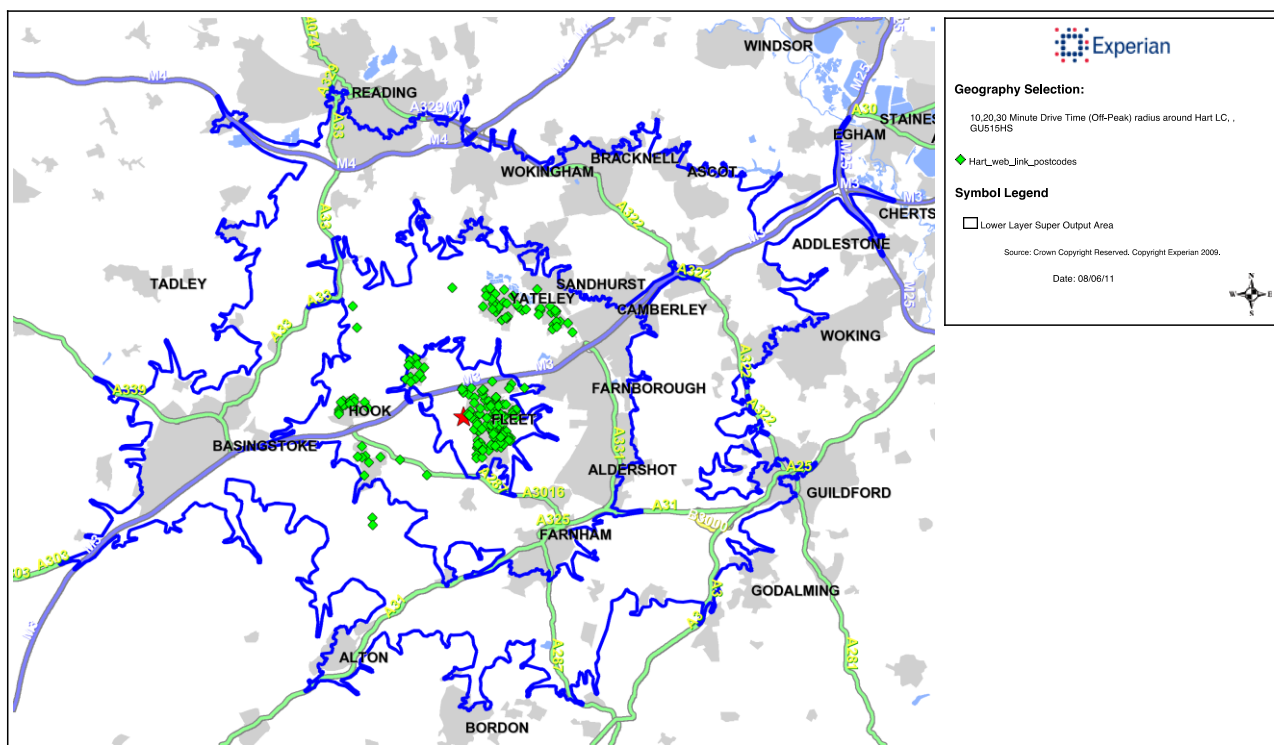
## Country Park – Assessment of Need

Map 3



Map 4

# Hart District Council Country Park – Assessment of Need



4.16 Evidence addressing the remainder of the study objectives is summarised in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4 Addressing the Study Objectives (continued over page)**

STUDY OBJECTIVES	EVIDENCE
To identify all existing similar provision, including that in neighbouring authorities, and any 'gaps' that exist	The audit of existing open space within and adjacent to the District identifies that while there is a significant amount of provision, within the District there is no large open space like a County Park that provides all the priority elements identified by residents responding to the survey. A high quality Country park which would be well-located, and could be planned and managed to incorporate a wide range of elements eg sports pitches, cycle paths, play areas, picnic and barbecue facilities, a Visitor Centre, café, toilets and car parking would address the identified aspirations of residents, and the wider catchment area.
To identify and assess current and future demand for a Country Park	Although the residents' survey did not specifically identify the need for a Country Park, views on sufficiency of existing open space did not take into account the impact of increased population (minimum 11,220), nor the construction of 3,740 new homes by 2028. Respondent residents did identify the range of provision they would like to see in a Country park; these priorities, coupled with the fact that there is no existing open space in the District currently

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STUDY OBJECTIVES	EVIDENCE
	<p>providing all the elements highlighted, and the current barriers to use of existing open space cited in the survey feedback, support the case for new, high quality open space provision, which could be a Country park.</p> <p>In terms of future demand the increased population will result in increased demand for provision, including open space. This supports the case for development of a Country Park.</p> <p>In addition, there is a need to provide appropriate and sufficient open space as part of sustainable housing developments,; the number of houses to be built will require open space provision, and this could be delivered very effectively through one large country park, with a range of amenities, as opposed to a number of smaller sites, without play areas/toilets etc.</p>
To identify likely modes of travel to a Country Park	<p>Whilst it is likely that many users of a Country Park would access the site by car, the location of Hitches Lane provides an opportunity to link a Country park into a districtwide network of cycle and walking paths. This would encourage increased walking and cycling because there would be specific provision, which would be safe, and separate from the road network; it would address the identified latent demand for cycling and walking, and it would contribute towards a more sustainable local transport infrastructure. Given that the District's population will increase steadily to 2028, it will be important to provide alternative means of transport in and around the District to avoid traffic congestion.</p>
To identify the likely visitor numbers for a Country Park in Fleet who will specifically come from elsewhere in the district, based on industry accepted modes of travel	<p>It is considered that a new Country park in Hart could attract between 30k – 50k visitors per annum as a minimum, based on a comparison with other similar existing provision. This number included visitors resident in Hart District, and those from outside the District.</p> <p>Given a District population of 92,700 (2010), and a local catchment ie 20 minute walktime) of 5,728, this mans the potential catchment population of the District who may access the Country park would be 87,422.</p>
To identify and assess the range and nature of activities in which visitors to the Country Park would want to participate	<p>The residents' survey identified that existing users of open space visit sites to walk, socialise, play and watch sport, picnic and barbecue, cycle, feed wildlife, go on guided walks, attend events, and take dogs for a walk. All these activities should be catered for in a new Country Park.</p> <p>Based on these views, a new Country Park should provide a range of facilities, incorporating both formal and informal provision, to facilitate a variety of activities, across all ages.</p>
To identify the range of facilities visitors would expect to find in a Country Park	<p>Based on the findings of the residents' survey it is clear that facilities in a country park should include car parking, toilets, play areas, barbecue and picnic sites, signage, cycling and walking paths, a</p>

STUDY OBJECTIVES	EVIDENCE
	café and a Visitor Centre as a minimum. Other potential provision, based on research into facilities provided at similar open space sites eg Country parks/regional and national parks, could include: wildlife areas, sports facilities (formal and informal eg pitches, bowls green, driving range, training areas), a pond/lake, adventure playgrounds, opportunities for boat/pedalo hire/use of remote controlled boats, an event area, bandstand, trim trails/outdoor fitness circuits, jogging routes, a maze, woodland areas, and nature trails.

- 4.17 The evidence gathered through the assessment of need and the residents’ survey provides support for a new Country Park in Hart. There is a need to address the needs of an increased population, and development of new residential areas, contribute to sustainable transport, encourage more active and healthy lifestyles, address latent demand for cycling, walking and outdoor sport and recreational activities, and respond to the findings of the Hart PPG17 Assessment, HDC Corporate policy, and the aspirations of existing open space users.
- 4.18 The catchment area analysis for the Country Park demonstrates that there is a critical mass of population, both local and sub-regional, which could provide sufficient visitor numbers to make the operation of a Country Park viable.
- 4.19 The provision of a Country Park could address all these needs.

**Addressing the Study Aim**

- 4.20 The twofold study aim:
- i) To develop irrefutable evidence that there is a need for a Country Park, and that therefore requests for developer contributions ie S106s are justified
  - ii) To demonstrate and evidence the likely catchment area for a Country Park in Hart District
- is answered by the evidence summarised above.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

- 5.1 The assessment of need has highlighted the need for a Country Park in Hart District for a number of reasons, including population growth of 11,220 (minimum) as a consequence of 3,740 new homes by 2028, delivery on HDC policy objectives for provision of open space in relation to new housing, current levels of physical activity, and clear latent demand for walking, cycling and outdoor sport and recreational activities, as well as the need to mitigate against the impact of residential development on eg SPAs/SSSIs, and respond to corporate objectives for sustainable transport, community health and well-being and quality of life.
- 5.2 In addition, although there are high levels of use of existing open space, residents have aspirations for better quality provision at local level, with a wide range of amenities on one site. This is currently a 'gap' at local level.
- 5.3 There is a sufficient catchment area population within a 20 minute drivetime to sustain a Country park; development of a Country Park in Hart is likely to reduce the level of usage of similar facilities outside the District by Hart residents, whilst also stimulating and attracting visits from those living outside Hart. Development of a country park in Hart is also likely to increase local levels of both walking and cycling, which would provide a significant contribution to the sustainability of the local transport infrastructure.
- 5.4 Although residents think there is currently sufficient open space in the District, their comments do not take into account the increase in population and the consequent demand for a range of provision, including open space, which will result. Their responses to the residents' survey do highlight that some existing open space is of poor quality, vandalised, and that signage, and information about open space sites could be improved. Provision of a new Country Park would provide the opportunity to address current and perceived barriers to use of open space at local level, and could therefore increase demand given that the Country Park will be well-designed, planned and managed, provide a safe environment, and be appropriately promoted.
- 5.5 Given the above conclusions, there is a case for a new Country Park in Hart. Provision of a Country park at Hitches lane will provide a critical mass of high quality community provision, and consequently economies of scale, which can be effectively and efficiently managed and delivered to benefit the people of Hart district and the wider sub region.

### Recommendations

- 5.6 Based on the findings of this study it is recommended that:

**Recommendation 1** – Based on the indicative capital costs of development, formal requests are agreed for developer contributions to a Country Park, through the S106 mechanism.

**Recommendation 2** – HDC develop a detailed business plan for the new Country park, setting out income and expenditure estimates, management and organisational structures, and that this is aligned to the business plan for the new Hart Leisure Centre and outdoor sports facilities.

**Recommendation 3** – HDC develops a detailed Management Plan for the new Country Park, setting out operational, maintenance and management responsibilities, together with clear policies on access, pricing (free entry is assumed), security, etc.

**Recommendation 4** – A detailed assessment of demand is undertaken to determine the demand for car parking to meet the needs of both the Country park and the new Hart Leisure Centre.

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*Image can be added here*