

Last month's column attracted comments in some quarters because of a perceived difference in the approach being taken in the City Plan in relation to sports development as compared to the arts. This month we thought that we'd take the opportunity to further clarify the approach and address some of the concerns raised.

The document we circulated to households in Autumn was only a summary of the proposals. Behind that sits the actual draft Ripon City Plan which provides further information, plus a number of supporting documents. Broken down by the themes in the City Plan, these documents contain all the evidence and the justifications for the approach that we have taken.

Ultimately the draft Plan and supporting documents will be considered by the independent examiner. Without a sufficiently robust case, the examiner could decide that the Ripon City Plan approach is not appropriate, and could suggest changes to or even removing certain policies. This is a situation that we want to try to avoid.

With regard to sports facilities a great deal of evidence exists to support the approach in the City Plan. In September 2011 Harrogate Borough Council commissioned a report which identified that the total forecast deficiency for sports pitches in the Ripon area in 2018 is a minimum of 24.5 hectares. The report also assessed a number of potential sites for new facilities but none were found to be suitable.

Given that there are a substantial amount of playing field land behind the fences within the Claro Barracks site, the City Plan approach is simple in that we believe that these sports fields should be protected as part of the regeneration of the site and made accessible to the people of Ripon. This approach is incorporated into our policies in relation to the military estate (Policies B.3 and B.4 on pages 6/7 of the City Plan summary). A number of the sports clubs have also recognised this opportunity, and are working together to see what could be achieved on this site, should it become available, and how it could assist them to develop.

The situation with regard to the arts is much more complex. Whilst a number of organisations and individuals have said that an arts centre is needed, at the moment there is no equivalent report which starts to quantify the demand for and size and scale of such a development. If this is to be deliverable in the future, then more development work is required to get this idea to a starting point. The City Plan lends weight to this by proposing a complementary project F.1 (page 15 of the City Plan summary) which identifies the need to carry out "... a feasibility study to identify the demand and requirements for performing arts space within the city and potential locations where this could be provided as a sustainable development."

However, at this stage and without this information being available now, we feel that there is not sufficient evidence to convince an independent examiner that we can justify a planning policy in relation to an arts centre. This does not stop this happening and we would support the efforts of the arts sector to work collaboratively and seek to secure funding to try to move this forward.

We do however, recognise the important role that the arts can play in the future development of the city and accordingly we do have a policy to ensure that development proposals contribute to delivering public art.

As we prepare the Ripon City Plan for submission, our focus is on ensuring that we have as much information as possible that enables the independent examiner to endorse our approach to the future development of the city.