

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION**

**STATEMENT OF THE LEE VALLEY REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY IN RESPONSE TO
MATTER 12 ISSUE 4 – TOURISM RELATED DEVELOPMENT, GREEN BELT AND THE LEE
VALLEY WHITE WATER CENTRE**

**STEPHEN WILKINSON
BA (Hons), BPI, Dip LA, MBA, MRTPI**

Issue 4: Is Policy E4 justified in terms of how it relates to tourism-related development in the Green Belt; and should it include specific provisions to support the expansion of the Lee Valley White Water Centre?

BACKGROUND TO THE LEE VALLEY REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1. The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority is a statutory authority created by the Lee Valley Regional Park Act 1966 (the Park Act). It has a statutory responsibility to either provide directly or work with partners to provide facilities for sport, recreation, leisure, entertainment and nature conservation throughout the Park. The Park lies in east London extending northwards from the River Thames to Ware in Hertfordshire and comprises 4,000ha of which 1,600ha are owned and managed by the Authority.
2. The Park includes a mosaic of award-winning facilities and open spaces, including three Olympic Legacy venues and a biodiversity resource of international, national and local importance, some of which is owned and managed by the Authority. The Park attracts approximately 7m visits each year.
3. From inception the Park was designed to be a place of Regional importance for nature conservation, leisure, sport and recreation. This is manifest both in terms of its length and from the design and catchment of its 15 venues. These include 3 'legacy venues' built for the London 2012 Games. They include the LV VeloPark, Hockey and Tennis Centre and the White Water Centre.
4. The venues are managed by the Authority's leisure contractor, Lee Valley Leisure Trust Limited, trading as Vibrant Partnerships.

THE AUTHORITY'S CASE

5. It is understood that that for the purposes of this Examination in Public the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF 2012) is applicable.
6. The Authority contends that the proposed policy E4 requires revision to include a specific reference to the development of the LV White Water Centre (LVWWC). This is a World Class venue and requires explicit policy support.
7. London 2012 was predicated on securing a lasting sporting legacy which if fully realised could result in regeneration. This has informed the strategic aim of the London Legacy Development Corporation which is the planning authority for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park where many of the London 2012 venues are located. The absence of a dedicated reference in the Districts' Local Plan to the LVWWC undermines the potential for the delivery of regeneration for Waltham Abbey which could be linked to the visitor economy.
8. Whilst the venue lies outside the administrative boundary of the District an adjacent site, the former 'Show Ground' lies within the District. This has considerable potential both for ancillary development which could sustain the venue's further expansion and the link it creates with other sites in Waltham Abbey. A specific policy reference, similar to that included in the Borough of Broxbourne Draft Local Plan at LV2 would enable the Authority to substantiate the 'very special circumstances' to enable the continued development of the venue as an exception to adopted Green Belt policy. This would complement the District Council's own policies which aim to regenerate the local area.

9. The Council's 'vision' for Waltham Abbey, included in the draft Local Plan, aims to secure its 'revitalisation' but critically does not reference the venue. The area around the LVWWC is one of the most deprived in both the Borough of Broxbourne and Epping Forest District. Both the centres of Waltham Cross and Waltham Abbey exhibit signs of environmental and social stress. The continued development of the venue provides a great opportunity to address some of these issues.
10. Waltham Abbey does include some interesting visitor attractions such as the 13th Century Abbey, its historic centre and the site of the former ordnance factory, which is now a visitor attraction, 'Secret Island' at Royal Gunpowder Mills. The town has considerable potential as a visitor destination but lacks the critical visitor numbers to support this. A revision to the draft policy would create a supportive policy context, complementary to that included in the draft local plan of the Borough of Broxbourne which could enable the development of a joint master plan to allow the planned expansion of the venue on land within the District. This would in turn allow the development of a robust visitor economy with the venue at its heart.
11. The LVWWC was opened in advance of the Games in April 2011 and apart from a 9 month break to accommodate the holding of the Games in 2012 was re-opened in September of that year. Since that time the venue has developed on an incremental basis. New development since 2012 have included, an extension to the main building with additional parking (2014), a new hub for British Canoe, the national governing body (2015) a boundary extension (2018) and a series of 'overlays' designed to accommodate a varied event programme which includes international and national events. These have included the following:
 - ICF Canoe Slalom World Cup 2014
 - ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships 2015
 - ICF Canoe Slalom World Cup 2019
 - ECA Canoe Slalom European Championships 2020
 - ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships 2023
12. The venue has proved a considerable success with visitor numbers exceeding 700,000 pa (2018/19). Whilst many of these visitors use the centre as a base from which to visit the River Lee Country Park a large proportion participate in 'paddle sports' and others come as spectators.
13. The venue now employs 43 FTE, this has risen from 10 when the centre began operating in 2012. Furthermore, there are around 400 'casuals' brought in who provide support to the management team during events and during the peak summer months.
14. The venue hosts a significant training and local event programme supported by the Authority's active communities team. The team aim to provide opportunities to address the chronic levels of obesity found throughout local communities by providing space and the expertise to support children along sporting pathways. It helps that the venue allows opportunities for elite athletes to train and compete providing children with clearly visible 'role models'. This is an advantage of having the Canoe England stationed on the ground floor of the venue.
15. In total 65,000 people have attended a range of activities at the venue during 2018/19. The details are included in Appendix A.

16. Participation in sport instils the self-discipline, team working and self esteem which children need to make good adults who can contribute to a wider society either through work or being active members of their communities; these measure can support the social regeneration of the local area in line with the Council's vision for Waltham Abbey.
17. The evidence base in support of the draft local plan includes a study from 'Hotel Solutions' (EB609) which was commissioned by the District Council for several reasons including:
- The development of a clear understanding of the future potential for hotel and visitor accommodation
 - Inform planning policy
 - Provide advice on the role which the District Council can play to accelerate hotel development.
18. The report identified the whole of the Regional Park as a key location for the development of visitor accommodation with the LVWWC as a major 'catalyst'. The report includes many references to the Councils requirement for an additional 10,000 new jobs across the district during the plan period.
19. The report highlights the importance of the continued development of the LVWWC in how it can provide a significant boost to the demands for accommodation. One of its main conclusions is that as drafted the Policy E4 requires revision to account for the development of the venue as a 'leisure destination'.
20. In conclusion, the District Council identify that Waltham Abbey requires 'revitalisation' and that the stimulation of the visitor economy would be a way of achieving this. However despite an evidence base which points to the opportunities afforded by the LVWWC as a 'leisure destination' draft policy would not realise the venue's potential and the development of land to the east of the venue within the District would be constrained by the limitations imposed by Green Belt policy.
21. In representations made in response to the Regulation 19 draft an addition to the Policy E4 was suggested. Following further consideration the following is considered to be appropriate:
- (viii) continued support for the further development of the LVWWC as a leisure destination to complement the regeneration of Waltham Abbey.
22. It is considered that this proposed change is in line with the Council's evidence base, would complement the draft policy suggested by the Borough of Broxbourne for this site and would sustain the 'revitalising' of Waltham Abbey. It would also be consistent with commitments made before and during the Games by Government to ensure an enduring sporting legacy. The proposed change to draft policy would support the opportunity for a creative piece of master planning between the Authority, and the two adjacent local planning authorities which could be used to explore 'very special 'circumstances' to warrant new development related to the venue in the Green Belt.

Appendix A – Breakdown of programmes

	Customer Booking (16/17)*	Customer Booking (17/18)**	Corporate Bookings (16/17)*	Corporate Bookings (17/18)**	Total (16/17)*	Total (17/18)**
Rafting	19,240	17,499	17,189	9,163	36,429	26,662
Public Paddling	19,789	21,137	0	0	19,789	21,137
Kayaking Courses & Bespoke Lessons	3,058	3,215	1,228	1,053	4,286	4,268
Go Canoeing	2,596	4,745	1,025	527	3,621	5,272
Hydrospeeding & Hot Dogs	3,527	3,574	9,022	2,046	12,549	5,620
Assessments	786	965	0	0	786	965
Events / Other	878	938	32	970	910	1,908
TOTAL	49,874	52,073	28,496	13,759	78,370	65,832