

# **Proposed Playing Fields (Community Involvement in Disposal Decisions) (Wales) Measure**

## **Explanatory Memorandum**

This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by Dr Dai Lloyd AM and is laid before the National Assembly for Wales. It has been amended in accordance with a resolution of Legislation Committee No.1 under Standing Order 23.40, to reflect amendments made to the proposed Measure at Stage 2.

## **Declaration on Legislative Competence**

In my view the provisions of the *Proposed Playing Fields (Community Involvement in Disposal Decisions) (Wales) Measure*, introduced by me on 18 July 2008, would be within the legislative competence of the National Assembly for Wales.

Dr Dai Lloyd AM  
Member in charge of the proposed Measure

29 September 2010

# **Contents**

## **Part 1: Background and Purpose of the Proposed Measure**

1. Introduction
2. Legislative Background
3. Purpose and Policy Objectives
4. Power to make Subordinate Legislation
5. Territorial Application

## **Part 2: Explanatory Notes**

**Appendix 1: Policy and legislative context provided on introduction of the proposed Measure**

**Appendix 2: Consultation exercise prior to the introduction of the proposed Measure**

**Appendix 3: Regulatory Impact Assessment provided on introduction of the proposed Measure**

## Part 1: Background and Purpose of the Proposed Measure

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 12 December 2007, Dr Dai Lloyd AM, the Plaid Cymru Regional Assembly Member for South West Wales, was successful in the third legislation ballot giving Members the right to seek leave of the Assembly to introduce a Member proposed Measure.
- 1.2 The primary purpose of the proposed Measure is to place a duty on local authorities to consider the impact that selling off local authority owned playing fields would have on local communities, in terms of health, well-being and social inclusion, before proceeding with the sale / disposal. As such, the proposed Measure will impose a duty on local authorities (including National Parks and community councils) to prepare and consult on impact statements when they propose to dispose of playing fields.
- 1.3 On the 6 February 2008, the Assembly agreed, without opposition, that the proposed Measure could be introduced for consideration by the Assembly.
- 1.4 An Explanatory Memorandum was prepared and laid in accordance with Standing Order 23.18 on 18 July 2008. It set out the background to the provisions in the Member proposed Measure, *Proposed Playing Fields (Community Involvement in Disposal Decisions) (Wales) Measure* and explained its scope.
- 1.5 On 7 July 2010, the proposed Measure was significantly amended during Stage 2 proceedings. Legislation Committee No. 1, which scrutinised the proposed Measure, subsequently requested that, under Standing Order 23.40, Dr Dai Lloyd AM prepare a revised Explanatory Memorandum.

## 2. Legislative Background

- 2.1 The constitutional context to this proposal is set out in the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. The Act provides a mechanism for enhancing the legislative powers of the National Assembly for Wales, allowing it to make Measures where it has the 'legislative competence' (i.e. the power) to do so.
- 2.2 The Assembly's Standing Orders provide for proposed Measures to be introduced by backbench Assembly Members, as well as the Welsh Assembly Government or Assembly committees, where the Assembly has existing legislative competence in a policy area.
- 2.3 The legislative competence for this proposed Measure is provided for in Matter 12.5 (b) of Schedule 5 to the *Government of Wales Act 2006* -

*Matter 12.5*

*Provision for and in connection with -*

*(...)*

*(b) the making of arrangements by relevant Welsh authorities for the involvement in the exercise of their functions of people who are likely to be affected by, or interested in, the exercise of the functions.*

### 3. Purpose and Policy Objectives

- 3.1 At present, the legislative provisions relating to the disposal of playing fields are such that, effectively, any disposal can proceed without a full assessment of the impact of that disposal on the health and well-being of the local community.<sup>1</sup>
- 3.2 Following amendment at Stage 2<sup>2</sup>, the proposed Measure provides Welsh Ministers with the power to make regulations for the involvement of communities in decisions by local authorities about the way in which they dispose of playing fields. This power will enable Ministers to prescribe the types of disposal covered by the regulations and the detailed procedures relating to the publicity and consultation around that, which are to be followed by authorities before they decide to dispose of a playing field.
- 3.3 The full transcript of the Stage 2 proceedings is available from the National Assembly's website.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.4 Appendix 1 sets out the original policy and legislative context contained in the Explanatory Memorandum at the time of introduction in July 2008, while Appendix 2 sets out details of the consultation exercise undertaken prior to introduction of the proposed Measure. The original Regulatory Impact Assessment that accompanied the introduction of the original proposed Measure is provided at Appendix 3.
- 3.5 On 3 February 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government published the final version of Technical Advice Note 16 (TAN 16): *Sport, Recreation and Open Space*<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.6 The final version of TAN 16 advises local planning authorities to undertake Open Space Assessments (OSA), but does not make this a requirement, reflecting March 2007 consultation responses.
- 3.7 TAN 16 also notes OSAs are an important part of the Local Development Plan (LDP) preparation process, but that where an OSA is not available the preparation of policies for recreation and open space in an authority's LDP should not be delayed, but should be based on "other information which is to hand and in which they [the local planning authorities] have confidence".

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<sup>1</sup> The relevant legislative provisions are contained in the *Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995*, SI 1995 / 419 and the *Local Government Act 1972*.

<sup>2</sup> The original proposed Measure, prior to amendment is available at:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-legislation/bus-leg-measures/bus-legislation-meas-pf.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-legislation/bus-leg-measures/bus-legislation-meas-pf.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, [Technical Advice Note 16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space](#), February 2009

- 3.8 The other proposals in the March 2007 consultation on additional protections for recreational open space, also proposed to amend planning legislation, reducing the size threshold triggering statutory consultation with the Sports Council for Wales, and broadening the definitions of recreational land requiring consultation. The former is to be implemented, and the revised TAN contains broadened definitions.

#### **4. Power to make Subordinate Legislation**

- 4.1 The proposed Measure contains powers for Welsh Ministers to make regulations to implement and set out the detail required to support the principles contained in the proposed Measure. The Regulations may be applied to different, specified disposals and specified playing fields and may require a local authority to consult persons likely to be affected by the disposal and provide for the form and manner of such consultation. Additionally the regulations may provide for the giving of notice (including the form and content of notice). The regulations may also require a local authority to furnish information about the effect of the disposal on any strategy, plan or assessment as may be specified in the regulations.
- 4.2 Regulations may also provide that a local authority, when exercising functions under the Measure, is to have regard to any guidance given by the Welsh Ministers.
- 4.3 Regulations made under the Measure are to be made by statutory instrument under the negative procedure and are subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of the National Assembly.

## **5. Territorial Application**

- 5.1 This proposed Measure will apply in relation to Wales. It will confer functions on Welsh Ministers and local authorities in Wales.

## **Part 2: Explanatory Notes**

### **Section 1A - Community involvement in disposals by local authorities of playing fields**

1. This section confers a power on Welsh Ministers to make regulations which provide for the involvement of communities in decisions by local authorities about disposals by them of land consisting or forming part of a playing field.
2. “Local authority” is defined in subsection (3) as a county or county borough council, a community council (including a town council) and a National Park authority, and “disposal” as the grant of any estate or interest in land or the entering into an agreement to do so. Subsection (3) also defines “playing field”. A playing field means an open space which includes one or more areas which have at any time been marked or otherwise set aside for sport or similar recreational activity.
3. Regulations made under this section may provide for their application to specific types of disposal or specific kinds of playing fields, and may make a disposal subject to consultation in accordance with the regulations, and require the giving of notice of the proposals. Local authorities may be required to provide information about the effect of a proposed disposal on any strategy, plan or assessment specified in the regulations, or about anything else connected with the disposal, and may be required to provide the information in the form and manner specified in the regulations.
4. If so provided by the regulations, a local authority must, in exercising its functions under the regulations, have regard to guidance given by the Welsh Ministers.
5. Regulations made under this section may make different provision for different cases or classes of cases, make provision generally or specifically, and may make such incidental, supplementary, consequential, transitional or saving provision as the Welsh Ministers think fit.

### **Section 2A - Amendment to the Local Government Act 1972 (c.70)**

6. Section 2A amends section 123 (disposal of land by principal councils) of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”) which makes provision about the disposal of open space by local authorities. The amendment made by subsection (2) provides that disposals of land by principal councils i.e. county councils or county borough councils, in addition to being subject to the provisions of section 123, will also be subject to the provisions of the Measure. Subsection (3) makes a similar amendment to

section 127 of the 1972 Act (disposal of land by parishes and communities).

### **Section 3A - Disposals by National Park authorities of playing fields**

7. Section 3A amends the Environment Act 1995. The effect of the amendment is to apply the provisions of the Measure to disposals of land by National Park authorities.

### **Section 9 - Procedure for regulations**

8. Regulations made under the Measure are to be made by statutory instrument and are to be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of the National Assembly.

### **Section 12 - Short title and commencement**

9. This section provides that the Measure may be known as the Playing Fields (Community Involvement in Disposal Decisions) (Wales) Measure 2010. The Measure comes into force on the day on which it is approved by Her Majesty in Council.

## Appendix 1: The Policy and Legislative Context provided on introduction of the proposed Measure

*This Appendix appeared as Chapter 4 in the original Explanatory Memorandum laid on introduction in July 2008. It has not been updated to take account of any policy changes since that date.*

### *The importance of playing fields*

- 4.1 Playing fields provide an accessible facility for all age groups within a community to engage in physical activity, whether as organised sporting events, or simply by walking or play. Encouraging this physical activity from an early age could be a crucial factor in preventing the onset of obesity in later life.
- 4.2 Playing fields also contribute positively to the general well-being of the community and the local environment.
- 4.3 The National Public Health Service for Wales (NPHS), in its *Health Needs Assessment Report 2006*, stated that physical activity not only contributes to well-being but is also essential for good health. People who have a physically active lifestyle have approximately 50 per cent less risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke and type-2 diabetes compared to those who have a sedentary lifestyle, and can reduce their risk of premature death by about 20-30 per cent. Regular physical activity is also associated with reduced risk of obesity, osteoporosis and colon cancer and with improved mental health and increased functional capacity in older adults.
- 4.4 Findings from the *Welsh Health Survey 2005/06* suggest that, based on their Body Mass Index, 56 per cent of people aged 16 or over in Wales are overweight or obese and 19 per cent are obese<sup>5</sup>.
- 4.5 The *International Study on Health Behaviour in School Aged Children* is a cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organisation regional office for Europe. The findings for Wales, derived from children's self-reported height and weight, are given in Table 1 below.

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<sup>5</sup> [Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Health Survey 2005/06, 2007 \(table 4.9\)](#)

**Table 1: Percentage of 13 and 15 year olds who are pre obese and obese**

Age	Boys		Girls	
	Pre-obese	Obese	Pre-obese	Obese
13 years old	17.8	4.4	15.1	1.7
15 years old	16.6	5.6	14.4	3.0

Source: World Health Organisation, Cross National Study on Health Behaviour in School Aged Children 2001/2002

- 4.6 Results from the *Welsh Health Survey 2005/6* show 29 per cent of adults achieving the recommended minimum of moderate physical activity of 30 minutes, five times a week. This breaks down as 36 per cent for men and 23 per cent for women. The *Health Needs Assessment Report 2006* further states:

The historically high prevalence of many of these chronic diseases in Wales, particularly in those areas of worst socio-economic deprivation, coupled with high levels of sedentary behaviour, have brought the physical activity agenda to the forefront of both the public health and political agendas in recent years. The evident downward trends in activity levels are one of the principal reasons for the conversely upward trends in obesity. With physical activity being one half of the energy balance equation, it follows that this must continue to be an important focus for national action.<sup>6</sup>

- 4.7 Fields in Trust estimate that around 17 playing fields around Wales are currently at risk of being sold off.<sup>7</sup>
- 4.8 Playing fields provide a local and accessible amenity for a range of physical activities from walking to the playing of team games. If it is imperative that the Welsh public increases its levels of physical activity then it is crucial that proper consideration is given to disposing of amenities that provide opportunities for such activities to take place.
- 4.9 This proposed Measure therefore recognises that playing fields are an important resource that allow and encourage physical activities to take place, and as a consequence make a positive contribution to maintaining and also improving the health and well-being of local communities. As such, the proposed Measure will ensure that any proposals to dispose of playing fields are subject to an assessment of the impact the disposal would have in terms of the health and well-being of local communities, and also subject to consultation with local communities.

<sup>6</sup> Health Needs Assessment 2006

<sup>7</sup> Information provided to Dr Dai Lloyd AM by Fields in Trust Cymru, February 2008.

## *Policies and strategies*

4.10 The Welsh Assembly Government has a range of strategies and initiatives that are aimed at encouraging healthy eating and physical activity in order to reduce obesity and encourage healthy living and well-being.

4.11 In particular, each Local Health Board and local authority in Wales must, under the requirements of the *National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002*, formulate and implement a strategy for the health and well-being of the population (the health, social care and well-being strategy) in the area, and have regard to that strategy in exercising their functions<sup>8</sup> The strategy should address, amongst other things:

- the state of health and well-being of the local population;
- the health and well-being needs of the local population;
- the existing provision of health and well-being services to the local population;
- gaps or deficiencies in the provision of health and well-being services to the local population;
- risks to the health and well-being of the local population;
- factors affecting the health and well-being of the local population including social, economic and environmental factors.

4.12 One of the *One Wales* commitments of the third Welsh Assembly Government is the pledge *Encouraging Sport and Physical Activity*<sup>9</sup>, which has the purpose of improving health. Previously, the Welsh Assembly Government published its strategies for sport and physical activity, *Climbing Higher (2005)*<sup>10</sup>, and *Climbing Higher - the Next Steps (2006)*.<sup>11</sup>

4.13 Guidance issued by the Welsh Local Government Association to local authorities in October 2007 underlined the importance of open space for the well-being of communities and individuals:

“The provision of public open space and facilities for sport and recreation underpins people’s quality of life. It is important to an individual’s health and well-being, and to the promotion of sustainable communities....”

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<sup>8</sup> *The Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategies (Wales) Regulations 2003*, SI UK/154 (W.24) specify what matters should be covered in the strategies

<sup>9</sup> *One Wales Document*, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, *Climbing Higher*

<sup>11</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, *Climbing Higher: The Next Steps*

Public open space plays an important role in enabling informal and formal leisure, recreation and exercise, ranging from a casual walk to an organised football match. Different sizes and locations of space are needed according to the function that they perform.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Legislative provisions*

- 4.14 Development affecting playing fields is currently controlled through the land use planning system and in particular the *Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995* and the disposal of open space (including playing fields) by the *Local Government Act 1972*.
- 4.15 The *Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995*<sup>13</sup> currently requires planning authorities to consult the Sports Council for Wales on planning applications affecting a “playing field”, and defines these as marked sports pitches, including surface run off areas, of more than 0.4 hectares in size. Following the consultation exercise *Changes to the Development Control System* (July 2006)<sup>14</sup> and a subsequent consultation in March 2007<sup>15</sup>, the Welsh Assembly Government intends to amend the requirement to consult the Sports Council for Wales on planning applications affecting playing fields and open space by reducing the threshold for consideration from 0.4 to 0.2 hectares and by broadening the definition of playing fields.
- 4.16 Local authorities are generally free to dispose of land held by them in any manner they see fit. However, under sections 123 and 127 of the *Local Government Act 1972*, local authorities may not dispose of open space unless they first publish a notice of their intention to do so for two successive weeks in a local newspaper and give consideration to any objections. Similar restrictions apply to town and community councils.
- 4.17 The requirements placed on local authorities and community councils by sections 123 and 127 respectively of the *Local Government Act 1972* in respect of the disposal of open space will no longer apply in respect of land to which the proposed Measure applies. However, the relevant requirements in respect of planning permission would continue to apply.

### *Planning guidance*

- 4.18 In disposing of playing fields, local authorities must take account of planning guidance. They should have regard to Chapter 11 of *Planning*

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<sup>12</sup> WLGA, *Shaping the Way We Work, Live and Play: Practical guidance on delivering sustainable development through the planning system*, October 2007.

<sup>13</sup> *Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995*

<sup>14</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, *Changes to the Development Control System*, Consultation Paper, July 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Consultation On Proposals to Provide Additional Protection for Recreational Open Space – Annex A, March 2007 <http://new.wales.gov.uk/consultations/closed/plancloscons/1344065/?lang=en>

*Policy Wales and Technical Advice Note 16 ('TAN 16'), Sport and Recreation.*<sup>16</sup>

4.19 TAN 16 states:

“Open space has a positive community value for recreation. Local authorities should consider the use made of the sites they own. They may not dispose of open space or appropriate it to another purpose, unless they first publish notice of their intention to do so for two successive weeks in a local newspaper and consider any objections.”<sup>17</sup>

4.20 TAN 16 further states:

“Playing fields are of special significance for their recreational and amenity value and, in towns and cities, for their contribution to the urban environment. When not required for their original purpose, they may meet the growing need for recreational land in the wider community. Given their recreational and amenity value the possible disposal of school playing fields should be investigated to establish that the sites will not be required in the longer term for school or community use.

The provision of facilities with synthetic or other surfaces capable of intensive use may help meet the demand for sports facilities. However, they are not a straight substitute for grass pitches. While they can take pressure off other pitches and sports halls, they seldom justify the release of grass pitches for other uses. Consideration should also be given to the precise sports function of artificial surfaces. Priority will often need to be given to intensive forms such as multi-sports provision which combines indoor and outdoor facilities.”<sup>18</sup>

4.21 In July 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government released the draft revised TAN 16, “Sport, Recreation and Open Space”<sup>19</sup>, for public consultation.

4.22 The draft revised TAN was prepared in light of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitments to health and well-being, increased participation in physical activity and opportunities for all, as set out in *Wales: A Better Country (2003)* and *Climbing Higher (2005)*.

4.23 The draft revised TAN recommended that planning authorities undertake an Open Space Assessment, which should be used to inform the development, assessment and monitoring of development plan policies. The Open Space Assessment should take account of all forms of formal and informal recreational open space and should include an assessment of local need, and an audit of local supply. Consequently, the Open Space Assessment should identify local deficiencies in provision, and also

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<sup>16</sup> TAN 16 is currently being revised by the Welsh Assembly Government.

<sup>17</sup> TAN 16, paragraph 6

<sup>18</sup> TAN 16, paragraphs 10 and 11

<sup>19</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, *Revision of Technical Advice Note 16 “Sport, Recreation and Open Space” - consultation draft*, July 2006

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/consultations/closed/plancloscons/1207864/?lang=en>

local excess of provision. The Welsh Assembly Government states that an Open Space Assessment would also inform development control decisions for applications affecting formal and informal recreational open space.

“By taking into consideration local excess or shortfalls of recreational facilities, planning authorities would be able to reach better informed decisions, reflecting public demand and use of recreational land uses that are subject to applications for development. The evidence provided by an Open Space Assessment would enable planning authorities to provide evidence to support planning decisions affecting these sites.”<sup>20</sup>

- 4.24 The draft revised TAN sets out the stages that the local authority should go through in order to produce an Open Space Assessment. This includes identifying surpluses and deficiencies in quantities of open space, sport and recreation. It is also expected that the local authority will consult with stakeholders as part of the process.
- 4.25 The Welsh Assembly Government subsequently consulted in March 2007<sup>21</sup> on introducing a policy requirement for local planning authorities to undertake an Open Space Assessment (preparation of such assessments was advisory only in the draft revised *TAN 16 Sport Recreation and Open Space* consulted on in 2006).
- 4.26 The outcome of this consultation has not yet been announced by the Welsh Assembly Government and the replacement TAN 16 has not yet been issued.
- 4.27 The proposed Measure would place a duty on local authorities additional to that required under planning policy guidance, including the proposed revisions to TAN 16.

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<sup>20</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Consultation On Proposals to Provide Additional Protection For Recreational Open Space – Annex A, March 2007 <http://new.wales.gov.uk/consultations/closed/plancloscons/1344065/?lang=en>

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

## Appendix 2: Consultation exercise prior to the introduction of the proposed Measure

*This Appendix appeared as Chapter 5, and Annexes 1 and 2 in the original Explanatory Memorandum laid on introduction in July 2008.*

- 5.1 The proposed Measure was issued for consultation in May 2008, for a four week period. 17 responses were received. A list of respondents can be seen in **Annex 1**. Of these, eleven were broadly in favour of the proposed Measure and six (all from local government) were opposed, arguing that the forthcoming revised TAN 16 will provide adequate and appropriate safeguards.
- 5.2 A summary of responses to the consultation questions is provided at **Annex 2**.
- 5.3 The proposed Measure has been amended in light of the consultation exercise and the principal changes are as follows:

### *Section 1*

- Section 1 has been amended to include what is now section 1(2). The effect is to exclude from the requirements of the proposed Measure any disposal of a playing field by one local authority to another or by a local authority to a registered charity or to a sporting or recreational body or association. The purpose is to exempt from the procedure those disposals where the land will continue to be within the ownership of a body broadly representing the community's interest or itself involved in sporting or recreational activities. This exemption would not, of course, affect the requirement of such a body to obtain planning permission for any subsequent change of use.
- The new section 1(4) is intended to avoid a local authority being prejudiced by a groundless complaint to the Welsh Ministers about the procedure followed by the authority. Such a complaint gives rise to a "stop direction" under section 7. Since an authority only has 12 months to complete the disposal, beginning with the date on which it gives notice to the public of the proposal, a period during which the Welsh Ministers are investigating such a complaint could encroach severely on the time available to complete the transaction and could even prevent it from proceeding altogether. The new subsection therefore extends the 12 months by the time during which the complaint is being investigated, *provided* the outcome is that the complaint is not upheld.

## *Section 2*

- The definition of “playing pitch” in section 2(e) has been amended to bring it more closely into line with the definition of “outdoor sports facility” in the proposed revision to TAN 16 (as well as the complementary proposed amendment to the General Development Procedure Order). Athletics and golf have been added to the list of sports. The definition is still however (in line with both those definitions) based on the playing of team games and other organised sports. It does not extend to land used for informal recreation, which would go beyond the proposal approved by the Assembly on 6 February 2008.

## *Section 3*

- Section 3(1)(b) now requires an impact statement to identify the demand for playing fields in the locality.

Section 3(1)(c)(iii) now requires the impact statement to identify the impact on the authority’s health, social care and well-being strategy (rather than its community strategy).

- Section 3(5) now provides for a deposit period of six weeks instead of four. (There is a consequential change in the minimum period from the publication of the notice until the end of the deposit period from 5 to 7 weeks – section 3(9)).

## *Section 4*

- Section 4(1) now expressly requires the authority to send a copy of the impact statement to the consultees.
- Section 4(1)(c) now includes in the consultees the occupiers of every household in the ward (electoral division).

## *Section 6*

- Section 6(2)(b) now requires the decision statement also to be sent to every consultee, including, therefore, every household in the electoral division.

## *Schedule*

- The Schedule had been amended in order to delete from the list of consultees Age Concern, Merched y Wawr and the WI and to add the local Communities First Partnership, the Commissioner for Older

People, Disability Wales, Disability Sports Wales and the local Youth Offending Team.

***Annex 1: List of Respondents to the Consultation***

Welsh Association of Chief Police Officers

Open Spaces Society

Rumney Recreation and Eastern Leisure Action Group

Councillor Lisa Mytton, Vaynor Community Forum

Fields in Trust

One Voice Wales

Denbighshire County Council

Flintshire County Council

City and County of Swansea Council

Women's Institute

Welsh Cricket Association

Welsh Local Government Association

Sports Council for Wales

Torfaen County Borough Council

Ceredigion County Council

City and County of Cardiff Council

Ely Garden Villagers

## ***Annex 2: Summary of Consultation Responses***

- (1) Do you agree with the principle of the proposed Measure? Please give reasons for your view and what impact you consider that the proposals will have.**

Most local government respondents were opposed to the proposed Measure. Denbighshire County Council argued that the proposed Measure would impose “additional bureaucracy and cost on councils and the Welsh Assembly Government” and that it “undermines the local leadership and accountability of councils”. The City and County of Swansea Council felt that the proposal would add “a further unnecessary step in the process that would be both time consuming and expensive to operate.” The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), while agreeing with the principles of the proposed Measure, concluded that “current planning policies, practices and processes sufficiently address the Measure’s key objectives, with decisions made on a strong evidence base”. Ceredigion expressed some concerns about references to the disposal of private land in the proposed Measure. One Voice Wales, the representative body for town and community councils, supported the objectives of the proposed Measure but had “significant reservations about the practical implementation” at the level of town and community councils.

Bodies expressing support for the proposed Measure included local action groups such as the Rumney Recreation and Eastern Leisure Action Group (RREEL) and the Ely Garden Villagers Group. Fields in Trust (FiT) felt that the proposed Measure “will ensure a more thorough examination of the playing field’s value to the local community and its impact if lost” and the Open Spaces Society that “unless there is a more robust requirement placed on Local Authorities, open space will continue to be disposed of to the detriment of local communities.” The Sports Council for Wales, supported the principles of the proposed Measure and suggested that there may be an overlap between the requirement for an Impact Assessment in the proposed Measure and the requirement to prepare an Open Space Assessment anticipated in the revised TAN16.

- (2) Do you agree with the principal definitions of terms used in section 2 of the proposed Measure? If not, please explain why and provide any alternative suggestions.**

Most responses were content with the definitions in Section 2. However, some responses made the point that it was important that there was consistency between definitions in the proposed Measure and those in the revised TAN16.

A number of responses, including the Sports Council for Wales, wished to see further clarification of the term “playing pitch”. Flintshire County Council argued that the minimum size to be applied to a playing pitch should be 0.4 of a hectare. Both Fields in Trust and the Sports Council for Wales wished athletics to be specifically included in the proposed Measure.

RREEL was of the opinion that language in the proposed Measure needed strengthening, for example, “disposing of playing fields” should become “appropriation, change of use, development or disposal”. Denbighshire County Council felt that the definition of “dispose” was too wide and would “capture long leases or transfer of title to community councils or other community or sporting organisations, including charitable trusts, even where there is no intention to change the use of the playing field.” Flintshire County Council expressed similar concerns about the term “dispose”.

**(3) Do you agree with the proposed contents of the impact statements? Please provide an explanation for your views.**

Most bodies that supported the principle of the proposed Measure supported Impact Statements. However, RREEL was of the opinion that the nature of the Impact Statement did not go wide enough and that the scope should be widened. FiT and the Sports Council for Wales thought that some reference to “demand” for playing space should be included.

Most local authority respondents thought that the Impact Assessments were unnecessary. Moreover, some also highlighted the difficulty of how the health and well-being of the community would be assessed. The City and County of Swansea Council stated that “it is not clear who would be in a position to make this technical assessment and in particular how the impact of the loss of playing fields could be weighed against the many other factors that bear on health and well being. The result is likely to contain a high level of subjectivity”. This view was shared by the Sports Council for Wales which stated that “it is not clear what sorts of measures should be referred to; whether the information available, and how health and well being would be affected the disposal of a playing field”. The City and County of Cardiff Council also noted the lack of any “methodology” for measuring the impact.

**(4) Are the provisions regarding consultation appropriate? Please explain your viewpoint.**

The Open Spaces Society was concerned that local authorities were still only required “to consider” any representations and called for “a more robust process”. The Sports Council for Wales wanted clarification of the

“reasonable steps” to be taken to bring the statement to the attention of bodies. RREEL wanted the wording to be changed to “demonstrable steps” and wanted an inspection period of six months. The National Federation of Women’s Institutes-Cymru (NFWI-Cymru) believed that the “deposit period” should be extended to not less than eight weeks and that the “consultation period” be extended to two weeks after that.

RREEL and Denbighshire County Council were very critical of the proposal to place notification of a decision to dispose of land in the local press. The former considered two weeks to be inadequate; the latter considered such provisions to be “Victorian in nature” and suggested that Councils should be required to publicise the proposed disposal by one or more means, including the website or a simple press statement by the council which would not incur the costs of an advertisement.

**(5) Are the consultees listed in the Schedule appropriate? Should less specific consultees be identified? If so, how should consultees be identified?**

Many responses were content with the consultees identified but thought the list could be extended to include other bodies such as Disability Sports Wales and the Commissioner for Older People.

However, some bodies expressed strong reservations about this provision. The City and County of Swansea Council said that “as a matter of principle, special interest groups...should not be statutory consultees” and “the organisations listed would clearly have a predisposition to oppose disposal.” Denbighshire County Council highlighted the danger that “over time, more and more bodies will be added”. RREEL thought that there was insufficient reference to “local people”.

**(6) Where the authority has decided to proceed with a disposal of playing fields after a consultation, do you think the requirements placed on the local authority are satisfactory? Please explain your view.**

RREEL argued that should a local authority decide to proceed with a disposal it must be backed up with evidence from consultees. FiT and the Open Spaces Society were both supportive of these provisions and welcomed the “Decision Statements”. However, the Open Spaces Society said that it was unclear whether there was formal process to challenge a decision.

Denbighshire County Council said that these provisions did not appear to be “consistent with normal arrangements for local accountability” and begged the question of why the proposed Measure “doubts councils’

compliance with what would be statutory requirements”. The danger was that councils would be subject to “double jeopardy” and be subjected to further delay.

**(7) Please outline your views on the powers of Welsh Ministers to issue directions to local authorities?**

FiT, the Open Spaces Society, NFWI-Cymru, One Voice Wales and the Sports Council for Wales all support the powers for Welsh Ministers but the Open Spaces Society also believed that Welsh Ministers should have an “overriding power”.

The WLGA believed that these provisions could “generate onerous demand for their [*i.e. Welsh Ministers*] involvement and response” without the benefit of specific local knowledge. One local authority, the City and County of Swansea Council, thought these proposals were “sound in principle” but protections would be required in regard to timing; an appeals process following a Ministerial decision and the right of a local authority to recoup costs if its decision is upheld to prevent vexatious challenges.

**(8) Will the proposals result in your organisation incurring financial costs? If so, what will they be (please quantify)?**

Most local authority responses argued that the proposals would impose significant costs. The City and County of Cardiff Council argued that it “cannot be accurately quantified at this stage”. Costs would arise directly in “preparing underlying benchmark data from which the impact of any proposals could be measured”. The enhanced consultation process would also generate costs.

Denbighshire County Council argued that costs would depend on how many disposals took place. There had been only a couple of disposals of playing fields for development in the last five years.

The WLGA and some local authorities made the further point that the proposed Measure fails to acknowledge that “unused playing fields can represent a significant asset which if realised can help deliver real community benefit and wider strategic goals such as affordable housing and/or investment in local schools.”

FiT estimated that reviewing and commenting on proposed playing field proposals was likely to cost around £5,300 per annum. The Sports Council estimated that, on the basis of applications received over the last five year, the time spent by staff is considering proposals would amount to £2,900.

## Appendix 3: Regulatory Impact Assessment of the proposed Measure on introduction

*This Appendix appeared as Chapters 8 and 9 in the original Explanatory Memorandum laid on introduction in July 2008. It has not been updated to take account of any policy changes since that date.*

### 8. Options

8.1 There is widespread concern about levels of obesity in Wales and the need for people to engage in regular exercise. Key stakeholders have also expressed concern about the sale of playing fields resulting in the loss of areas where people may pursue healthy activities and which contribute to the general wellbeing of the local area.

8.2 As a result of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, there is an opportunity in Wales to use the new legislative powers of the National Assembly to place a duty on local authorities in Wales to carry out an impact assessment and consult key stakeholders in the locality before proceeding with the disposal of playing fields.

8.3 The current options are:

**Option 1:** Do nothing

**Option 2:** Rely on revisions to current planning guidance

**Option 3:** Introduce a proposed Measure.

#### Option 1: Do nothing

8.4 The first option is to do nothing. This would mean that consultation and other requirements relating to the disposal or development of playing fields would remain the same as they are currently.<sup>22</sup> This would, in effect, allow for the disposal of playing fields to continue without a full assessment being made of the impact on the health and well-being of the local community.

8.5 It is the view of bodies such as Fields in Trust (FiT)<sup>23</sup> and the Open Spaces Society<sup>24</sup> that the current position does not afford sufficient time

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<sup>22</sup> As set out in *Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995* and the *Local Government Act 1972*, and existing planning guidance, namely *Planning Policy Wales* and TAN 16

<sup>23</sup> Fields in Trust (Cymru) website [http://www.npfa.co.uk/what\\_we\\_do/how\\_we\\_are\\_organised/fit\\_cymru.php](http://www.npfa.co.uk/what_we_do/how_we_are_organised/fit_cymru.php)

<sup>24</sup> Open Spaces Society, Consultation Response on the Proposed Measure, 2008.

for adequate consideration of the implications of disposing of playing fields which may be lost to the local community with detrimental effects on its health and well-being.

## **Option 2: Rely on revisions to current guidance**

- 8.6 The second option is for the Welsh Assembly Government to continue to monitor and revise guidance for local authorities in Chapter 11 of *Planning Policy Wales* (PPW) and Technical Advice Note (TAN) 16. The latter, which has been revised and is due for re-issue, provides advice on issues encountered by planning authorities relating to sport, recreation and open space.
- 8.7 Consultation responses received on the draft proposed Measure from local authorities argued that the existing planning regime, in particular the expected publication of a revised TAN 16, is an adequate and appropriate way to safeguard playing fields and has already been subject to widespread consultation.
- 8.8 The revised TAN 16 will aim to further integrate the links between health and well being, sport and recreational activity and sustainable development in Wales through the development of land use planning guidance in accordance with the policies set out in PPW.
- 8.9 This revised TAN 16 is likely to advise that the objectives set out in PPW can only reasonably be achieved by undertaking local assessments of need and an audit of existing provision. These assessments undertaken by local authorities, taken together, form an Open Space Assessment<sup>25</sup>, which will be a requirement and must be used to inform the preparation, monitoring and review of Local Development Plan (LDP) policies.
- 8.10 The draft revised TAN 16 notes that undertaking assessments will demand collaboration between the local authority's departments, external agencies and the public<sup>26</sup>. However, whilst assessments will normally be co-ordinated by a local authority, where they have not been undertaken, surveys prepared on behalf of a planning applicant may be considered, provided they are consistent with the methodology set out in the document and the policy objectives contained in PPW.
- 8.11 Although Open Space Assessments are likely to be a requirement for local areas under the revised TAN 16 and the General Development Procedure Order requires the local authority to consult the Sports Council for Wales on individual planning applications, this proposed Measure will provide

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<sup>25</sup> Open space includes not just land, but also areas of water. A typology of open space is provided at Annex B of the revised TAN16 consultation document.

<sup>26</sup> Section 1.36

additional safeguards by requiring impact statements and widespread consultation to consider the impact on health and well-being for each disposal. The local authority would have to take account of its Open Space Assessment in the preparation of an impact statement for an individual disposal (i.e. in respect of the requirement under section 3(1)(c)(i) in the proposed Measure).

### **Option 3: Introduce a proposed Measure**

- 8.12 The third option, involving the introduction of a proposed Measure, would enshrine in legislation a more robust and accountable process when the disposal of playing fields is under consideration.
- 8.13 The proposed Measure would:
- require the local authority to prepare an assessment of the impact of each disposal on the health and well-being of the community;
  - build in a longer consultation process; and
  - identify statutory consultees.
- 8.14 The proposed Measure would in effect provide a new, additional safeguard to the situation that currently exists in respect of disposal of playing fields.

## 9. Estimate of Costs

### Options 1 and 2

- 9.1 As the publication of the revised TAN 16 is expected soon, Option One, the *status quo* is unlikely to remain for any time.
- 9.2 However, should there be a requirement for local authorities to conduct an Open Space Assessment in the revised TAN 16, it will involve a number of stages, namely:
- identifying local needs;
  - auditing local provision;
  - setting the standards of provision;
  - applying the standards of provision;
  - drafting policies for development plan.
- 9.3 Both England<sup>27</sup> and Scotland<sup>28</sup> have similar provision for assessment and audit in their planning guidance.
- 9.4 Local authorities in England and Scotland identify an open space audit as the most resource intensive element of the preparation of an Open Space Assessment. Some local authorities are able to carry out the work in-house, but those that have employed consultants identify costs in the region of £30-£40,000 for carrying out the audit and preparing a strategy over an 18 month to two year period<sup>29</sup>, although costs can rise to around £80,000.<sup>30</sup>

### Option 3

- 9.5 If the proposed Measure is successful, most of the costs are likely to fall on local authorities in respect of their duty to prepare and consult on the impact assessment.
- 9.6 As part of the consultation exercise, respondents were asked to estimate the likely financial impact of the proposed Measure. Torfaen Borough Council was the only local authority to provide detailed estimated costings. Denbighshire County Council, the City and County of Swansea Council and the City and County of Cardiff Council said that the costs were difficult to predict at this stage, with the latter two authorities indicating that they were likely to prove “significant”. However, this would be balanced by how

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<sup>27</sup> DCLG, *Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation*, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Scottish Government, *PAN 65: Planning and Open Space*, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> For example, West Dunbartonshire Council (March 2008), Swale Borough Council (2005), Borough of Oadby and Wigston (2008), Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

<sup>30</sup> For example, West Lanarkshire Council (January 2007).

frequently proposed disposals of playing fields occurred. Denbighshire County Council, with the proviso that the definition of the term "dispose" was tightened up, suggested that this could be as few as two playing fields in five years.

*Preparing the Impact Assessment and publishing it in local newspapers (Section 3)*

- 9.7 Torfaen County Borough Council estimated that the preparation of an impact assessment would cost in the region of £2,000 in terms of officer time and the cost for working up alternative sports provision would be a further £2,000.
- 9.8 If local authorities are required to carry out an Open Space Assessment under a revised TAN 16, including an audit of provision, it is likely that much of the information necessary to prepare an impact statement will already have been gathered, and the costs incurred, as part of that exercise.
- 9.9 If a separate study is required, Torfaen County Borough Council estimated that a full sport and recreation study to ascertain the overall provision of playing fields in the locality, including the quality and accessibility of such playing fields (section 3(1)(c)(i)) was likely to cost £35,000 for the whole county. Such a study could also ascertain the level of demand, including any foreseeable future demand for the use of playing fields in the locality (this provision, at section (3)(1)(b) was inserted following consultation).
- 9.10 Torfaen County Borough Council estimated that advertising the impact statement in local newspapers (section 3(8)) would cost in the region of £1,250.

*Consultation and consideration of representations (Sections 4 and 5)*

- 9.11 The proposed Measure requires that all local residents, as well as organisations listed in the Schedule and those representing people likely to make use of the playing field, are sent a copy of the impact statement (section 4(1)).
- 9.12 Torfaen County Borough Council estimated that officer time for carrying out the consultation on the impact assessment would cost £1,500 and reporting on the consultation £1,000. Committee consideration of the Report would cost a further £500.
- 9.13 In addition, costs will be incurred in printing and distributing the impact statement. Assuming in-house printing and a basic 40 page bilingual document, printing costs are estimated at £130 per 1,000 copies. For

commercial printing, the costs could be up to £2,000 per 1,000 copies. The exact cost will be dependent on the number of households that are required to be consulted. In terms of distribution costs, for 1,000 copies, these are estimated at £700 for first class post and £600 for second class post

#### *Decisions about whether to proceed (Section 6)*

- 9.14 Sections 6(1) and 6(2), require notices to be published in one or more newspapers locally. Section 6(2) also requires decision statements to be sent to all of the consultees listed in section 4(1).
- 9.15 Local newspapers charge rates for publishing public notices by square cm. These can vary depending on the coverage of the publication. All editions of the North Wales *Daily Post* cost £21.90 per cm and the *South Wales Echo* £23.38. However, a paper with more limited geographical coverage such as the *Holyhead and Anglesey Mail* might charge as little as £5.95 per cm.
- 9.16 Denbighshire County Council estimated that a typical notice for a proposal affecting a school or a highways closure costs £110 for each insertion in a local newspaper or £1,000 in the *Daily Post*.
- 9.17 Torfaen Borough Council estimated that advertising the decision statement in the local press would cost £1,250.
- 9.18 Torfaen County Borough Council estimated that the preparation of a decision statement would cost around £250.
- 9.19 In addition, costs will also be incurred in printing and distributing a decision statement. These costs will be dependent on the number of households / organisations required to be consulted under section 4(1), but will be significantly less than the costs associated with printing and distributing the impact statement.

#### *Overall costs*

- 9.20 Based on the figures provided by Torfaen Borough Council, the likely costs for a single disposal are estimated in the region of £10,000 plus printing and distribution costs associated with the preparation of impact statements and any decision statement.
- 9.21 It is considered that the preparation of a sport and recreation study (see paragraph 9.9) to inform the preparation of an impact statement will be covered by the preparation of an Open Space Assessment under a revised TAN 16. As such the costs will be incurred as part of the

preparation of an Open Space Assessment. Where an Open Space Assessment is not undertaken, the cost of the sport and recreation study is estimated at £35,000. If such a study is required, costs of a future disposal may not be as high, if the study remains relevant.

- 9.22 These costings are broad estimates from a single source. Torfaen Borough Council is a relatively small authority in terms of population and the third smallest in Wales in terms of area. It is therefore not possible to assume that costs relating to provision of plans for the whole authority will be typical for all authorities in Wales, and costs for larger authorities are likely to be higher.
- 9.23 The proposed Measure will have a cost implication for local authorities. It is considered that these costs should be considered against the longer term benefits associated with better health, such as contributing towards the prevention of obesity; reducing the risk of developing coronary heart disease, osteoporosis, colon cancer and by the potential reduction in associated healthcare costs.
- 9.24 As noted by Denbighshire County Council in their consultation response, the proposed Measure could affect as few as two playing fields every five years. Consequently, the financial implications are likely to represent a minor proportion of the authorities' total annual budget.

#### *Cost to statutory consultees*

- 9.25 With regard to costs to statutory consultees, Fields in Trust Cymru estimated that reviewing and commenting on proposed playing field proposals was likely to cost around £5,300 per annum. The Sports Council for Wales estimated that, on the basis of applications received over the last five year, the time spent by staff in considering proposals would amount to £2,900 on current salary levels.