

# Solihull

## Open Space Assessment



**Solihull**  
METROPOLITAN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**2019**

(FINAL SEPTEMBER 2019)

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# Solihull Open Space Assessment

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## Glossary of Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>ANGSt</b>	Accessible Natural Green Space Standard
<b>CIL</b>	Community Infrastructure Levy
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>FIT</b>	Fields In Trust (originally known as the 'National Playing Fields Association')
<b>GI</b>	Green Infrastructure
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information Systems
<b>GSS</b>	Green Space Strategy
<b>GSSR</b>	Green Space Strategy Review
<b>IMD</b>	Index of Multiple Deprivation
<b>LAP</b>	Local Area for Play
<b>LEAP</b>	Local Equipped Area for Play
<b>LNR</b>	Local Nature Reserve
<b>LSOA</b>	Lower-layer Super Output Area
<b>MUGA</b>	Multi Use Games Area
<b>NEAP</b>	Neighbourhood Equipped Play Area
<b>NEWP</b>	Natural Environment White Paper
<b>NGB</b>	National Governing Body
<b>NPPF</b>	National Planning Policy Framework
<b>NSGSR</b>	North Solihull Green Spaces Review
<b>PPG17</b>	Planning Policy Guidance Note 17
<b>PPS</b>	Playing Pitch Strategy
<b>PROW</b>	Public Right of Way
<b>SMBC</b>	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
<b>SPD</b>	Supplementary Planning Document
<b>WMCA</b>	West Midlands Combined Authority

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This Open Space Assessment has been undertaken by Ethos Environmental Planning to inform the Council's Local Plan Review, and act as a baseline to update the Council's existing Green Space Strategy and approach for managing the Council's green spaces. It will inform the Council's decision-making process in relation to open space provision up to 2035 (the Local Plan Review period is 2018 -2035).

The Open Space Assessment is one of two reports provided as part of the overall Study. The two reports are the:

- Solihull Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report (2018); and
- Solihull Open Space Assessment (this report).

Open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. The focus of this assessment are those open spaces with public access, which sit within and form an important part of the wider Green Infrastructure (GI) network. The retention and enhancement of the natural environment/GI (including achieving net gains for nature) are core principles within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Solihull's Green Prospectus, with its focus on green infrastructure, transport and the environment supports the delivery of the council priority 'Planning and delivery for Solihull's low carbon future' (see section 3.2.2.10).

The NPPF also recognises that access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. It requires local planning authorities to set out policies to help enable communities to access high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation. These policies must be based on a thorough understanding of the local needs for such facilities and opportunities available for new provision.

Solihull's motto is 'Urbs in Rure' or Town in Country and is known for its attractive green spaces and leafy suburbs. The Council recognise the importance of their parks, open spaces and countryside as assets that help to deliver growth as well as shape place-making; making Solihull an outstanding place to live, work and invest.

The study has been carried out in-line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was updated in February 2019. The Open space assessment has primarily been affected by the omission of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG 17) from the national planning policy framework. Whilst the government has not published anything specifically to replace this document (it does signpost the Sport England guidance for sports facilities

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assessments<sup>1</sup>), there is however, still a clear reference made in the new guidance to the principles and ideology established within PPG17. As such the underlying principles of this study have been informed by the former guidance provided in 'Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation', and its Companion Guide 'Assessing Needs and Opportunities', which is a tried and tested methodology and takes a consistent approach with many other local authorities.

It should be noted that this study provides an evidence base for planning policy and is not a strategy document. The recommendations (Section 8) of this assessment include the basis for the formulation of policies related to open space that will be included within the reviewed Local Plan, and the assessment can be used to inform more detailed strategy work.

## 1.2 The Local Plan Review

The current local plan, the 'Solihull Local Plan', was adopted in December 2013 and covers the period 2011 to 2028. Since the Local Plan was adopted, a legal challenge has resulted in the overall housing requirement being deleted and remitted back to the Council for reconsideration.

In addition, the government's plans for high speed rail have passed through Parliament and Royal Assent has now been granted for Phase One of the route. Contracts to deliver the scheme are being put in place and the route is expected to open by 2026.

The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Black Country authorities published a Strategic Housing Needs Study across the combined Housing Market Area in September 2015, which indicates a shortfall in land for new housing. A Strategic Growth Study for the Housing Market Area was published in February 2018, which identifies a number of options for future growth, including some within Solihull.

To ensure that a proper planning framework is in place that addresses these issues, the Council is undertaking a Local Plan Review.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) published its Local Plan Review Scope, Issues & Options for consultation in November 2015, and the Draft Local Plan Review for consultation in December 2016. A further Supplementary Consultation on potential site allocations was carried out in January 2019. The Council is seeking to adopt a reviewed Local Plan by the summer of 2020. The Open Space Assessment for Solihull will form part of a suite of SMBC commissioned studies forming the evidence base to support the Local Plan Review.

The Vision for the Borough within the Draft Local Plan (November 2016, and remains in the January 2019 consultation document) is as follows:

*'By 2033, Solihull will have built on its distinct reputation as an attractive and aspirational place to live, learn, invest, work and play. It will have taken advantage of the unique*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities>

*opportunity to maximise the economic and social benefits of the High Speed 2 rail link and interchange both for the Borough and wider area; reflecting the Borough's location at the heart of the national rail and motorway network. In particular the opportunity will have been taken to ensure that the HS2 Interchange is well integrated to the Borough's green infrastructure and key economic assets, including Birmingham Airport, the NEC and JLR to ensure they, and others, can capitalise on this potential. The Borough will play a part in meeting, in a sustainable manner, the needs of its housing market area so that its residents have access to a range and choice of quality accommodation. The Borough will retain its sense of identity, both in its urban and rural area (including appropriate protection of the Green Belt); and the quality of the environment that make it a special place.*

*This vision will contribute towards the ability for everyone to have an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and prosperous, through managed growth'.*

Section 9 (Protecting and enhancing our environment) of the Draft Local Plan, highlights the importance of sustainable development, open space and GI, with policies proposed around Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change; Natural Environment; Water Management; Resource Management; Minerals and; Amenity. Section 10 (Health and Supporting Local Communities) focuses on policies promoting and Health and Wellbeing as well as a criteria-based policy on Provision for Open Space, Children's Play, Sport, Recreation and Leisure.

The natural environment is fundamental to Solihull's attractive urban and rural environment, which helps to attract and retain investment and people. The need to address the decline in biodiversity and fragmentation of habitats locally and to enhance and restore the Borough's green infrastructure network to maximise the benefits for people and nature are recognised in the challenges and objectives, and the policies of this plan.

The Council recognise that the Borough's high quality green and blue infrastructure (GI) is one of its greatest assets e.g. the River Blythe is a designated SSSI, 16 of the Council's parks have Green Flag awards<sup>2</sup> and the suburbs are characterised by tree-lined streets. The benefits of high quality, well-connected GI are highlighted, which include:

- Attracting Investment
- Creating Sense of Place
- Providing opportunities for recreation and play
- Improving health and well-being
- Habitat for wildlife
- Flood prevention and alleviation
- Addressing Climate Change
- Urban cooling
- Filtering air and soil pollution
- Reducing noise impacts

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Leisure-parks/parks-and-open-spaces/parks/green-flag-parks>

The proposed housing and employment growth in the Local Plan review will provide opportunities to create more publicly accessible open spaces as well as better connected green infrastructure networks that contribute to the Borough's natural capital.

### **1.3 Purpose of this Report**

#### **1.3.1 Overall Aim of the Study**

The aims of the study are to provide a robust assessment of needs and deficiencies in publicly accessible open spaces in order to establish local provision standards and create an up to date evidence base which can be used to inform the Local Plan Review. The standards will be used to assess proposals for open spaces during the Local Plan period, recognising the need for improving the quality of existing open spaces in addition to requiring new provision.

#### **1.3.2 Scope of Study and Objectives**

The overall aim of the commission is to audit the quality, quantity and accessibility of existing open space within the Borough; identify any surplus, shortfalls or deficiencies; assess future needs as a result of proposed growth; and to develop local standards for planning policy.

The study will provide the council with up to date information on green space location, coverage and provision. It will provide a comprehensive assessment of the current level of provision of the different types of open space including parks; natural and semi-natural open space; amenity green space; children's and youth play spaces; allotments, orchards and community gardens; churchyards and cemeteries; and civic spaces.

The objectives of this commission are:

- To form evidence to support the Local Plan Review spatial strategy and policies developed by SMBC.
- To identify the deficiencies or surpluses in existing and future open space provision in the Borough, as well as options for addressing these.
- To provide evidence to justify the collection of developer contributions towards open space.

The assessment excludes playing pitches as these have been covered under a separate study.

### **1.4 Structure of the report**

The open space assessment follows the five key stages as summarised below:

- Step 1 – Identifying Local Needs
  - Step 2 – Audit of Existing Open Space Assets
  - Step 3 – Setting Local Standards
  - Step 4 – Applying Local Standards
  - Step 5 – Drafting Policy Recommendations
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## 1.5 The Study Area

### 1.5.1 Overview of the Borough

Solihull Metropolitan Borough is approximately 17,828 ha in size, located on the southern edge of the West Midlands conurbation, between Birmingham and the Black Country to the west and Coventry to the east. It is bound to the north by the rural area of North Warwickshire and to the south, by rural Bromsgrove, Stratford and Warwick. The Borough is renowned for its key economic assets and strategic transport infrastructure both of regional and national significance; its attractive environment and quality of life; aspirational housing and excellent schools. All of which mean that Solihull is a desirable place in which to live, work and invest. Together, these elements combine to establish Solihull's character of 'town in country' living up to the Borough's motto: "Urbs in Rure".

The Borough has a number of distinct areas as follows:

- UK Central Hub and Key Economic Assets
- North Solihull Regeneration Area
- Mature Suburbs
- Solihull Town Centre
- Rural Area:
  - Knowle, Dorridge, Bentley Heath and Hockley Heath
  - Catherine de Barnes, Hampton-in-Arden and Meriden
  - Balsall Common, Berkswell, Barston, Temple Balsall and Chadwick End
  - Dickens Heath, Tidbury Green, Cheswick Green and Blythe Valley Park

Around two thirds of Solihull's 17,800 hectares is countryside and designated Green Belt, which separates the West Midlands conurbation from surrounding settlements. The vital strategic gap between Birmingham/Solihull and Coventry is known as the Meriden Gap. This area is predominantly rural, characterised by a series of settlements, historic villages, hamlets, scattered farmsteads and dwellings set within attractive countryside. This area has been under increasing pressure to accommodate development and infrastructure.

### 1.5.2 Administrative Boundaries

In order to analyse the current provision and future requirements for open space across the Borough, ward boundaries have been used as the geographical areas (as shown in figure 1). This was agreed by the project steering group as the most effective way to analyse provision.

Of particular relevance to this study are the ONS 2017 mid-year population statistics, which have been used as the basis for much of the current and future assessment of need for open space.

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Figure 1 Solihull Ward Boundaries



### 1.5.3 Population Statistics

The total population within the borough is 213,933 (ONS 2017 mid-year estimate), and the breakdown by ward is shown in table 1 below.

*Table 1 Ward population statistics (ONS 2017 mid-year population estimate)*

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Population</b>
Bickenhill	12,708
Blythe	13,908
Castle Bromwich	11,333
Chelmsley Wood	12,940
Dorridge and Hockley Heath	11,370
Elmdon	12,460
Kingshurst and Fordbridge	12,985
Knowle	11,088
Lyndon	13,713
Meriden	12,542
Olton	12,721
Shirley East	11,865
Shirley South	12,546
Shirley West	12,591
Silhill	12,574
Smith's Wood	12,801
St Alphege	13,788
<b>Total</b>	<b>213,933</b>

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

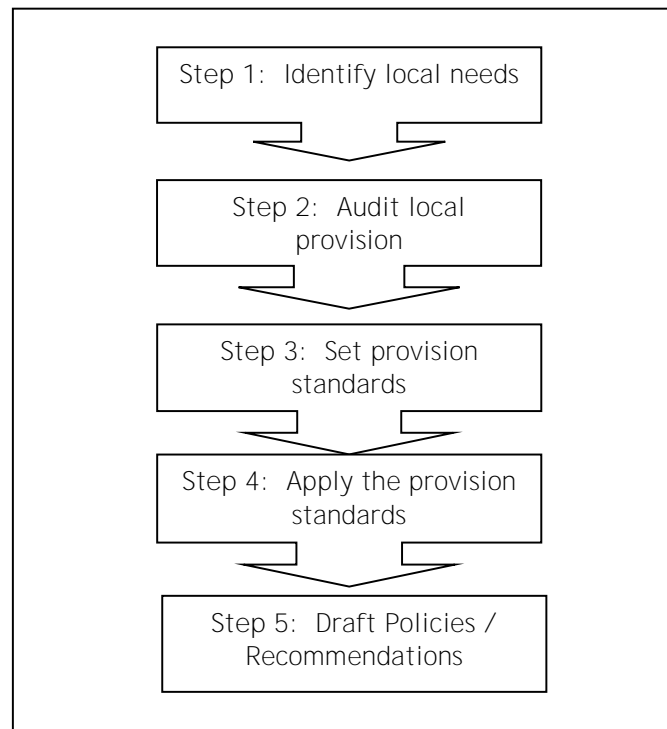
### 2.1 General

The starting point for this study has been the guidance in Section 8 of the NPPF, which adheres to but has superseded PPG17. The policy gives clear recommendations for the protection of and appropriate provision for open space, however it does not provide any detailed guidance on how to conduct an open space assessment. It is therefore both logical and acceptable to reference the guidance for assessment provided in the former PPG17 and its Companion Guide. PPG17 placed a requirement on local authorities to undertake assessments and audits of open space, sports and recreational facilities in order to:

- identify the needs of the population;
- identify the potential for increased use;
- establish an effective strategy for open space/sports/recreational facilities at the local level.

The Companion Guide to PPG17 recommended an overall approach to this kind of study as summarised below:

*Figure 2 Summary of methodology*



Within this overall approach the Companion Guide suggests a range of methods and techniques that might be adopted in helping the assessment process. Where appropriate, these methods and techniques have been employed within this study and are explained at the relevant point in the report. In addition, they are summarised in the paragraphs below.

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## 2.2 Identifying Local Need (Step 1)

The Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report (2018) examines local need for various types of open space, and outdoor recreation facilities. It has drawn upon a range of survey and analytical techniques as well as a detailed review of existing consultation data and other relevant documentation. The report details the community consultation and research process that has been undertaken as part of the study as well as the main findings. The findings from the Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report are summarised in this document.

## 2.3 Audit of Existing Open Space Assets (Step 2)

### 2.3.1 Defining the scope of the audit

In order to build up an accurate picture of the current open space and play provision in Solihull, an initial desktop audit of the open space asset was carried out, this included:

- analysis of existing GIS data held by SMBC;
- desktop mapping of open space from aerial photography;
- questionnaires to town and parish councils;
- liaison with council officers.

Following this, site visits were undertaken by Ethos at 242 open spaces and 64 outdoor play spaces to assess the quality of open spaces. The quality audit drew on criteria set out in the 'Green Flag Award'<sup>3</sup>. The audits were undertaken using a standardised methodology and consistent approach (explained in more detail in section 7.4 and appendix 4). However, audits of this nature can only ever be a snap-shot in time and their main purpose is to provide a consistent and objective assessment of a site's existing quality rather than a full asset audit. Clearly, local communities may have aspirations which are not identified in the quality audit, but it is hoped that these can be explored further through site management plans and neighbourhood/parish plans as appropriate.

### 2.3.2 Approach to mapping

As part of the audit process, sites were mapped into their different functions using a multi-functional approach to mapping (as shown in figure 3). In order to calculate open space provision by ward, where open spaces cross ward boundaries, they have been split by the ward boundary.

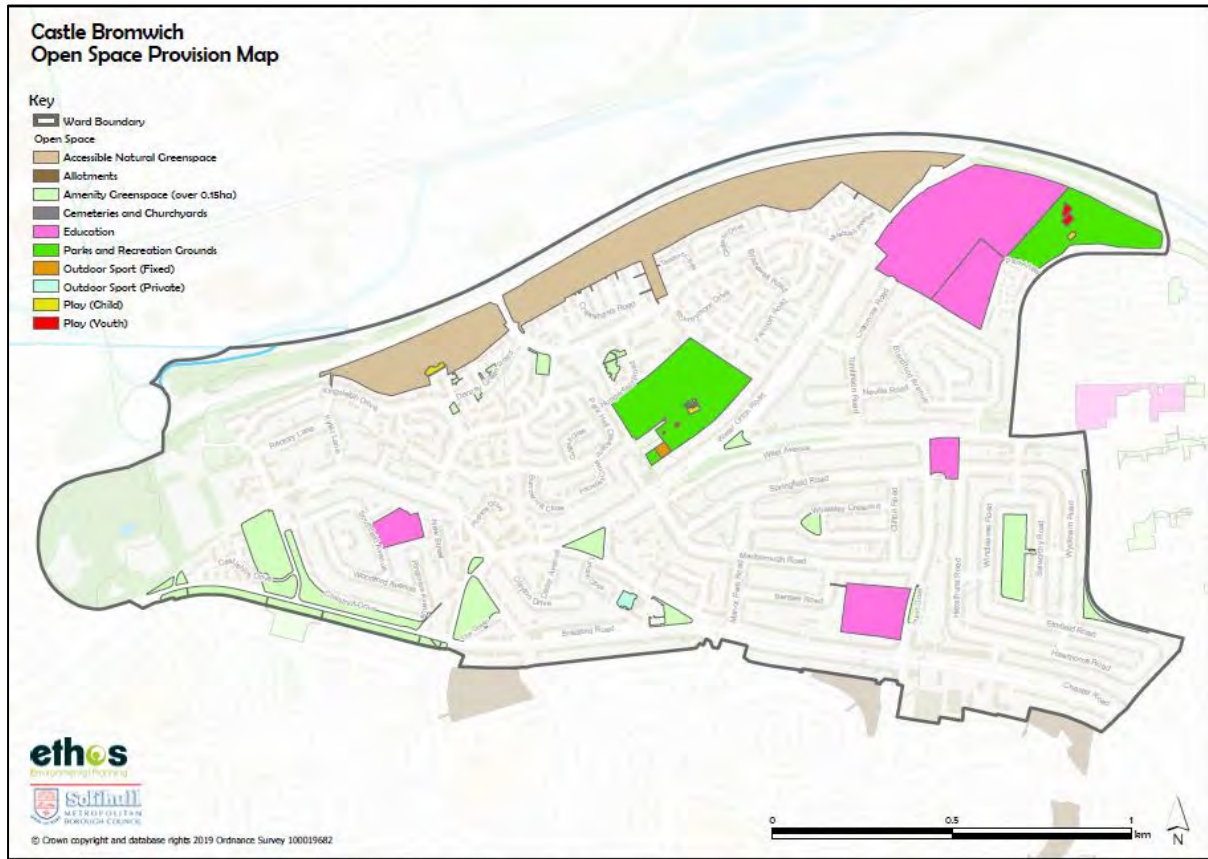
Only open spaces within the borough have been mapped i.e. although cross-border use of open space has been noted and considered (including within the Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report 2018), open spaces falling outside of the borough have not been mapped.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/judges/judging-criteria>

It should be noted that the typologies mapping is as accurate as possible (as of March 2019) following cross checking with the council's GIS layers, a detailed desktop mapping exercise, consultation with town/parish councils and council officers, and site visits. The mapping was signed off by SMBC in May 2019.

Figure 3 Example of multi-functional mapping of open space



## 2.4 Set and Apply Provision Standards (Steps 3 and 4)

Local provision standards have been set, with three components, embracing:

- quantity;
- accessibility;
- quality.

### Quantity

The GIS database and mapping has been used to assess the existing provision of open space across the study area. Open space provision maps by ward are provided at Appendix 1. The existing levels of provision are considered alongside findings of previous studies, the local needs assessment and consideration of existing and national standards or benchmarks. The key to developing robust local quantity standards is that they are locally derived, based on evidence and most importantly achievable. Typically, standards are expressed as hectares per 1000 people. The recommended standards are then used to assess the supply of each type of open space across the study area.

## **Access**

Evidence from previous studies, the needs assessment and consideration of national benchmarks are used to develop access standards for open space.

Drive time standards have not been proposed as these are normally only appropriate for strategic sites such as sports hub sites. Drive time standards generally do not work well for analysing access to local facilities/open space, as they do not generally show where the gaps in access are, and in addition, the consultation has shown that the majority of households access open spaces on foot.

A series of maps assessing access for different typologies are presented in this report, they are intended to be indicative, and more detailed maps by ward are provided at Appendix 2.

## **Quality**

Quality standards have been developed drawing on previous studies, national benchmarks and good practice, evidence from the needs assessment and the findings of the quality audits. The quality standards also include recommended policies to guide the provision of new open space through development in the future. Maps showing the results from the quality audits (by ward) are provided at Appendix 3.

The detailed quality audit methodology, including worked examples of how it has been applied is provided at Appendix 4.

## **2.5 Drafting Policy Recommendations (Step 5)**

This section outlines higher level strategic options which may be applicable at town, ward, and study area wide level. The strategic options address five key areas:

1. Existing provision to be protected;
  2. Existing provision to be enhanced;
  3. Opportunities for re-location/re-designation of open space;
  4. Identification of areas for new provision;
  5. Facilities that may be surplus to requirement.
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## 3.0 CONTEXT

### 3.1 Introduction

This section sets out a brief review of the most relevant national, regional and local policies related to the study, which have been considered in developing the methodology and findings of the study. Policies and strategies are subject to regular change, therefore the summary provided in this section was correct at the time of writing. SMBC reserve the right to change and update this section as policies change.

It also provides important contextual information regarding health and deprivation for the Borough.

The policy overview includes analysis of the Council's existing strategies and policies. It also includes a review of other strategies of relevance at national, regional and local levels and assesses their implications for the provision of open space, sport and recreation opportunities.

The PPG17 companion guide identified the importance of understanding the implications of existing strategies on the study. Specifically, before initiating local consultation, there should be a review of existing national, regional and local plans and strategies, and an assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of existing planning policies and provision standards.

### 3.2 Strategic Context

#### 3.2.1 National Strategic Context

##### 3.2.1.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2019)

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. The NPPF must be adhered to in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in planning decisions. The NPPF contains the following references that relate to green infrastructure and open spaces:

- **Para 7** - The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
  - **Para 96** - Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision are needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.
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- Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
  - a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
  - b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
  - c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.
- **Para 98** - Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.
- **Para 149** - Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes, and the risk of overheating from rising temperatures. Policies should support appropriate measures to ensure the future resilience of communities and infrastructure to climate change impacts, such as providing space for physical protection measures, or making provision for the possible future relocation of vulnerable development and infrastructure.
- **Para 170** - Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

### 3.2.1.2 Green Infrastructure

The concept of green infrastructure (GI) is now firmly embedded in national policy with the NPPF requiring local planning authorities to set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. It defines green infrastructure as *'a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities'*.

The Borough has a wide range of existing green infrastructure assets such as open spaces, parks and gardens, allotments, woodlands, street trees, fields, hedgerows, treelines, lakes, ponds, meadows and grassland playing fields, as well as footpaths, cycleways and waterways. However, the concept of GI looks beyond existing designations, seeking opportunities to increase function and connectivity of assets to maximise the benefits for the community and wildlife.

### 3.2.1.3 The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (2011)

The white paper<sup>4</sup> recognises that a healthy natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. It sets out how

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>



the value of nature can be mainstreamed across our society by facilitating local action; strengthening the connections between people and nature; creating a green economy and showing leadership in the European Union and internationally.

It responds to the 2010 independent review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network, chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton, which identifies the need for more, better and bigger joined spaces for nature.

Vision: To be the first Government ever to return the environment in a better condition that it inherited it, over the course of a generation.

### **3.2.1.4 Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services, (August 2011)**

This biodiversity strategy for England builds on the Natural Environment White Paper and sets out the strategic direction for national biodiversity policy to implement international and EU commitments.

The vision for England is: 'By 2050 our land and seas will be rich in wildlife, our biodiversity will be valued, conserved, restored, managed sustainably and be more resilient and able to adapt to climate change, providing essential services and delivering benefits for everyone'.

The mission of this strategy is to 'halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people'. The strategy contains four outcomes to be achieved by the end of 2020. These are:

#### *Habitats and ecosystems on land (including freshwater environments)*

By 2020 we will have put in place measures so that biodiversity is maintained and enhanced, further degradation has been halted and where possible, restoration is underway helping to deliver more resilient and coherent ecological networks as well as healthy and well-functioning ecosystems which can deliver multiple benefits for wildlife and people too.

#### *Marine habitats, ecosystems and fisheries*

By 2020 we will have put in place measures so that biodiversity is maintained, further degradation has been halted and where possible, restoration is underway, helping deliver good environmental status and our vision of clean, healthy, safe productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

#### *Species*

By 2020, we will see an overall improvement in the status of our wildlife and will have prevented further human-induced extinctions of known threatened species.

#### *People*

By 2020, significantly more people will be engaged in biodiversity issues, aware of its value and taking positive action.

### 3.2.1.5 A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (January 2018)

This 25 Year Environment Plan sets out government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. It aims to deliver cleaner air and water in our cities and rural landscapes, protect threatened species and provide richer wildlife habitats. It calls for an approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fishing that puts the environment first.

The 25-year goals are:

1. Clean air.
2. Clean and plentiful water.
3. Thriving plants and wildlife.
4. A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought.
5. Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently.
6. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

In addition, pressures on the environment will be managed by:

7. Mitigating and adapting to climate change.
8. Minimising waste.
9. Managing exposure to chemicals.
10. Enhancing biosecurity.

Actions/policies are identified around six key areas: Using and managing land sustainably; Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes; Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing; Increasing resource efficiency, and reducing pollution and waste; Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans; Protecting and improving the global environment.

The Plan sits alongside two other important government strategies. The Industrial Strategy sets out how productivity will be boosted across the UK through five foundations – ideas, people, infrastructure, business, environment, and places. Clean Growth is one of the four Grand Challenges laid out in the strategy that will put the UK at the forefront of industries of the future, ensuring that it takes advantage of transformational global trends. The Clean Growth Strategy sets out the UK's reaffirmed ambition to promote the ambitious economic and environmental policies to mitigate climate change and deliver clean, green growth.

Natural capital<sup>5</sup> is the cornerstone of the 25 Year Environment Plan for England.

### 3.2.1.6 Sporting Future - A New Strategy for an Active Nation (December 2015)

This cross-government strategy seeks to address flat-lining levels of sport participation and high levels of inactivity in this country. Through this strategy, government is redefining what success in sport means, with a new focus on five key outcomes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic

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<sup>5</sup> Natural capital refers to the Stock of natural resources, such as water, air, soil and biodiversity, from which people can or do benefit.

development. In future, funding decisions will be made on the basis of the outcomes that sport and physical activity can deliver.

It is the government's ambition that all relevant departments work closer together to create a more physically active nation, where children and young people enjoy the best sporting opportunities available and people of all ages and backgrounds can enjoy the many benefits that sport and physical activity bring, at every stage in their lives.

The government is reaffirming its commitment to Olympic and Paralympic success but also extending that ambition to non-Olympic sports where it will support success through grassroots investment in those sports, and by sharing UK Sport's knowledge and expertise. The strategy outlines what is expected of the sector to deliver this vision, and how the government will support it in getting there.

Public investment into community sport is to reach children as young as five as part of a ground-breaking new strategy. The move will see Sport England's remit changed from investing in sport for those aged 14 and over to supporting people from five years old right through to pensioners, in a bid to create a more active nation.

Investment will be targeted at sport projects that have a meaningful, measurable impact on how they are improving people's lives – from helping young people gain skills to get into work, to tackling social inclusion and improving physical and mental health.

Funding will also be targeted at groups who have low participation rates to encourage those who do not take part in sport and physical activity to get involved. This includes supporting women, disabled people, those in lower socio-economic groups and older people. Sport England will set up a new fund in 2016 to get inactive people physically active and will support and measure participation in sport and wider physical activity going forward.

### **3.2.1.7 Sport England Strategy – 'Towards an Active Nation' (2016-2021)**

In response to the Government's strategy, Sport England's new strategy vision is that everyone in England, regardless of age, background or ability, feels able to take part in sport or activity. Sport England's new vision and its supporting aims will therefore contribute to achieving the government's strategy. Key features of the new Strategy are:

- Dedicated funding to get children and young people active from the age of five, including a new fund for family based activities and offering training to at least two teachers in every secondary school in England to help them better meet the needs of all children, irrespective of their level of sporting ability.
  - Working with the sport sector to put customers at the heart of everything they do and using the principles of behaviour change to inform their work.
  - Piloting new ways of working locally by investing in up to 10 places in England – a mix of urban and rural areas.
  - Investing up to £30m in a new volunteering strategy, enabling more people to get the benefits of volunteering and attracting a new, more diverse range of volunteers.
-

- Helping sport keep pace with the digital expectations of customers – making it as easy to book a badminton court as a hotel room.
- Working closely with governing bodies of sport and others who support people who already play regularly, to help them become more efficient, sustainable and diversify their sources of funding.

### 3.2.2 Local and Regional Context

#### 3.2.2.1 Council Plan (2018 to 2020)

The Council Plan is a corporate wide plan that sets out the direction that SMBC wants to go in, how it aims to travel on that journey and what is expected at the end of it. It represents a good starting point to develop a vision that can be used to shape the local plan. The Plan vision is one: “Where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and prosperous”.

The Council Plan goes on to set the following priorities:

- Securing inclusive economic growth;
- Planning and delivery for Solihull’s low carbon future;
- Managing demand and expectation for public services;
- Developing and delivering our approach to services for adults and children with complex needs; and
- Making the best use of our people and physical assets.

The Council Plan then identifies a number of key programmes that will help to address these priorities. Those with most relevance to this Study include the following:

- Creating the conditions for communities to thrive; and
- Deliver the Green Prospectus, including continuing to develop green infrastructure, transport and environment.

#### 3.2.2.2 Love Solihull Strategy- Supporting communities to make a difference

The Strategy sits in Environmental Services, under Managed Growth Directorate and contributes to priorities and key programmes identified in the ‘Solihull Council Plan 2018-2020’

The purpose of the Love Solihull Strategy is to:

- Recognise what has worked well already
  - Identify areas of development and growth
  - Establish a plan to deliver the programme over the next three years
-

The programme and associated action plan contained in the strategy is designed to:

- Provide individuals, no matter their background, with the opportunity to contribute to improving their community
- Make the work of communities more recognised, visible and valued
- Co-ordinate the Council's resources that support community action through a joined up cross council approach to service delivery
- Identify the best ways to mobilise energy, talents, and passions of people to make a real difference to local priorities
- Encourage and inspire residents, businesses, partners, and community organisations to get involved with Love Solihull initiatives
- Focus on measuring results through community impact
- Provide and demonstrate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and behaviours that help people to make informed and responsible decisions.

Examples of this initiative in action include getting communities involved in parks e.g. through Friends groups, who carry out activities such as litter picking and neighbourhood patrols.

### 3.2.2.3 Solihull Local Plan 2013

The Solihull Local Plan sets out how and where Solihull will develop in the future. It outlines challenges facing Solihull and how they will be addressed, the vision for the future of Solihull, the strategy for achieving the vision, and policies and proposals to enable the Borough to grow and develop into the place we would like it to be. Sites for development are also identified. The Plan has been informed by extensive involvement with a wide range of stakeholders and the community.

The stated **Vision** for the Local Plan is: *“By 2028, Solihull will have built on its distinct reputation as an attractive and aspirational place to live, learn, work and play, with strong links to Birmingham and the wider Local Enterprise Partnership area, to the major urban area of Coventry and rural Warwickshire.”*

Area spatial strategies: The spatial strategy and directions of change for Solihull by 2028 are expressed further in the five distinct areas of the Borough covering:

- North Solihull Regeneration Area;
- Mature Suburbs;
- Solihull Town Centre;
- M42 Economic Gateway; and,
- The Rural Area.

Key existing local policies (currently being reviewed as part of the Local Plan Review) in relation to this study are:

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**POLICY P10 Natural Environment:** The Council recognises the importance of a healthy natural environment in its own right, and for the economic and social benefits it provides to the Borough. The full value and benefits of the natural environment will be taken into account in considering all development proposals, including the contribution to the green economy and the health of residents, and the potential for reducing the impacts of climate change.

**POLICY P15 Securing Design Quality:** All development proposals will be expected to achieve good quality, inclusive and sustainable design, which meets the following key principles, [including]:

- Conserves and enhances local character, distinctiveness and streetscape quality and ensures that the scale, massing, density, layout, materials and landscape of the development respect the surrounding natural, built and historic environment;
- Conserves and enhances biodiversity, landscape quality and considers the impact on and opportunities for green infrastructure at the earliest opportunity in the design process.
- Integrates the natural environment within the development through the provision of gardens, quality open space and/or improved access to, enhancement or extension of the green infrastructure network.
- Creates attractive, safe, active, legible and uncluttered streets and public spaces which are accessible, easily maintained and encourage walking and cycling and reduce crime and the fear of crime.

**POLICY P18 Health and Wellbeing:** The potential for achieving positive health outcomes will be taken into account when considering all development proposals. Where any adverse health impacts are identified, the development will be expected to demonstrate how these will be addressed or mitigated.

The Council will expect new development proposals to promote, support and enhance physical and mental health and well-being. Support will be given to proposals which [among other criteria]:

- Provide opportunities for formal and informal physical activity, exercise opportunities, recreation and play;
  - Contribute to a high quality, attractive and safe public realm in accordance with Policy P15 Securing Design Quality, to encourage social interaction and facilitate movement on foot and by cycle;
  - Contribute to the development of a high quality, safe and convenient walking and cycling network; and,
  - Improve the quality and quantity of the green infrastructure network in the Borough, particularly in the North Solihull Regeneration Area and in areas where green infrastructure is identified as lacking. The protection and enhancement of physical access, including public rights of way to open space and green infrastructure will also be supported.
-

**POLICY P20 Provision for Open Space, Children's Play, Sport, Recreation and Leisure:**

**a) Existing public open space, sports and recreational facilities:** The Council recognises the importance and multi-functional benefits of public open space, sports and recreational facilities within the Borough and will support the enhancement of existing facilities and open space. Loss of existing facilities through development will not be permitted where they are of value by to the local community for recreation, visual amenity, nature conservation or make an important contribution to the quality of the environment or network of green infrastructure, unless:

- it can be demonstrated that the open space or buildings are clearly surplus to requirements; or
- the need or benefits of the development clearly outweigh the loss. In such circumstances, the Council will require appropriate compensatory measures for the loss.

The Council supports the principle of designating land as Local Green Space. Where designation would be appropriate, necessary and where the open space meets the criteria outlined in national guidance, the Council will support designation of Local Green Spaces in neighbourhood plans.

**b) Provision of new public open space, sports and recreational facilities:** The Council will require provision for and maintenance of appropriate open space, sports and recreational facilities as an integral part of new development. This should address identified shortfalls in local provision, outlined in adopted Council strategies and provide for the resultant increase in population from the development. Provision should accord with the local standards and priorities for action outlined in the adopted Green Spaces Strategy (2006) and future revisions. Where the minimum standard for children's play and youth facilities is already met, developments will be expected to give more generous provision

To promote healthy lifestyles in the workplace, major commercial development proposals, (over 1ha or 1,000 sq.m) will also be required to provide new open space and/or contribute to enhancement of the green infrastructure network, in accordance with Policy P15 – Securing Design Quality and Policy P10 – Natural Environment.

The importance of green infrastructure in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change and effects of flooding are also recognised in policies P9 'Climate Change' and P11 'Water Management' respectively.

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### 3.2.2.4 Solihull Green Spaces Strategy 2006

In 2006 a Green Space Strategy (GSS) for Solihull was developed to help plan, manage and maintain Solihull's Green Spaces. The strategy was developed to set priorities for the future, especially in terms of planning policy.

The strategy provided a full assessment and analysis of green space assets and provision across the Borough. The vision for the strategy was (now superseded by replacement vision in Strategy Review document): *"By 2025 Solihull aims to provide a network of attractive, high quality, accessible green spaces that are managed and developed, recognising the Borough's landscape character and local distinctiveness, to meet the diverse needs of the community and the natural environment. Our green spaces should be safe, clean and maintained in a sustainable way, becoming an important element of everyday life, for the future enjoyment and well-being of all."*

The strategy included the development of proposed 'local standards' for different types of green space, an Implementation Plan that sets out the actions necessary to achieve the vision and the local standards, and Zone Actions Plans (based on local landscape characteristics and community aspirations), each with their own aspirational targets for delivering green space.

Table 2 Zone action plan areas

Zone	Action plan area
Zone 1	Lyndon, Olton and Elmdon
Zone 2	Silhill and St Alphege
Zone 3	Shirley East, Shirley West and Shirley South
Zone 4	Bickenhill and Meriden
Zone 5	Blythe, Dorridge and Hockley Heath, and Knowle
Zone 6	Castle Bromwich, Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge, and Smiths Wood

The adoption of a zoned approach means that there are 6 'units' to consider, rather than 17 individual wards. However, for this current study, it was agreed by the project steering group that analysis by ward (smaller geographical areas) is an effective and more meaningful way of analysing provision.



### 3.2.2.5 Solihull Green Spaces Strategy Review (GSSR) (2014)

This Green Space Review for Solihull forms a reassessment and updated version of the Green Space Strategy (GSS) completed in 2006. This document brings together previous studies, new policies and emerging issues to understand the context of Green Space in Solihull.

The overall purpose of the strategy is to:

- Review Solihull's Green Space Strategy 2006;
- Consider local and national directives such as the Local Development Framework;
- Incorporate and respond to local and national directives;
- Provide an overarching approach and deliverable action plan;
- Provide a strategy that can be regularly updated and understood by a range of stakeholders.

The revised Vision for green space was now defined as: *"A sustainable network of good quality green spaces that are safe, healthy, rich in biodiversity and distinctive in character; celebrating what is special about Solihull."*

#### Themes and Aims

In supporting the Vision, the strategic and operational delivery of green space will be achieved within the framework outlined below.

Table 3 2014 GSSR framework for green space delivery

Green Flag Award Themes	Aims
A welcome place	To provide high quality and accessible green spaces
Healthy, safe and secure	To work in partnership and support green space projects that increase healthy and active lifestyles
Cleanliness and maintenance	To improve overall quality score for green spaces
Sustainability	To ensure sustainable and diverse green spaces through planned landscape and biodiversity initiatives
Conservation	To maintain visitor and customer satisfaction levels
Marketing	To ensure customers continue to receive value for money
Community involvement	To improve overall customer satisfaction
Overall management	To maintain and seek to increase Borough average and zone action plan for green space provision

The Review retained and built on the hierarchy and standards outlined in the 2006 Green Space Strategy. However, it was recognised that as further topic strategies were developed, new standards might emerge, which would supersede or supplement prevailing standards.

The information provided below sets out the global aspirational green space standard for the Borough in terms of quantity, accessibility and quality. The standard is based on the provision of a range of hierarchies generated as part of the original GSS 2006.

Further information is then provided in relation to specific requirements for new developments within the borough and the requirements of sites with specialist or specific standards e.g. children's play. It should be noted that the terminology and definition of the hierarchies and site-specific standards have been updated to conform to changes in national standards and to provide a consistent approach.

These standards (set out below) have been considered in the development of new standards for the borough, in section 6 of this report.

### **Borough Standards for Green Space (Strategic)**

The borough standards for green space are based on the GSS 2006. The standards have been informed through community consultation, national standards and detailed data analysis of provision within Solihull. In relation to the long-term strategic provision of green space within the Borough the standards for each hierarchy of green space are outlined in the following table.

*Table 4 Borough standards (GSSR 2014)*

<b>Hierarchy definition (2013)</b>	<b>General description</b>	<b>Quantitative standard</b>	<b>Accessibility standard</b>	<b>Qualitative standard</b>
Principal green space	Multifaceted green space with play, sport, landscape, heritage and high levels of community participation	Over 8 ha	Unrestricted public access within 2km of settlements over 5000 people	Green Flag Award status achieved and retained for each site
Major green space	Large open spaces with less defined characteristics. Emphasis of on specialist land	Over 8 ha	Unrestricted public access	Managed using Green Flag Award principles

	use such as nature conservation or outdoor sport			
Local green space	Component part of green space network at a local level with varied characteristics associated with play, informal recreation and outdoor sport	1.5 to 8 ha	Unrestricted public access within 1km of settlements over 300 people	General best practice in design conforming to governing bodies or local strategies e.g. biodiversity action plan
Neighbourhood green space	Component part of green space network at a neighbourhood level with varied characteristics associated with play, informal recreation and outdoor sport	0.2 to 1.5 ha	Unrestricted public access within 400m of homes in all settlements with more than 300 people	General best practice in design conforming to governing bodies or local strategies e.g. biodiversity action plan

Where the standards are met in terms of quantity and accessibility, enhanced provision will be sought for existing sites to raise overall quality standards.

### **New Developments: general green space standards**

In addition to the standards outlined above, where new developments are proposed the standards in the following table will also apply.

*Table 5 General green space standards for new development (GSSR 2014)*

<b>Typology Definition (2013)</b>	<b>General description</b>	<b>Quantitative standard</b>	<b>Accessibility standard</b>	<b>Qualitative standard</b>
Green space	Green space provision in new developments consisting of a range site specific	2.86 ha	Unrestricted public access per 1000 population	

Typology Definition (2013)	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
	standards and typologies include play, sport and allotments)			
Informal green space	Incidental areas within new developments providing general amenity green space in addition to general green space of 2.86 ha	0.4 ha	Unrestricted public access per 1000 population with a minimum area of 0.2ha for all settlements with more than 300 people	General best practice and British Standards

### New developments: site specific standards

In relation to proposed new developments the standard for green space will be 2.86 ha per 1000 population. This will consist of a range of site specific standards based on the following outlined in the table below.

Table 6 Site specific standards for new development (GSSR 2014)

Typology definition (2013)	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
Door-step spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation	A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults	Minimum activity zone of 100m <sup>2</sup>	Unrestricted public access with 60m straight line distance from home	All design proposals to meet Play England and Fields In Trust guidance  A vision for play space in Solihull
Local spaces and facilities for play and	A larger space which can be reached safely	Minimum activity zone of 400m <sup>2</sup>	Unrestricted public access within 400m of	All design proposals to meet Play

<b>Typology definition (2013)</b>	<b>General description</b>	<b>Quantitative standard</b>	<b>Accessibility standard</b>	<b>Qualitative standard</b>
informal recreation	by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.		housing in settlements greater than 500 population. Minimum of one site per 4300 population in urban areas.	England and Fields In Trust guidance  A vision for play space in Solihull
Neighbourhood spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation	A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences	Minimum activity zone of 1000m <sup>2</sup>	Unrestricted public access within 1000m of housing in settlements greater than 1000 population. Minimum of one site per 8600 population in urban areas.	All design proposals to meet Play England and Fields In Trust guidance  A vision for play space in Solihull
Provision for young people	Outdoor provision within green spaces specifically for 12-18 years. Facilities to include areas for wheeled	Minimum one site per Zone. Subject to completion of topic strategy - Green space provision for young people	Minimum one site per Zone. Subject to completion of topic strategy - Green space provision for young people	Minimum one site per Zone. Subject to completion of topic strategy - Green space provision for young people

Typology definition (2013)	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
	activities e.g. BMX and ball games e.g. basketball			A vision for play space in Solihull
Informal outdoor sports	Specific pitch provision for rugby, cricket and football	1.64 ha	Unrestricted public access per 1000 population	All design proposals to accord with Sport England, relevant National Governing Bodies and Solihull Sports Pitch Strategy
Allotments	Provision of accessible space for growing produce	0.3 ha Minimum site size of 0.5ha	Unrestricted or partially restricted access per 1000 population. Settlements greater than 1000 population should have allotment sites with 1000m of housing	All design proposals to accord with vision for allotments in Solihull document

### Green Infrastructure Standards

As part of the planning for green space, strategic links such as wildlife corridors, canal towpaths, railway lines and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) will provide connectivity between green space typologies. To support the Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy in the Borough the prescribed standards in the following table will apply.

Table 7 GI Standards (GSSR 2014)

Typology definition (2013)	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
Strategic green space route	Traffic free routes for leisure activities such as cycling and walking, connecting green spaces	None	Unrestricted public access	Appropriate facilities in key area such as secure cycle parking, information/signage, refreshments and toilets
Strategic green space link	Natural features such as rivers, hedgerows and ditches linking green spaces	None	Unrestricted public access	Local biodiversity strategies and site specific management plans
Natural green space	Semi natural areas including ponds, meadows and woodlands usually with statutory designation for bio/geo diversity e.g. Site of Special Scientific Interest.	i) Local Nature Reserve- 1 ha ii) One 0.9 ha natural green space iii) One 10 ha natural green space	i) Unrestricted public access per 1000 population. ii) Unrestricted public access within 300m of homes in settlements greater than 300 population iii) Unrestricted public access within 2km of homes in settlements greater than 5000 population	Proposal in accordance with Natural England guidance

### **3.2.2.6 North Solihull Regeneration: North Solihull Green Space Review**

Green space has a positive role to play in the regeneration of North Solihull, improving the quality of place and meeting the requirements of existing and future residents plus those who work in and visit the Borough.

The North Solihull Green Space Review (NSGSR) was produced to evaluate the location, quality and accessibility of green space and develop a strategy that enhances the quality and accessibility (where practicable) of the land available and ensure there will be no overall loss of green space. The study is based on the Green Space Strategy produced by Solihull MBC and in particular the Zone 6 Action Plan that covers the North Solihull Regeneration area.

The Review identified a number of key opportunities in North Solihull to achieve a significant increase in the value of green space, opportunities to provide larger, better quality facilities, improve quality on existing sites and provide new facilities and greater connectivity. It suggested that the large number of small sites that sit within the residential communities need to be reviewed as part of a neighbourhood plan. It also suggested that school sites should become more usable for community use with a subsequent increase in the value of each school site.

It should be noted that this study has only included amenity green space of 0.15ha or above (as explained in section 5.1.2). Therefore, much of the amenity green space within the NSGSR is not included in this study. The importance of these smaller spaces within this area is recognised, and the NSGSR will sit alongside this open space assessment.

### **3.2.2.7 Solihull Habitat and Nature Improvements Project (2017-2020)**

Solihull Council has secured almost £2m of funding to improve areas of grassland, woodland and wetland in the borough over three years (2017-2020). The Council successfully bid for £966,552 funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds growth programme 2014-20 – the majority of which the Council will be match funding along with the Environment Agency.

Through the Solihull Habitat and Nature Improvements Project, the Council's dedicated project team will work with the Environment Agency, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, community groups and volunteers to improve 121 hectares of accessible green space.

The funding is being used to undertake wildlife/habitat improvement schemes and the creation of new and improved cycling and walking routes (The Wildlife Ways project – see below). The wildlife schemes will include thinning areas of existing woodland and planting new trees and shrubs, converting areas of grassland into meadows and building new reed beds, wetlands and pools.

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### **3.2.2.8 Solihull ERDF Wildlife Ways (2018-2021)**

Wildlife Ways<sup>6</sup> is a £16.8 million programme, part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), to improve Solihull borough for the benefit of people and wildlife. It will include tree, bulb and wildflower planting and make it easier for people wanting to walk and cycle by widening and connecting paths and cycle routes with green spaces.

### **3.2.2.9 Tame Valley Wetlands Nature Improvement Area**

The Tame Valley Wetlands NIA has the potential to link habitats between the River Trent in the North and the River Cole in the south. The inclusion of the Cole Valley and four wards of North Solihull will form a continuous link with the Birmingham & Black Country NIA. Creating a cross-boundary partnership between with the GBSLEP and Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull LNP; and to enhance prospects of securing future conservation grant funding.

### **3.2.2.10 Solihull Green Prospectus – delivering a greener Solihull for Success (2018/2019 Refresh)**

The aim of Solihull's Green Prospectus is to articulate Solihull's low carbon vision, ensuring that - through managed growth - they are at the forefront of the UK's transition to a low carbon economy.

It recognises that if economic growth is to be sustained, natural capital must be safeguarded, that limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and that resilience to the impacts of a changing climate must be increased. It will therefore ensure sustainability is embedded in the Council's approach to place making.

The Green Prospectus, with its focus on green infrastructure, transport and the environment supports the delivery of the council priority 'Planning and delivery for Solihull's low carbon future'.

### **3.2.2.11 Solihull MBC Green Infrastructure Study (January 2012)**

This Green Infrastructure (GI) Study forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. The Green Infrastructure Plan provides the evidence base for analysis of potential locations for growth in the Borough and provides opportunities to enhance existing and identify areas for new GI.

The study identifies the GI provision and connectivity in terms of: biodiversity; geodiversity; landscape character; urban forest; historic environment; accessible greenspace; greenspace typologies and links; and flood risk. It also identifies GI projects and provides a GI function plan and strategic overview, as well as recommendations for future work.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://wildlifeways.co.uk/>

**Solihull's GI Vision:** *Solihull will have an integrated, well-designed and diverse Green Infrastructure network throughout and extending beyond the borough, which will contribute to the quality of life of new and existing communities and help to create a positive sense of place for people who live and work here, while helping to protect and promote the Borough's rich cultural heritage.*

*Solihull's Green Infrastructure will be valued for its contribution to the local economy and its capability of providing essential ecosystem services.*

*Solihull's Green Infrastructure should be a showcase for well-designed and sustainable communities, one which reduces inequalities, actively encourages healthy living, cultural awareness and sustainable travel whilst delivering a robust, biodiversity-rich natural environment, resilient to an ever changing environment.*

*Green Infrastructure benefits can deliver many of the aspirations of the Solihull Sustainable Communities Strategy.*

### **3.2.2.12 Solihull Woodlands Strategy (2010 – 2014)**

This Strategy aims to protect, manage and enhance Solihull's woodlands for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

### **3.2.2.13 Solihull Nature Conservation Strategy (2010 – 2014)**

The Council will protect Solihull's important wildlife and geological sites and ensure that its diverse natural assets are maintained and enhanced.

### **3.2.2.14 A vision for play spaces in Solihull (2013-18)**

This strategy document was produced in 2012 and updated in 2015. The scope of the strategy is limited to the management of the Council's own play spaces and outdoor youth facilities and does not cover facilities provided by parish councils or other agencies.

The document notes that "the *Ask Parents* annual survey 2012 recognises that more affordable, local activities, for both children and young people, and things for families to do together are needed and ways for outdoor play spaces to contribute to this need to be identified".

#### **Solihull's vision for play spaces**

Our vision is for parks and play spaces in Solihull to be attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children, young people and their families and carers to enjoy.

#### **Aims for the management of play spaces in Solihull**

The strategy has the following main aims and objectives:

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- Prioritise future spending on play space improvement and development through a regularly reviewed action plan
- Ensure regular maintenance continues to achieve high standards on sites, and routine, operational and annual inspections are undertaken regularly.
- Make better use of electronic playground management systems and find user friendly solutions to provide accurate records.
- Manage risks appropriately (using a risk/benefit approach as recommended by Play England).
- Continue to examine current challenges, identify future opportunities and explore potential external funding streams.
- Consider how the Council, in partnership with the local community and partner agencies, can make play spaces more inclusive (particularly sites that did not receive Playbuilder money).
- Provide opportunities for children, young people and their families to take an active role in the development of local play spaces and ensure that play space provision is built around the local needs of children and young people.

The strategy provides both a general strategic action plan and a site-specific plan for the Council's own play spaces and youth facilities.

### **3.2.2.15 Solihull Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016 – 2019**

This strategy has been written by the Solihull Health and Wellbeing Board, which was established in 2011 to work towards ensuring that Solihull residents and patients get better and more joined up services.

The Board is an influential body that brings together Solihull Council, Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group and other organisations which provide health, education and social care in Solihull. The main role of the Health and Wellbeing Board is to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population by coordinating commissioning and promoting the integration of services.

Vision: Improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Solihull from pre-birth to end of life, to reduce inequalities and improve the quality of health, education and social care services.

Priorities:

1. People will live longer and have healthier lives
  2. Give every child the best start in life
  3. Ageing well—healthy older life
  4. Healthy and sustainable places and communities
-

Under priority 1, 'What do we need to do in Solihull?' it includes the following objectives that have relevance to open space:

- Ensure there is a focus on improving the physical health needs of people with poor mental health, with increased utilisation of green space.
- Work with other councils in the West Midlands Combined Authority to improve health through increasing physical activity levels.
- Develop initiatives to increase safe, active travel journeys across all age groups.

Under priority 4 it states that *'Many conditions such as obesity, heart disease, stress and mental health have been linked to the environments in which people live and work, and contact with the natural environment enhances both physical and mental health. There is also growing appreciation of how the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable members of society.'*

*'Our health and behaviours cannot therefore be viewed in isolation, and the way in which we plan and design places can impact both positively and negatively on health and wellbeing.'*

Under 'What do we need to do in Solihull?' it includes the following:

- Improve access to quantity and quality of open and green spaces available across the social gradient, to improve both physical and mental health.
- Utilise opportunities through Solihull Connected to increase the numbers of people walking and cycling for everyday journeys.
- Further develop planning which encourages increased activity and healthier lifestyles.
- Integrate active travel planning into new building and regeneration.
- Minimise the impacts of climate change, particularly on vulnerable groups in society.
- Utilise community assets to develop community growing and agriculture projects.

### **3.2.2.16 Solihull Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan (June 2017)**

This PPS was undertaken by consultants (KKP) in accordance with Sport England methodology. It builds upon a preceding assessment report which was jointly produced together with an assessment report for Birmingham City Council.

The Strategy identifies current levels of provision of playing pitches within Solihull across the public, education, voluntary and commercial sectors and to compare this with current and likely future levels of demand. The primary purpose of the PPS is to provide a strategic framework that ensures the provision of playing pitches meets the local needs of existing and future residents.

The PPS covers the following playing pitches including accompanying ancillary facilities:

- Football pitches (including 3G AGPs)
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- Cricket squares
- Rugby union pitches (including 3G AGPs)
- Rugby league pitches
- Hockey pitches (Sand/water based AGPs)
- Other grass pitch sports (including baseball and Gaelic football).

In addition, tennis courts and athletics track are also included.

*Vision: 'An accessible, high quality and sustainable network of sports facilities that provides and promotes local opportunities for participation by all residents at all levels of play from grassroots to elite'.*

The Study found that for all pitch sports, the position is either that demand is being met or that there is a shortfall, whereas the future position shows the exacerbation of current shortfalls and the creation of shortfalls for some pitches and for some areas where demand is currently being met. As such, there is a need to protect all existing playing pitch provision until demand is met; or there is a requirement to replace any lost provision to an equal or better quantity and quality before it is lost.

### **3.2.2.17 Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Sub- Regional Green Infrastructure Study (July 2011)**

The overall purpose of the study was to gather and analyse existing information to provide a shared evidence base which will support a consistent approach to GI planning across the sub-region.

The Study found that there is one sub-regional GI site located in Solihull District (Kingfisher Country Park) which is located in the north west of the District (although much of the site is located just outside the District boundary). The Park is accessible to the public. With only one sub-regionally important GI site, it is considered that there is a deficiency in sub-regional GI sites in this District.

The Study acknowledges that there are a large number of rivers and sections of both the Grand Union and Stratford-Upon-Avon canal networks in the borough which have potential for habitat provision, that Kingfisher Country Park may have the potential for performing a flood attenuation function in the borough, and also that there are two promoted walking routes in the borough; 'Coventry Way' and Heart of England Way'. There is also a short section of Sustrans National trail and one very small area of open access land located in the north west of borough. It also acknowledges that the towpaths of the river and canal networks may provide walking and cycling opportunities.

The Study identifies four potential sub-regional GI priorities which includes the creation of a new country park to the south of Solihull, and enhancement of Coventry's Green belt to the east of Solihull.

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### 3.2.2.18 West Midlands Industrial Strategy – Consultation document (2018)

The Industrial Strategy sets out the major, global opportunities ahead for the West Midlands.

Overall vision: to drive economic growth in a way that enables a healthier, happier, better connected and more prosperous population.

The Strategy proposes ten commitments which will guide the work of public, private and voluntary partners, which includes ‘Being known for the improvements we make to our natural environment, and choice of high-quality housing’.

Public and private partners in the West Midlands are committed to ensuring that all their investment improves the natural environment, including through embedding a natural capital<sup>7</sup> approach in their investment strategies. The ambition is for an annual net gain for biodiversity and natural capital.

## 3.3 Health and Deprivation Context

### 3.3.1 Introduction

Public Health England have published the 2018 Health Profile for Solihull Unitary Authority<sup>8</sup>. In summary, the health of people in Solihull is varied compared with the England average. About 15% (5,600) of children live in low income families. Life expectancy for both men and women is higher than the England average.

Health inequalities and deprivation are key issues - Life expectancy is 12.8 years lower for men and 11.1 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Solihull than in the least deprived areas.

### 3.3.2 Personal well-being in the UK: April 2017 to March 2018

The Measuring National Wellbeing project led by the Office for National Statistics has led to the inclusion of four questions on subjective wellbeing in the Annual Population Surveys.

As can be seen from the table below, several areas in the West Midlands combined authority (CA) scored lower than the England average in the year ending March 2018 for aspects of personal well-being, however Solihull fared better, with life satisfaction and happiness ratings above the England average.

*Table 8: Subjective wellbeing (rating out of 10). Source: Annual Population Survey Year Ending March 2018*

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5 for definition of natural capital

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/InfoandIntelligence/Solihull-Health-Profile.pdf>

		<b>Life Satisfaction</b>	<b>Worthwhile</b>	<b>Happiness</b>	<b>Anxiety</b>
	<b>England</b>	7.68	7.88	7.52	2.90
<b>West Midlands Combined Authority</b>	<b>Birmingham</b>	7.55	7.73	7.58	2.86
	<b>Coventry</b>	7.52*	7.71*	7.36	2.96
	<b>Dudley</b>	7.47*	7.54*	7.14*	2.57*
	<b>Sandwell</b>	7.41*	7.63*	7.37	2.54*
	<b>Solihull</b>	7.81*	7.96	7.71*	2.53*
	<b>Walsall</b>	7.52*	7.80	7.38	3.23*
	<b>Wolverhampton</b>	7.28*	7.56*	7.23*	2.31*

Notes:

1. Estimates which are significantly different statistically to the England average are denoted with \*.
2. Statistically significant differences have been determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals.

### 3.3.3 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Analysis

The Indices of Deprivation 2015 provide a set of relative measures of deprivation for small areas (Lower-layer Super Output Areas) across England, based on seven different domains of deprivation:

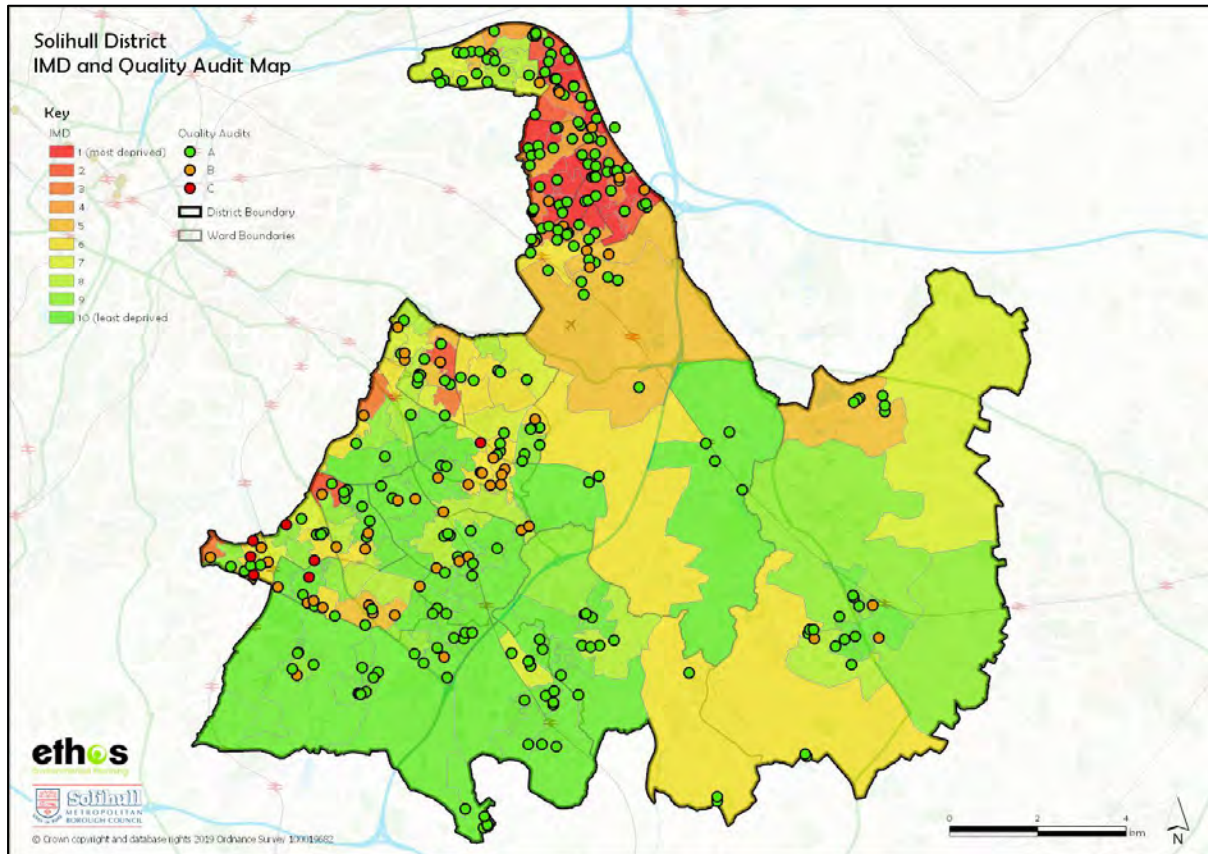
- Income Deprivation
- Employment Deprivation
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation
- Health Deprivation and Disability
- Crime
- Barriers to Housing and Services
- Living Environment Deprivation

Each of these domains is based on a basket of indicators. As far as is possible, each indicator is based on data from the most recent time point available; in practice most indicators in the Indices of Deprivation 2015 relate to the tax year 2012/13.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation combines information from the seven domains to produce an overall relative measure of deprivation.

Figure 4 below shows the IMD rank for each LSOA within the Borough, where 1 is most deprived and 10 is least deprived. This is overlain with the quality assessment results for all open spaces included within the quality audit (see section 7.4 and appendix 3), to build a picture of the quality/condition of open space in relation to the level of deprivation.

Figure 4 IMD ranks in SMB (by LSOA) with open space quality assessment results



As can be seen from figure 4, the highest levels of deprivation are within the northern most part of the borough, with small pockets along the western boundary. There does not appear to be a strong correlation between the levels of deprivation and the quality of sites, with the majority of sites assessed as being of good quality in the areas of highest deprivation (this is likely to be a reflection of the investment and improvements made in the North Solihull Regeneration Area (NSRA)), and some of the average/poor quality sites falling within areas with low levels of deprivation.

### 3.4 Conclusions – the benefits of open space and GI

The review of existing policies and strategies highlights the importance and benefits of a healthy green space network. The Solihull MBC Green Infrastructure Study (Jan 2012) sets out the key economic, social and environmental benefits, as follows:

#### Economic Benefits:

- Provides an inspiring setting for economic growth and that will assist in attracting business and inward investment to the town.
- Increases property and land values
- Helps attract and retain people ensuring stable populations and labour supply
- Provides opportunities for education and training, including lifelong learning for adults



- Delivers urban and rural policy, renaissance and regeneration objectives through robust and cost-effective means
- Provides climate change mitigation and adaptation for example, flood alleviation and micro-climate attenuation
- Sustains environmental tourism providing employment opportunities and boosting local economies

#### **Social Benefits:**

- Facilitates community cohesion, helping to reach across traditional social barriers
- Enables essential contact between people and nature (locally and wider countryside)
- Provides opportunities to maintain or enhance people's physical health and mental well-being
- Helps protect and promote the Borough's rich cultural heritage
- Provides opportunities for reflection and a tranquil respite from the often hectic urban environment
- Provides opportunities to reinforce feelings of local pride and a sense of ownership and belonging

#### **Environmental Benefits:**

- Reinforces and enhances landscape character and local distinctiveness
- Supports wildlife reservoirs and provides a refuge/ buffer from anthropogenic pressures (human disturbance, pollution, invasive/domestic species, etc.)
- Supports environmental processes and natural resource remediation (air, soil and water)
- Provides a framework and encouragement for sustainable development including the use of sustainable transport such as walking and cycling, sustainable urban drainage systems, whilst designing in sustainable urban ecology solutions
- Protects and enhances the Borough's historic assets
- Protects, restores & defragments habitats that support priority species currently threatened by land use/climate change.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board Paper: A Naturally Healthy Economy – through integrating the Environment<sup>9</sup> sets out natural capital<sup>10</sup> principles and facts and figures around the contribution of the natural environment to health and wellbeing, the economy and the environment within the WMCA. It also sets the case for the creation of a WMCA Environment Board to oversee the integration of a regional 25 Year Environment Plan (amongst other things, including A West Midlands Natural Capital Investment Plan).

In addition, the recent Fields in Trust Report, Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces – Measuring their economic and wellbeing value to individuals (2018)<sup>11</sup> provides a robust economic

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Natural-Capital-Plan-Opportunities-for-WMCA-July17.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://cieem.net/resource/natural-capital-and-biodiversity-a-briefing-note-for-policy-makers-july-2019/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/Upload/file/research/Revaluing-Parks-and-Green-Spaces-Report.pdf>

valuation of parks and green spaces in the UK as well as valuing improvements in health and wellbeing associated with their frequent use. This is the first research study on parks and green spaces to use welfare weighting methodology, allowing for more informed evidence-based policy decisions. The headline findings from this report are as follows:

- **The Total Economic Value to an individual is £30.24 per year** (£2.52 per month), and includes benefits gained from using their local park or green space and non-use benefits such as the preservation of parks for future generations. The value of parks and green spaces is higher for individuals from lower socio-economic groups and also from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. This research is the first to apply welfare weighting methodology to public parks and green spaces in the UK. The findings show that any loss of parks and green spaces will disproportionately impact disadvantaged and underrepresented communities, precisely those who value them the most.
  - **The Wellbeing Value associated with the frequent use of local parks and green spaces is worth £34.2 billion per year** to the entire UK adult population.
  - **Parks and green spaces are estimated to save the NHS around £111 million per year** based solely on a reduction in GP visits and excluding any additional savings from prescribing or referrals.
-

## 4.0 LOCAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT (STEP 1)

### 4.1 Introduction

The Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report (2018) examines local need for a wide range of different types of open space and outdoor recreation facilities. It draws upon a range of survey and analytical techniques including a review of consultation findings from relevant studies, questionnaire surveys and one to one stakeholder interviews. The work was undertaken from July to September 2018.

Questionnaire surveys were undertaken looking at the adequacy of current provision in terms of the quantity, quality and access, in relation to the various typologies of open space. The surveys were:

- A general household survey – postal and online (sent to 3000 households, with 461 surveys completed);
- A survey of town and parish councils; and
- Local groups and organisations' surveys.

In addition to the above a series of one to one stakeholder interviews were undertaken.

The results of this consultation and other analyses have helped amongst other things to inform the content of the recommended local standards (section 6 of this report). It has also helped the study to understand local people's appreciation of open space and outdoor recreation facilities, and the wider green infrastructure and the values attached by the community to the various forms of open spaces and facilities. This appreciation will have clear implications for the way in which open space and outdoor recreation facilities are considered as part of the review of the local plan as well as in dealing with spatial planning applications.

This section summarises the key findings from The Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report (2018) under four sections:

1. General Community Consultation;
2. Neighbouring local authorities; town and parish councils;
3. Parks, green spaces, countryside, and rights of way; and
4. Play and youth facilities.

### 4.2 General Community Consultation – Key Findings

#### Quantity

- Over 60% of respondents to the household survey think that overall there are enough parks and recreation grounds and MUGAs; and 54% note that there are enough areas for water recreation.
  - 58% of households suggest a general need for more facilities for teenagers.
-

- A small majority of households (52%) suggest a general need for more footpaths, bridleways, cycle paths etc; woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves; and informal open space for ball games, picnic etc.
- In many cases opinion is quite close regarding the sufficiency of provision most notably for allotment provision where 47% report an overall need for more while 50% think there are enough.

### Quality

- For all kinds of outdoor facilities/open spaces a majority of households suggested that in general they were of average or better quality (though the most common rating tended to be only "average").
- However, for some typologies there were notable levels of dissatisfaction with general levels of quality. For example, 36% of households highlighted the overall quality of outdoor facilities for teenagers as being either poor or very poor compared to 20% rating them as good or very good; and 29% rated the quality of MUGAs as poor compared to 22% rating them as good or very good.
- In contrast some kinds of facilities/open spaces were rated highly in terms of quality. These include: parks and recreation grounds (62% rate quality in general as being good or very good); woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves (51% similarly); footpaths etc (48%); and play areas (47%).

### Access

In general, a majority of household respondents report that they would not normally travel more than 15 minutes to visit the different kinds of open spaces and outdoor facilities.

There is considerable variation however between the typologies. For example:

- Just over half of user households are prepared to travel 20 minutes to visit woodlands, wildlife area and nature reserves and water recreation facilities. Around 25% of these report that they would travel more than 20 minutes.
- In contrast, for significant numbers of residents, facilities need to be much more locally accessible before they will be used (for example, play areas; informal open space areas - for ball games, picnics, hobbies, dog walking; parks and recreation grounds; and allotments).
  - 53% of users would expect play areas and informal open spaces to be within a 10-minute travel time, of which around 26% would not wish to travel more than 5 minutes.
  - 49% of users would expect local parks/recreation grounds to be within a 10-minute travel time, of which 23% would not wish to travel more than 5 minutes.
  - 48% of users would expect allotments to be within a 10-minute travel time, of which 25% would not wish to travel more than 5 minutes.

For nearly all typologies walking is the norm and will provide the basis for setting access standards, most notably for facilities such as play areas (79%); parks and recreation grounds (78%); and informal open spaces (74%).

However, a higher proportion of households would normally drive rather than walk to areas for water recreation; and significant numbers would drive to some of the facilities e.g. 42% would drive to access MUGAs and 38% would drive to visit woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves.

### ***Importance of footpath/cycle access***

- It is also of note that cycling is an important access consideration for some households e.g. 12% of respondents have household members who would cycle to use MUGAs; 9% to access footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths; and 7% to make use of youth facilities.
- 78% of households confirmed that they would be prepared to walk/cycle further if the quality of the route was improved; and 79% also said that if the quality of the route was improved they would make the journey more often.

### **Priorities**

- The category highlighted by the largest number of households as a high priority for potential improvement/new provision was better footpaths, bridleway and cyclepath provision (49%) followed by woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves (47%).
- Other notable high priorities for improvement highlighted by significant numbers were informal open spaces (39%); areas for water recreation (37%); and parks and local recreation grounds (33%).
- Children's play areas also score quite highly as a priority need (a combined high/medium priority choice for 54% of households - 26% high/28% medium). Facilities for teenager were also rated similarly (a combined high/medium priority choice for 47% of households - 26% high/21% medium).

### **Public Health and other issues**

- Solihull Council fully recognises the value of access to open space in relation to promoting health and wellbeing and public health objectives.
- The Solihull Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2016-19 highlights that lack of physical activity is a major contributor towards the pattern of health inequalities in Solihull. Accessible open space provision can provide opportunities for increasing physical activity.
- Public Health also note the importance of play areas and outdoor informal youth facilities such as MUGAs and skate parks in enabling regular physical activity for children and young people.
- Evidence suggests that people in communities with access to quality green space have improved mental well-being, less stress and social isolation, improved social cohesion and improved physical health, with fewer working days are lost to ill health. Conversely, when contact with the natural environment becomes difficult, or even unpleasant, the impact on people's emotional wellbeing will be adversely affected.
- Creating opportunities to provide new green infrastructure throughout the borough is essential to improving the urban environment. The provision and enhancement of

green infrastructure should be an essential part of planning proposals, and should be viewed through the lens of the impact on physical and emotional wellbeing.

- Public Health also noted that to maximise benefit, green spaces need to be: high-quality not left to decay; close and accessible to all sectors of the community; multi-functional and multi-use; and connected to other green spaces as part of a green infrastructure network.
- Solihull Active deliver specific projects relating to public open space in support of the Council's public health remit including walking and cycling initiatives; Park Run and Race for Life; and Eat Well Move More.
- Some sectors of the community face particular barriers to access such as disabled people; children and young people; and those in the more deprived wards of the borough.

### **4.3 Neighbouring Local Authorities and Town/Parish Councils - Observations and key issues**

#### **Neighbouring Local Authorities – Key Findings**

Section 3.2 of the consultation report briefly reviewed feedback from neighbouring Local Authorities in relation to the status of their open space strategies/associated studies and any cross border issues of significance. The variety of documents and strategies in place (and their relevance to current planning policy) is considerable, embracing green infrastructure studies, open space strategies, and sport, recreation and play strategies.

The approach adopted by each authority is very much locally derived. It is also notable that many authorities are currently involved with commissioning new open space related studies or updating previous strategies that are out of date.

There is a considerable amount of cross border and wider strategic partnership working between Solihull Borough and neighbouring authorities particularly relating to Green Infrastructure and natural green space, but relatively few neighbour authorities highlight specific issues related to the Solihull Open Space Assessment. Some examples are noted below:

- Bromsgrove and Redditch District: GI - Possible implications arising from cross boundary landscape types (to the north east of Bromsgrove District) and future action plans.
- Stratford-on-Avon District: GI - River Tame tributaries Blythe and Cole – 'living landscapes'. Earlswood Lakes on the border with Solihull. The closest Main Rural Centre to Solihull is Henley-in-Arden but the assessment area did not extend to the Solihull border. Open Space: the study is not yet complete, but clearly there is opportunity for residents of Stratford-on-Avon District using open spaces and facilities within Solihull and vice versa.
- Warwick District: GI - Identification of the medium / long term aspiration/opportunity to enhance the Arden Landscape character area. Principally to target the

enhancement of the Arden Landscape and fragmented woodland resource in the west of Warwick District.

## **Town/Parish Councils**

### ***General Overview***

- The individual towns/parishes are very different in relation to size, demographics, geography, needs and demand/aspirations. It is important that the study takes this variation into account.
- 10 of the 11 town/parish councils who responded were directly responsible for the management of various local spaces and facilities.
- 10 of the 11 local councils who responded noted that there was a need for additional or improved open space, sport, play and recreation facilities within their town or parish.
- Two of the parishes did not think there was scope for greater community use of outdoor sport and recreation spaces at local schools; and four were not sure. However, five of the parishes highlighted potential for community use (see below) or noted a need for improvements.
- The sector of the community most commonly identified as being poorly served in relation to their needs were young people/teenagers.

### ***Common areas of concern***

For the parish councils, the areas of most common concern are:

- Not enough areas for teenagers e.g. MUGAs, skateparks, shelters etc. and the quality of existing play areas.
- Need for improvements to parks, recreation grounds and village greens.
- The need for additional Multi-use games areas and allotments in some parishes.
- Improvements to footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths.

### ***Quality considerations***

The quality factors most commonly deemed to be of a high priority as regards recreational public open spaces are that:

- They should be safe and secure for those using them.
- They should be easy to get to (and get around) for all members of the community.
- Equipment and grounds should be of high quality and well maintained. They should be clean and free from litter and graffiti.
- They should be multi-functional providing for all sectors of the community.

It is also thought important by many local councils that there should be good footpath and cycleway links to and between public open spaces; and that there should be control of noise and unsocial behaviour.

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### ***Detailed responses on open space typologies***

Many of the town/parish councils provided detailed responses relating to aspects of quantity and quality of the various elements of open spaces surveyed.

## **4.4 Parks, Green Space, Countryside and Rights of Way - Key Findings**

### **Overview**

- The Borough has produced several noteworthy strategy documents to inform the development plan process and other Council decision making.
- However, several of the above documents have elapsed time-horizons. These include strategies relating to woodland, nature conservation, walking, and cycling.
- There are a considerable number of 'standards' promoted by the Council for the provision and protection of open space. Most of these appear to be contained in non-statutory documents supporting the statutory local plan.
- Natural England stress the need to take into account the ANGst standard as a starting point for developing a standard for natural and semi natural green space. Variations from this standard should be justified.
- The Woodland Trust Woodland Access Standard (WAS - endorsed by Natural England) provides guidance on access to Woodland, which should be taken into consideration.
- Working relations with strategic conservation bodies (especially the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust) appear to be strong and productive.

Working relations with strategic conservation bodies (especially the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and Habitat Biodiversity Audit Partnership) appear to be strong and productive.

### **Quantity**

#### ***Strategic organisations (including Borough Council officers, and policy documents)***

- The consensus seems to be that whilst the Borough is, overall, well provided with open space, the distribution is skewed across the geography. The 'urban' north is significantly worse off in per capita terms than the more rural south of the Borough.
- There is a concern about the proliferation of relatively small areas of 'amenity space' associated with the application of 'Radburn' housing layouts across the urban north of the Borough, which have no discrete function.

#### ***Community groups survey***

- Of those responding to the question 43% local organisations felt there to be enough open spaces to meet their needs; 37% did not think there were sufficient; and, 20% didn't know/had no opinion.
  - Specific instances of quantity issues are reported in the relevant part of this section.
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## **Household Survey**

- It is the Borough's footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths that are most commonly used by most households at least monthly (79%); followed by woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves (76%) local parks and recreation grounds (74%) and informal open spaces for ball games etc (72%). Rights of way, parks and informal open spaces are also the most frequently used facility on both a weekly and daily basis: 63% use such paths at least weekly (of which 38% make use almost every day); 55% make use of informal spaces at least weekly (of which 32% almost every day); and 55% visit parks and recreation grounds at least weekly (18% of which visit almost every day).
- Play areas and areas for water recreation are also fairly frequently used but by fewer households. At least 40% use them on a regular basis - at least monthly (including those who are more regular users).

Of the householders responding:

- Over 60% think that overall there are enough parks and recreation grounds and MUGAs; and 54% note that there are enough areas for water recreation.
- 58% of households suggest a general need for more facilities for teenagers.
- A small majority of households (52%) suggest a general need for more footpaths, bridleways, cycle paths etc; woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves; and informal open space for ball games, picnic etc.
- In many cases opinion is quite close regarding the sufficiency of provision most notably for allotment provision where 47% report an overall need for more while 50% think there are enough.

## **Quality**

### ***Strategic organisations (including Borough Council officers, and policy documents)***

- Even in 2006 the original Green Spaces Strategy raised concerns about the ability of the Council to maintain the quality of existing green spaces it controls within the Borough. Perceptions have not changed and have probably worsened in the intervening years, across the gamut of open space provisions.
- The role of the voluntary and community sectors in helping to maintain local spaces, is increasingly emphasised.

### ***Community group survey***

Of those responding to a question about the quality of different types of open space:

- 48% considered that local parks and recreation grounds were at least good or very good in quality;
  - 48% considered wildlife, nature reserves and woodland were at least good or very good in quality;
  - 40% did not know/had no opinion about the quality of allotments;
-

- 36% considered that water recreation opportunities were at least good or very good in quality- the same percentage felt them to be of adequate quality;
- 40% considered that footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths were of poor or very poor quality; and, 56% felt that 'other' informal and amenity green spaces were either poor or adequate in quality.

Specific instances of quality issues are reported in the relevant part of this section.

### ***Household Survey***

Of the householders responding:

- For all kinds of outdoor facilities/open spaces a majority of households suggested that in general they were of average or better quality (though the most common rating tended to be only "average"). However, for some typologies there were notable levels of dissatisfaction with general levels of quality as noted below.
- 36% of households highlighted the overall quality of outdoor facilities for teenagers as being either poor or very poor compared to 20% rating them as good or very good; and 29% rated the quality of MUGAs as poor compared to 22% rating them as good or very good.
- In contrast some kinds of facilities/open spaces were rated highly in terms of quality. These include: parks and recreation grounds (62% rate quality in general as being good or very good); woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves (51% similarly); footpaths etc (48%); and play areas (47%).

### **Access**

#### ***Strategic organisations (including Borough Council officers, and policy documents)***

The general views appear to be:

- Generally good access to green space in overall, but with some provision-specific exceptions. Play areas are covered in a separate section, but it is noted that access to certain types of facility is difficult in parts of the Borough.
- Internally within parks, there have been some barriers erected to stop motorcycling, and to deal with illegal and unauthorised encampment, but these can be problematic for visitors in wheelchairs.
- There are also concerns about the impact of human access in to some wildlife areas, although the health benefits provided by such access for residents is also recognised.
- There is a view that some of the quieter rural roads could be turned into quiet green lanes, where through vehicular traffic is discouraged or banned.

### ***Household Survey***

Of the householders responding:

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- In general, a majority of household respondents report that they would not normally travel more than 15 minutes to visit the different kinds of open spaces and outdoor facilities. There is considerable variation however between the typologies.
- For example, 51% of user households are prepared to travel 20 minutes to visit woodlands, wildlife area and nature reserves and water recreation facilities. Around 25% of these report that they would travel more than 20 minutes.
- In contrast, for significant numbers of residents, facilities need to be much more locally accessible before they will be used (for example, informal open space areas - for ball games, picnics, hobbies, dog walking; parks and recreation grounds; and allotments).

In addition:

- 49% of users would expect local parks/recreation grounds to be within a 10-minute travel time, of which 23% would not wish to travel more than 5 minutes.
- 48% of users would expect allotments to be within a 10-minute travel time, of which 25% would not wish to travel more than 5 minutes.

### ***Community groups survey***

Of those responding to a question about the *accessibility* of different types of open space:

- 25% said that they did face issues;
- 58% said they did not face issues; and,
- 17% said they didn't know/had no opinion.

## **4.5 Play Areas and Youth Facilities - Key Findings**

The Borough Council is the primary provider of play space and youth facility providers in Solihull Borough and manage 33 play/youth spaces across the Borough. Some of the town/parish councils also manage play spaces.

### **Quantity**

#### ***Stakeholder views***

- SMBC Neighbourhood Management noted that more facilities for teenagers could assist them in engaging young people in positive activity and help reduce anti-social behaviour.
  - A small number of town and parish councils report that there is not enough play provision in their parish but a higher proportion highlight a lack of youth facilities.
  - The Youth Council respondents thought that overall there are not enough outdoor youth facilities and spaces for young people (13+) to meet. In contrast a small majority though that there are enough outdoor play areas for younger children (under 13).
  - The Senior Playworker at Meriden Adventure Playground suggested that overall there are not enough public play spaces or youth facilities across the Borough.
-

- A significant number of play and youth organisations suggested an overall lack of youth facility provision.

### ***Residents survey***

- A clear majority of respondents (58%) to the resident's survey believe that overall across Solihull Borough there is insufficient provision of youth facilities.
- In contrast a majority of respondents (55%) report that there are enough play areas for younger children (under 13s).

## **Quality**

### ***Stakeholder views***

- The SMBC Public Realm Manager noted that play areas provided from the Play Builder programme ten years ago are now having to be refurbished as part of a prioritised programme.
- The Public Realm Manager also observed that in certain locations there are good facilities for youth/teenagers, but not in all areas.
- A significant number of town/parish councils highlighted a need to improve the quality of local play space and youth facility provision.
- Community and Youth Organisations - the most common view was that overall the quality of play spaces is quite good (50% rating quality as good or very good in contrast to 19% reporting it as poor or very poor).
- Meriden Adventure Playground suggested that in the main both play spaces and youth facilities tended to be of poor quality with the exception of outdoor gyms and grass kickabout areas. The senior playworker said that "children and young people tell us that public play areas are actually boring with little challenge or stimulation".
- Youth Council - a clear majority of the young people thought that some outdoor play areas for younger children were not well maintained and of good quality. Opinion on the quality and maintenance of youth facilities was divided.
- A number of community organisations and Meriden Adventure Playground noted that vandalism was a problem in some areas in relation to maintaining the quality of play areas.

### ***Residents survey***

- The quality of youth facilities is not rated highly - 80% of respondent households say that they are at best adequate with 36% of those rating them as poor or very poor).
- In contrast residents are quite satisfied with the quality of equipped play areas across the Borough (47% rated them as being good or very good in contrast to 11% rating them as poor or very poor).

## **Access**

### ***Stakeholder views***

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- Youth Council respondents indicated that they would walk or cycle a bit further than normal to somewhere that had more to do and was more interesting.
- Cars Area Together noted the importance of ensuring there are safe routes to play areas for children and young people.

### ***Residents survey***

- 53% of users would expect play areas to be within a 10 minute travel time, of which around 26% would not wish to travel more than 5 minutes.
- 84% of users would expect youth facilities to be within a 15 minute travel time. 21% of these would not wish to travel more than 10 minutes and 19% no more than 5 minutes.

### **Priorities for improvement**

#### ***Stakeholder views***

- Youth Council - the kinds of provision seen as a priority for improvement by most were play areas with more challenging equipment for teenagers, equipped play areas for younger children and youth shelters/outdoor meeting areas with seats.
- Meriden Adventure Playground - the main priorities for improvement noted were play areas with more challenging equipment for teenagers; wild natural areas (grass, ponds, trees for climbing, sand/mud etc); and youth shelter/outdoor meeting areas with seats.

#### ***Residents survey***

- Children's play areas score quite highly as a priority need (a combined high/medium priority choice for 54% of households - 26% high/28% medium). Facilities for teenager were also rated similarly (a combined high/medium priority choice for 47% of households - 26% high/21% medium).

### **Other Issues / General Observations**

- The SMBC Public Realm Manager noted that it is increasingly difficult to maintain the quality of provision due to lack of internal resources, especially given the proliferation of small play areas.
  - SMBC is involved in early discussions with the FA regarding recreational football (MUGAs and other courts). Ten sites are currently being considered.
  - The value of play in relation to improvements to children and young people's health and wellbeing was highlighted by the Borough Council and various stakeholders.
  - Stakeholders noted the need for well-designed play and youth facilities, the value of consultation with young people and the wider community in that process.
  - The Community Engagement Officer noted that It is particularly important that young people are consulted and engaged at an early stage in relation to any play and youth facility developments or changes in their local area.
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- Youth Council - all of the respondents said that they would like to have a say in how new outdoor areas for young people should be designed and how they can be improved.
- Some of the Youth Council respondents highlighted that they met in the town centre and “on the street” indicating the importance of considering the role of planning more widely in relation to the design of public open space.
- Meriden Adventure Playground and a number of community organisations highlighted the need for more outdoor supervised play and youth activities – noting recent cuts in play and youth services.
- Play England and FiT provide useful guidance on play and spatial planning; play space design; and managing risk in play. Some of these could be adopted as guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents.

#### **4.6 Concluding remarks**

The survey work, stakeholder consultation, desk-based research and group sessions have highlighted a wide range of issues of value to the Open Space Assessment. Response levels to the residents’ survey, town/parish councils survey, and community organisation survey have been high. This has ensured that a wide and diverse range of views from local residents and groups with an interest in open space and outdoor recreation facilities have influenced the findings of the study. All the main strategic stakeholders have responded and key issues have been identified.

There is a strong degree of consistency across the various sources on key areas of local need and aspiration from which we can be confident that the findings are robust and reliable, providing a strong evidence base to be combined with the detailed facilities audit and analysis.

The findings and evidence highlighted in the Community and Stakeholder Consultation report will feed into:

- the development of open space policy statements; and
  - the recommended standards for typologies of open spaces (quantity, quality and access elements).
-

## 5.0 AUDIT OF EXISTING OPEN SPACE ASSETS

### 5.1 General approach

This section sets out the proposed typologies which will have standards developed or have been included within the quantitative or access analysis. The typologies of open space have drawn on guidance provided within PPG17, and through discussions with the project Steering Group. The agreed list of typologies are seen to be locally derived and appropriate for the type and range of open spaces that exist within Solihull.

Although sites have been categorised into different typologies<sup>12</sup>, the multifunctionality of different types of open space is important to recognise e.g. amenity green space, natural green space, parks and recreation grounds and allotments may all provide numerous functions such as providing space for recreation, habitat for wildlife conservation, flood alleviation, improving air quality, and providing food growing opportunities. Linked to this are the intrinsic benefits of open space, such as providing an attractive landscape for improving health and wellbeing.

The following typologies have been used:

Table 9 SMBC typologies

Typologies mapped with standards	Typologies mapped but no standards <sup>13</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allotments</li> <li>• Amenity Green Space (&gt;0.15ha)</li> <li>• Park and Recreation Grounds:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks and Recreation Grounds</li> <li>- Outdoor Sports Space (Fixed)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Play Space (Children)</li> <li>• Play Space (Youth)</li> <li>• Accessible Natural Green Space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic space</li> <li>• Education sites</li> <li>• Churchyard and Cemeteries</li> <li>• Outdoor Sports Space (Private)</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> The typologies are discrete, and do not overlap in area, to prevent double counting

<sup>13</sup> An explanation for not developing standards for these typologies is outlined in the following sections

## Open Space Typologies with standards

### 5.1.1 Allotments

Allotments provide areas for people to grow their own produce and plants. It is important to be clear about what is meant by the term 'Allotment'. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 obliged local authorities to provide sufficient allotments and to let them to persons living in their areas where they considered there was a demand.

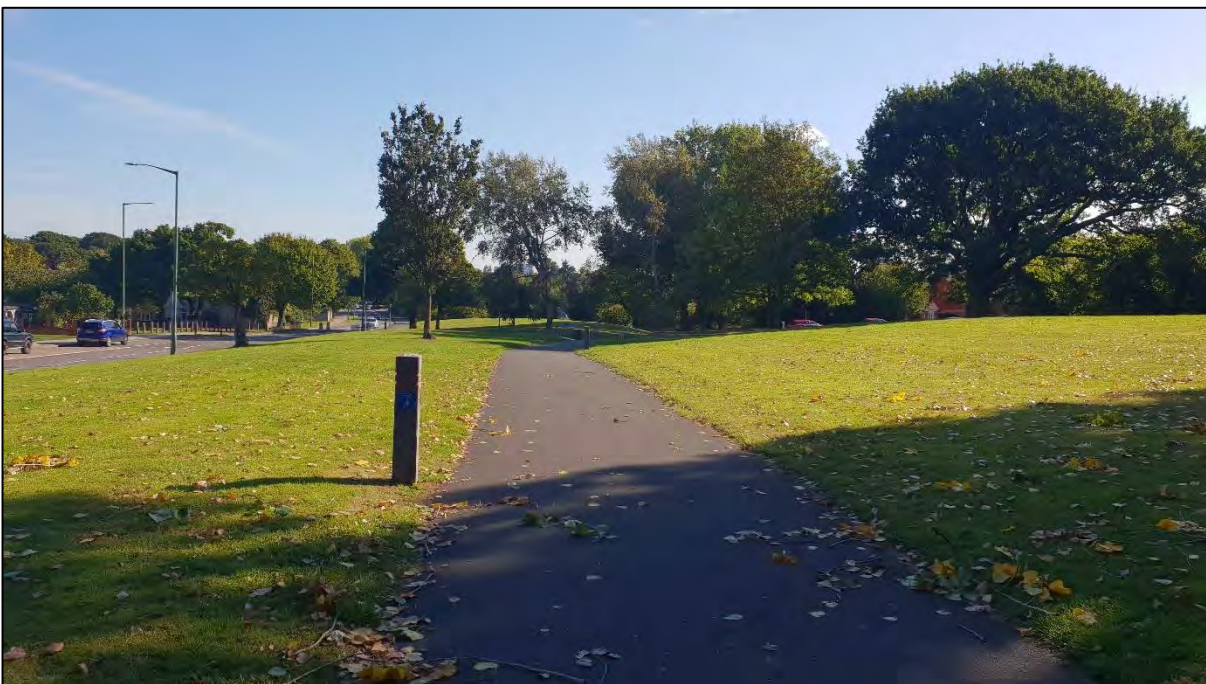
The Allotment Act of 1922 defines the term 'allotment garden' as:

***“an allotment not exceeding 40 poles in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family”***

(N.B. 40 Poles equals 1,210 square yards or 1,012 square metres. A Pole can also be known as a Rod or Perch.)

The Allotments Act of 1925 gives protection to land acquired specifically for use as allotments, so called Statutory Allotment Sites, by the requirement for the need for the approval of Secretary of State in event of sale or disposal. Some allotment sites may not specifically have been acquired for this purpose. Such allotment sites are known as “temporary” (even if they have been in use for decades) and are not protected by the 1925 legislation.

### 5.1.2 Amenity Green Space





The category is considered to include those spaces (minimum 0.15ha in size) open to free and spontaneous use by the public, but neither laid out nor managed for a specific function such as a park, public playing field or recreation ground; nor managed as a natural or semi-natural habitat. These areas of open space will be of varied size, but are likely to share the following characteristics:

- Unlikely to be physically demarcated by walls or fences.
- Predominantly laid down to (mown) grass.
- Unlikely to have identifiable entrance points (unlike parks).
- They may have shrub and tree planting, and occasionally formal planted flower beds.
- They may occasionally have other recreational facilities and fixtures (such as play equipment or ball courts).

Examples might include both small and larger informal grassed areas in housing estates and general recreation spaces. They can serve a variety of functions dependent on their size, shape, location and topography. Some may be used for informal recreation activities, whilst others by themselves, or else collectively, contribute to the overall visual amenity of an area.

It should be noted that amenity green spaces smaller than 0.15 ha<sup>14</sup> and amenity roadside verges were not included within the analysis for this typology, as it is considered that these sites will have limited recreation function and therefore should not count towards open space provision (although they may have other functions such as visual amenity or biodiversity value).

### 5.1.3 Park and Recreation Grounds



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<sup>14</sup> As already mentioned, this means that much of the amenity green space within the NSGSR is not included in this study. The importance of these smaller spaces within this area is recognised, and the NSGSR will sit alongside this open space assessment.

This typology brings together the function of Parks and Recreation Grounds and Outdoor Sports Space as identified in the former PPG17 typology. The distinction between the two typologies in the study area is blurred, with very few formal gardens and many parks and/or outdoor sports space having multi-functions used for both informal and formal recreation. The consultation undertaken indicated that people refer to their local park or rec, and communities do not make a distinction between outdoor sports space and parks and recreation grounds. Therefore, for the study an overarching typology for Park and Recreation Grounds has been used.

For the purpose of this study, a Park and Recreation Ground is defined as an open space that:

- Has at least two facilities e.g. a children's play area and tennis courts, or;
- Has provision for formal sport e.g. football or cricket pitch (informal football would be excluded);
- Includes private sports grounds where there is open public access i.e. although it is private (e.g. managed by a football club), access is allowed for informal recreation.

Those outdoor sports grounds which have no public access at all have been mapped as Outdoor Sport (Private), as set out in section 5.1.9.

This typology comprises the general open space surrounding play areas, sports facilities etc. used for general recreation and includes those areas laid out as pitches which are accessible i.e. they can be walked over/used informally. Pitches which have no access e.g. they are fenced off/private managed have been mapped as Outdoor Sport (Private) and are not included within the quantity analysis for parks and recreation grounds. Playing Pitch provision is covered in detail as part of a separate study.

The quantity analysis for Parks and Recreation Grounds also includes fixed outdoor sports space (comprising all other non-pitch based provision including tennis courts and outdoor gyms which are publicly accessible/available to book. Those facilities that are managed by a club and are not freely accessible are mapped as Outdoor Sport (Private) and are not included within the quantity analysis (see section 5.1.9).

The quantity figure for Parks and Recreation Grounds excludes the provision of children and youth play spaces which have a separate typology (see section 5.1.4).

Parks and Recreation Grounds take on many forms, and may embrace a wide range of functions including:

- Play space of many kinds;
  - Provision for a range of formal pitch and fixed sports;
  - Provision of outdoor gyms and fitness trails;
  - Informal recreation and sport;
  - Providing attractive walks and cycle routes to work;
  - Offering landscape and amenity features;
  - Areas of formal planting;
-

- Providing areas for ‘events’;
- Providing habitats for wildlife;
- Dog walking.

The recommended standards for this typology (set out in Section 6 below) are intended to provide sufficient space for facilities and sport. The detailed layout/requirements would be covered by more detailed strategy work e.g. through a playing pitch strategy.

#### 5.1.4 Play Space (Children and Youth)



It is important to establish the scope of the study in terms of this kind of space. Children and young people will play/‘hang out’ in almost all publicly accessible “space” ranging from the street, town centres and squares, parks, playing fields, “amenity” grassed areas etc. as well as the more recognisable play and youth facility areas such as equipped playgrounds, youth shelters, BMX and skateboard parks, Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs) etc. Clearly many of the other types of open space covered by this study will therefore provide informal play opportunities.

To a child, the whole world is a potential playground: where an adult sees a low wall, a railing, kerb or street bench, a child might see a mini adventure playground or a challenging skateboard obstacle. Play should not be restricted to designated ‘reservations’ and planning and urban design principles should reflect these considerations.

The study has recorded the following:

- **Children’s Play Space** – Areas of play that cater for the needs of children up to and around 12 years of age. Play Areas are an essential way of creating safe but adventurous places for children of varying ages to play and learn. The emphasis in play area management is shifting away from straightforward and formal equipment such as slides and swings towards creating areas where imagination and natural learning can flourish through the use of landscaping and natural building materials and the creation of areas that need exploring.

- **Youth Play Space** - Informal recreation opportunities for, broadly, the 13 to 16/17 age group, and which might include facilities such as skate parks, basketball courts and 'free access' MUGAs. In practice, there will always be some blurring around the edges in terms of younger children using equipment aimed for youths and vice versa.

Teenagers should not be ignored, it is important to create areas for 'hanging out' such as shelters and providing them with things to do such as bike ramps. The stakeholder consultation and typologies mapping/site audits has highlighted that currently recognisable provision for teenagers is few and far between.

### 5.1.5 Natural Green Space



For the purpose of this study, natural and semi-natural green space covers a variety of partly or wholly accessible spaces including meadows, woodland and copses all of which share a trait of having natural characteristics and wildlife value, but which are also open to public use and enjoyment.

There are large tracts of open countryside within the study area, much of this is private land used for farming, however, there is significant access to the countryside provided through the rights of way network. It was not the intention of this audit to survey and map all these areas, but to focus on sites where there are definitive boundaries or areas of natural green space which have some form of public access. In some cases, access may not be fully clear, however there is evidence of some level of informal use and access.

Whilst access may not be available fully across all areas of these sites (e.g. the middle of a lake or dense scrub in a woodland), the whole site has been included within the assessment.

Some natural spaces were found to have no access at all, and whilst they cannot be formally used by the general community, they can be appreciated from a distance, and contribute to

visual amenity, landscape character and local distinctiveness, green infrastructure and biodiversity. Whilst every effort was made to exclude these spaces from the assessment, as already identified, in certain sites access was not always clear. Although such spaces are not the subject of standards developed by this study, their value is recognised.

The local consultation and strategy review, and research elsewhere (e.g. Natural England<sup>15</sup>) have identified the value attached to natural spaces for recreation and emotional well-being. A sense of 'closeness to nature' with its attendant benefits for people is something that is all too easily lost in urban areas. Natural green spaces can make important contributions towards local Biodiversity Action Plan targets and can also raise awareness of biodiversity values and issues.

Natural Green Spaces can also form important 'green corridors' for both wildlife and people, especially when linked with the public rights of way network, cycle paths and waterways etc. These spaces form an important part of the Green Infrastructure of an area and can be important in delivering ecosystem services and attracting visitors across administrative boundaries. The importance of these linear routes is recognised; however, they have not been mapped as part of this study.

## **Open Space Typologies with no Standards**

### **5.1.6 Civic space**

Civic and market squares and other hard surfaced areas designed for pedestrians have been identified and mapped, as it is recognised that these provide important space for community events and areas for 'hanging out'. No standards for provision, access or quality have been set as part of this study.

### **5.1.7 Churchyards and cemeteries**

The borough has many churches and cemeteries, and these provide significant aesthetic value and space for informal recreation such as walking and relaxing. Many are also important in terms of biodiversity, particularly closed churchyards. Their importance for informal recreation, aesthetic value and contribution towards biodiversity must be acknowledged, and as such, investment in their upkeep, maintenance and quality is an important factor. Churchyards and Cemeteries have been identified and mapped where known, however, no quantity or access standard for provision have been set, as it is outside the scope of this study to make recommendations related to requirements for new provision.

However, the quality of churchyards can be influenced by this study, particularly closed churchyards which have become the responsibility of the Local Authority. Three of the Council's churchyards (Robin Hood, Widney Manor and Woodlands) are managed as more park-type spaces and all have Green Flag Awards, and these have been included as part of the open space quality assessment, as requested by the Council.

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<sup>15</sup> Natural England have published a variety of health and the natural environment publications at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/127020>

### 5.1.8 Education

Many schools and colleges have open space and sports facilities within their grounds. This may range from a small playground to large playing fields with several sports pitches. More often than not, public access to these spaces is restricted and in many cases forbidden. Nevertheless, many of the sports facilities are used by local people on both an informal and formal basis.

Sports clubs may have local informal arrangements with a school to use their pitches, and in some cases more formal 'dual-use' agreements may be in place. School grounds can also contribute towards the green infrastructure and biodiversity of an area.

Quantity, quality and access standards have not been proposed for education sites. This is because they are not openly accessible to the public and whilst important to the local community, there is less opportunity for the Council to influence their provision and management.

### 5.1.9 Outdoor Sport (Private)

Outdoor sports spaces with no public access (e.g. private sports grounds), have also been recorded and mapped where known. Private sport space makes up an important part of outdoor sports provision across the Borough and forms an important part of the community facilities. The private sports spaces have been mapped separately to publicly accessible sites, to determine exact provision of the different types of provision.

This typology includes golf courses, where more often than not, public access is restricted. Nevertheless, these facilities are used by local people and they form part of the Green Infrastructure network.

This typology also includes fixed outdoor sports space (such as tennis courts) which are privately managed, and not accessible.

No quantity or access standards for provision have been set, as it is outside the scope of this study to make recommendations related to requirements for new provision. However, the Solihull Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan (June 2017) deals with the supply of, and demand for sports pitches.

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## 5.2 Existing provision of open space

The existing provision of open space is based on the desktop mapping and site surveys undertaken by Ethos Environmental Planning which included:

- analysis of existing GIS data held by SMBC and from other sources such as the Ordnance Survey Greenspace layer;
- desktop mapping of open space from aerial photography;
- questionnaires to town and parish councils;
- liaison with council officers; and
- site visits to check accessibility, boundaries, typologies and complete quality audits.

### 5.2.1 Provision across the Borough

The following table shows the average existing provision of open space in hectares and ha/1000 population across the Borough. The figures for 'Park and Recreation Ground (Combined)' include a combination of the following typologies:

- Park and Recreation Ground; and
- Outdoor Sport (Fixed).

Table 10 Summary of existing provision of open space across the Borough

Typology	Existing (ha)	Existing (ha/1000) <sup>16</sup>
Allotments	18.60	0.09
Amenity Greenspace (>0.15ha)	149.39	0.70
Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	336.42	1.57
<i>Parks and Recreation Grounds</i>	<i>334.42</i>	<i>1.56</i>
<i>Outdoor Sport (Fixed)</i>	<i>2.00</i>	<i>0.01</i>
Play (Child)	5.47	0.03
Play (Youth)	1.55	0.01
Accessible Natural Greenspace	337.55	1.58
Cemeteries and Churchyards	41.01	0.19
Education	285.58	1.33
Outdoor Sport (Private)	98.48	0.46
Civic Space	0.79	0.00

<sup>16</sup> Calculated using ONS 2017 mid year population estimates

## 5.2.2 Provision in Wards

### Quantity Statistics

The following tables shows the average existing provision of open space in hectares (table 6) and ha/1000 population (table 7) for each of the wards in the Borough.

Table 11 Existing provision of open space (hectares) in wards

Ward	Allotments	Amenity Green Space	Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	Parks and Recreation Grounds	Outdoor Sport (Fixed)	Play (Child)	Play (Youth)	Accessible Natural Green Space	Cemeteries and Churchyards	Education	Outdoor Sport (Private)	Civic Space
Bickenhill	0.46	12.47	20.56	20.29	0.28	0.38	0.04	32.55	2.83	6.44	28.56	0.00
Blythe	2.19	9.89	8.16	8.16	0.00	0.06	0.01	62.73	1.31	10.78	1.95	0.00
Castle Bromwich	0.02	10.78	10.83	10.72	0.11	0.19	0.12	19.59	1.66	17.31	0.18	0.00
Chelmsley Wood	0.93	4.90	15.10	14.83	0.27	1.14	0.30	46.16	0.80	4.72	3.00	0.00
Dorridge and Hockley Heath	1.19	8.05	31.81	31.35	0.46	0.60	0.08	0.78	7.72	7.29	6.32	0.00
Elmdon	2.95	3.55	54.04	53.90	0.14	0.39	0.02	48.57	0.35	6.51	0.00	0.00
Kingshurst and Fordbridge	0.66	8.08	34.51	34.51	0.00	0.42	0.13	19.94	0.40	34.27	6.91	0.00
Knowle	1.35	2.99	14.70	14.56	0.14	0.31	0.01	18.75	1.30	13.14	18.42	0.00
Lyndon	1.56	5.58	28.70	28.70	0.00	0.51	0.47	10.49	0.15	18.31	0.00	0.00
Meriden	2.89	12.16	13.80	13.66	0.14	0.27	0.07	14.11	3.29	7.85	6.49	0.00
Olton	0.36	8.82	4.91	4.91	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.10	2.25	19.29	9.49	0.00
Shirley East	1.53	4.31	4.47	4.47	0.00	0.06	0.00	7.73	14.57	1.57	0.00	0.00
Shirley South	1.36	14.21	18.73	18.73	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.70	0.39	17.43	3.04	0.00



Ward	Allotments	Amenity Green Space	Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	Parks and Recreation Grounds	Outdoor Sport (Fixed)	Play (Child)	Play (Youth)	Accessible Natural Green Space	Cemeteries and Churchyards	Education	Outdoor Sport (Private)	Civic Space
Shirley West	0.00	5.04	17.52	17.27	0.24	0.36	0.10	5.16	0.86	10.47	2.37	0.00
Silhill	1.13	6.71	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.00	5.44	1.26	29.13	2.76	0.13
Smith's Wood	0.00	17.79	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.06	5.38	0.59	19.57	0.00	0.00
St Alphege	0.00	14.07	58.58	58.37	0.22	0.61	0.14	31.37	1.27	61.51	8.99	0.66

Table 12 Existing provision of open space (ha/1000 population) in wards

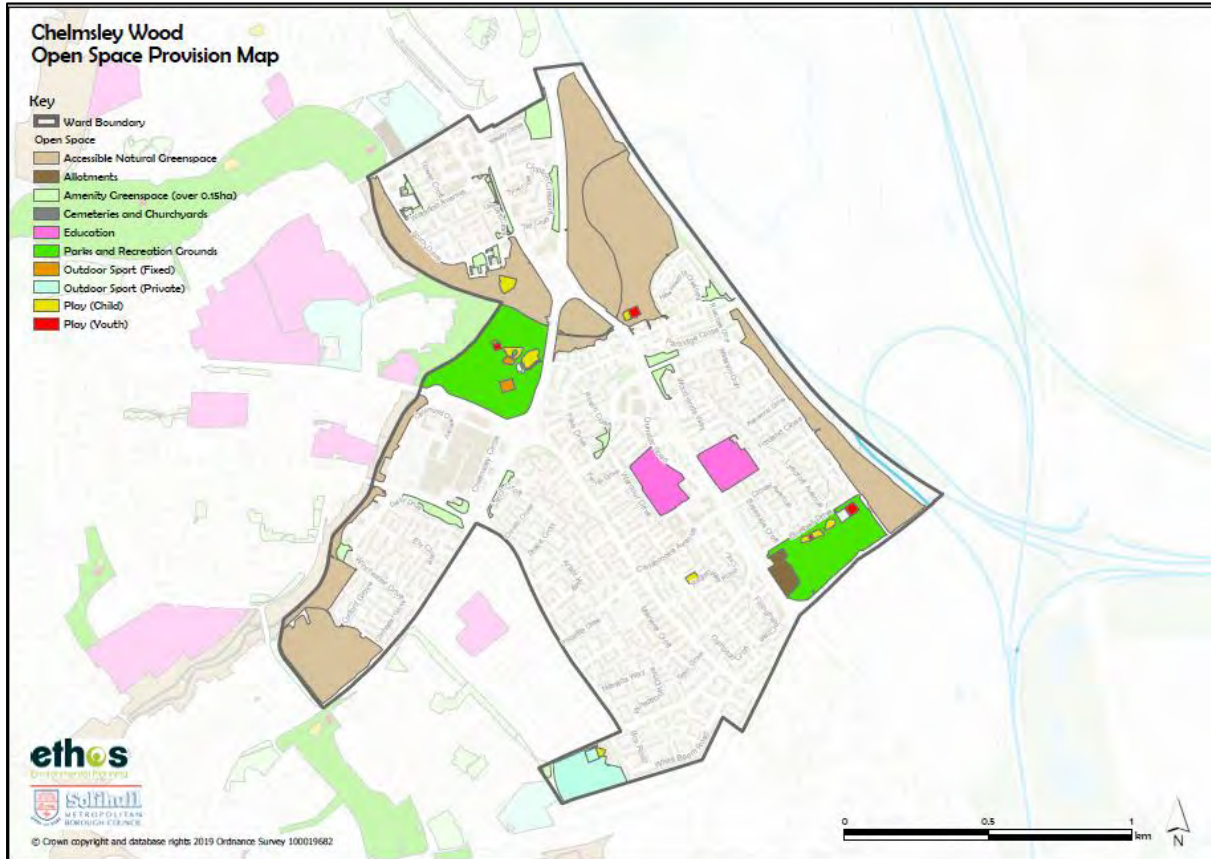
Ward	Allotments	Amenity Greenspace	Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	Parks and Recreation Grounds	Outdoor Sport (Fixed)	Play (Child)	Play (Youth)	Accessible Natural Greenspace	Cemeteries and Churchyards	Education	Outdoor Sport (Private)	Civic Space
Bickenhill	0.04	0.98	1.62	1.6	0.02	0.03	0	2.56	0.22	0.51	2.25	0.00
Blythe	0.16	0.71	0.59	0.59	0	0	0	4.51	0.09	0.78	0.14	0.00
Castle Bromwich	0	0.95	0.96	0.95	0.01	0.02	0.01	1.73	0.15	1.53	0.02	0.00
Chelmsley Wood	0.07	0.38	1.17	1.15	0.02	0.09	0.02	3.57	0.06	0.36	0.23	0.00
Dorridge and Hockley Heath	0.1	0.71	2.8	2.76	0.04	0.05	0.01	0.07	0.68	0.64	0.56	0.00
Elmdon	0.24	0.29	4.34	4.33	0.01	0.03	0	3.9	0.03	0.52	0	0.00
Kingshurst and Fordbridge	0.05	0.62	2.66	2.66	0	0.03	0.01	1.54	0.03	2.64	0.53	0.00
Knowle	0.12	0.27	1.33	1.31	0.01	0.03	0	1.69	0.12	1.19	1.66	0.00
Lyndon	0.11	0.41	2.09	2.09	0	0.04	0.03	0.76	0.01	1.34	0	0.00
Meriden	0.23	0.97	1.1	1.09	0.01	0.02	0.01	1.12	0.26	0.63	0.52	0.00
Olton	0.03	0.69	0.39	0.39	0	0	0	0.01	0.18	1.52	0.75	0.00

Ward	Allotments	Amenity Greenspace	Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	Parks and Recreation Grounds	Outdoor Sport (Fixed)	Play (Child)	Play (Youth)	Accessible Natural Greenspace	Cemeteries and Churchyards	Education	Outdoor Sport (Private)	Civic Space
Shirley East	0.13	0.36	0.38	0.38	0	0	0	0.65	1.23	0.13	0	0.00
Shirley South	0.11	1.13	1.49	1.49	0	0	0	0.69	0.03	1.39	0.24	0.00
Shirley West	0	0.4	1.39	1.37	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.41	0.07	0.83	0.19	0.00
Silhill	0.09	0.53	0	0	0	0.01	0	0.43	0.1	2.32	0.22	0.01
Smith's Wood	0	1.39	0	0	0	0.01	0	0.42	0.05	1.53	0	0.00
St Alphege	0	1.02	4.25	4.23	0.02	0.04	0.01	2.28	0.09	4.46	0.65	0.05

## Maps showing provision by Ward

Appendix 1 provides a map for each of the wards within the Borough showing the provision of open space. An example map is shown in figure 5.

Figure 5 Example map showing existing provision of open space by ward (appendix 1)



## 6.0 THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS

### 6.1 Introduction

Following the completion of the assessment of local needs and the audit of provision (the first two steps of this study), new standards of provision for open space are proposed below. This section explains how the standards for Solihull have been developed and provides specific information and justification for each of the typologies where standards have been proposed.

The standards for open space have been developed in-line with the NPPF. Standards comprise the following components:

- **Quantity standards:** These are determined by the analysis of existing quantity, consideration of existing local and national standards and benchmarks and evidence gathered from the local needs assessment. It is important that quantity standards are locally derived and are realistic and achievable. The recommended standards need to be robust, evidence based and deliverable through new development and future mechanisms of contributions through on-site or off-site provision.
- **Accessibility standards:** These reflect the needs of all potential users including those with physical or sensory disabilities, young and older people alike. Spaces likely to be used on a frequent and regular basis need to be within easy walking distance and to have safe access. Other facilities where visits are longer but perhaps less frequent, for example country parks, can be further away. Consideration is also given to existing local or national standards and benchmarks.
- **Quality standards:** The standards for each form of provision are derived from the quality audit, existing good practice and from the views of the community and those that use the spaces. Again, quality standards should be achievable and reflect the priorities that emerge through consultation.

The standards that have been set are for **minimum guidance levels of provision**. So, just because geographical areas may enjoy levels of provision exceeding minimum standards does not mean there is a surplus, as all such provision may be well used. It is also important to note that the quantity, accessibility and quality standards need to be considered together – they should not be considered in isolation. For example, even if there may be sufficient supply of a particular open space typology against the quantity standard, there may still be gaps in access, or the existing provision may be poor quality/not fit for purpose – and therefore there would still be shortfalls against the standards.

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## 6.2 Allotments

Table 13 Summary of quantity and access standard

Quantity Standard	Access Standard
0.20 ha/1000 population (minimum size of new provision is 0.1ha),	720 metres (15 minutes' walk time)

### **Existing national or local standards**

National standards for allotments and other such open spaces are difficult to find. The closest thing to such standards appears to be those set out by the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG). These are as follows:

- Standard Plot Size = 330 sq yards (250sqm)
- Paths = 1.4m wide for disabled access
- Haulage ways = 3m wide
- Plotters shed = 12sqm
- Greenhouse = 15sqm
- Polytunnel = 30sqm

The Solihull Green Spaces Strategy (2006 and 2014 Review) sets the following standards for the provision of allotments from new development:

- 0.3 ha/1000, minimum site size of 0.5ha
- Unrestricted or partially restricted access per 1000 population. Settlements greater than 1000 population should have allotment sites with 1000m of housing
- All design proposals to accord with vision for allotments in Solihull document

### **Quantity standard for allotments**

#### **Quantity:**

- 72% of all respondents from the household survey 'never' use allotments, meaning this is the least used type of open space;
- The existing average level of provision across the study area is 0.09 ha/1000;
- Provision varies by ward, ranging from 0 to 0.24ha/1000;
- The household survey identified 47% of people felt there should be more allotments, however, 50% felt there are enough;
- Consultation with Council Officers highlight that almost all of their (c.15) allotment sites are almost at capacity;
- Consultation with Council Officers also highlights the value of allotments (and other open spaces) in providing access to outdoor physical activity and associated benefits for health and wellbeing, both physical and mental;
- Consultation with Town and Parish Councils has identified the need for additional allotments in a number of parishes – namely Chelmsley Wood, Cheswick Green, Hockley Heath, Meriden and Smith's Wood.

- The propensity for higher density new housing with smaller gardens is likely to increase demand;
- The Solihull Food Strategy and Action Plan (2015-2017) has a number of aims including that food is at the heart of the community and is used as a mechanism to reduce health inequalities;
- It is noted that the previous 2006 strategy recommended a standard of 0.3 ha/1000, the main justification being health and wellbeing, wildlife value and benchmarking with Harlow and Cambridge;
- With the above in mind, an increase against the existing average level of provision is recommended, however it is hard to justify a standard in line with the previous study (0.3ha/1000). Therefore, a standard of 0.20 ha/1000 is proposed for analysing existing provision and for new provision.
- The minimum allotment size in the previous 2006 study is 0.5ha. This is considered to be very large and would make new provision of this typology potentially undeliverable on smaller developments or in urban areas. Therefore, a minimum allotment size (for new provision) is set at 0.1ha, which is in line with the current smallest allotment size (0.118ha) within the study area.

### ***Access standard for allotments***

- Responses received in relation to acceptable travel times to allotments from the household survey identified a mix in responses, with 25% wanting allotments within 5 minutes, 23% between 6 to 10 minutes, 23% between 11 to 15 minutes and 17% between 16 to 20 minutes; and that they access allotments by foot (65%).
- This suggests that people do not want to travel too far to reach their allotment;
- It is considered that the availability of allotments is more important than having them very close to home, nevertheless there is some demand for facilities relatively nearby. Therefore, a standard of no more than 15 minutes' walk time (720 metres straight line walk) is proposed.

### ***Quality standards for allotments***

Few comments were received in relation to the quality of allotments. The household survey identified that 29% of respondents thought that allotments were either good or very good quality, whereas 51% thought they were average. 61% of respondents thought that allotments were either low priority for improvement (18%) or not a priority (43%). Allotment sites were not subject to quality audits as part of this study, this was agreed by the project group as the majority of allotments are locked/not accessible and are generally in decent condition/well maintained.

However, a number of general recommendations are made in relation to quality, which should include the following:

- Well-drained soil which is capable of cultivation to a reasonable standard.
  - A sunny, open aspect preferably on a southern facing slope.
  - Limited overhang from trees and buildings either bounding or within the site.
-

- Adequate lockable storage facilities, and a good water supply within easy walking distance of individual plots.
- Provision for composting facilities.
- Secure boundary fencing.
- Good access within the site both for pedestrians and vehicles.
- Good vehicular access into the site and adequate parking and manoeuvring space.
- Disabled access.
- Toilets.
- Notice boards.

### 6.3 Amenity Green Space

Table 14 Summary of quantity and access standard

Quantity Standard	Access Standard
0.70 ha/1000 population (sites > 0.15ha) (minimum size of new provision is 0.15ha)	480 metres (10 minutes' walk time)

#### **Existing national or local standards**

The Fields in Trust (Previously known as the National Play Fields Association) Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play report 'Beyond the Six Acre Standard' proposes a benchmark guideline of 0.6ha/1000 population of amenity green space, and a walking distance guideline of 480m. FIT recommend that the quantity guidelines are adjusted to take account of local circumstances.

The Solihull Green Spaces Strategy (2006 and 2014 Review) sets the following standards for provision of informal green space (Incidental areas within new developments providing general amenity green space in addition to general green space of 2.86 ha/1000) from new development:

- 0.4ha/1000
- Unrestricted public access per 1000 population with a minimum area of 0.2ha for all settlements with more than 300 people
- General best practice and British Standards (for quality)

In terms of assessing existing provision, the GGS sets standards based on a hierarchy of provision.

The standards for local green space were:

- 1.5ha to 8ha
- Unrestricted public access within 1km of settlements over 300 people

And for neighbourhood green space:

- 0.2 to 1.5 ha

- Unrestricted public access within 400m of homes in all settlements with more than 300 people

### ***Quantity standard for amenity green space***

- Existing average level of provision in the study area is 0.70 ha/1000 population (for sites greater than 0.15 ha in size);
- The household survey identified that 52% of people felt there was a need for more informal open space areas, whilst 46% felt there were enough;
- Provision varies by ward, with some areas falling well below the average, and others exceeding it;
- Considering the above factors, a minimum standard (in line with existing provision levels) of 0.70 ha/1000 is recommended for analysing existing provision and for new provision of amenity green space;
- The minimum size of a space that will be considered acceptable and count towards open space provision is recommended to be 0.15 ha in size (about the size of a mini football pitch). This will avoid a proliferation of small amenity spaces which have no real recreation function. Any spaces below this size will be acceptable in terms of their visual amenity, but would not count towards the required level of provision.
- When delivering new provision, consideration should be given to combining this with the natural green space standard (i.e. a combined standard of 1.70 ha/1000) in order to provide bigger, more biodiverse spaces.
- It is also recognised that there may also be the need to split the provision of new amenity green space on larger development sites, in order to ensure that all residents have access (in line with the access standard below). However, housing developments should be designed to protect and provide a connected network of open space/GI, for people and wildlife.

### ***Access standard for amenity green space***

- Responses received in relation to acceptable travel times to informal open space from the household survey identified that people expect informal open space/amenity green space to be close by, with 53% expecting informal open spaces to be within a 10 minute travel time (of which 27% expecting to travel no more than 5 minutes) and a further 21% expecting to travel no more than 15 minutes; and that they access these spaces by foot (74%);
- Therefore, a standard of no more than 480 metres (10 minutes' straight line walk time) is justified.

### ***Quality standards for amenity green space***

The household survey revealed that almost half (46%) of respondents think that the quality of informal open space is generally average, with 42% rating it as either good or very good quality. This typology was also rated as a high priority for improvement by 39% of respondents.



The audit of provision as well as the consultation has identified the importance attached by local people to open space close to home. The value of ‘amenity green space’ must be recognised especially within housing areas, where it can provide important local opportunities for play, exercise and visual amenity that are almost immediately accessible. On the other hand, open space can be expensive to maintain and it is very important to strike the correct balance between having sufficient space to meet the needs of the community for accessible and attractive space, and having too much which would be impossible to manage properly and therefore a potential liability and source of nuisance. It is important that amenity green space should be capable of use for at least some forms of public recreation activity.

It is therefore recommended that in addition to the minimum size threshold identified above (0.15ha), that all amenity green space should be subject to landscape design, ensuring the following quality principles:

- Capable of supporting informal recreation such as a kickabout, space for dog walking or space to sit and relax;
- Include high quality planting of trees and/or shrubs to create landscape structure and biodiversity value;
- Include paths along main desire lines (lit where appropriate);
- Be designed to ensure easy maintenance.

## 6.4 Park and Recreation Grounds

Table 15 Summary of quantity and access standard

Quantity Standard	Access Standard
1.55 ha/1000 population	720 metres (15 minutes’ walk time)

### *Existing national or local standards*

The Fields in Trust (FIT) Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play report ‘Beyond the Six Acre Standard’ proposes a benchmark guideline of 0.80ha/1000 population for parks and gardens, with a walking distance guideline of 710m. In addition to this they also recommend the following standards:

- Playing pitches: 1.20ha/1000 population with a walking distance of 1,200m
- All outdoor sports: 1.6ha/1000 population with a walking distance of 1,200m
- Equipped/designated play areas: 0.25ha/1000 population, with a walking distance of 100m for Local Areas for Play (LAPs), 400m for Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) and 1000m for Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs).
- Other outdoor provision (MUGAs and skateboard parks): 0.30ha/1000 population and a walking distance of 700m.

The Solihull Green Spaces Strategy (2006 and 2014 Review) sets the following standards for the provision informal outdoor sports (specific pitch provision for rugby, cricket and football) from new development:

- 1.64ha
- Unrestricted public access per 1000 population
- All design proposals to accord with Sport England, relevant National Governing Bodies and Solihull Sports Pitch Strategy

In terms of assessing existing provision, the GGS set standards based on a hierarchy of provision. The standards are as follows.

For principal green space (multifaceted green space with play, sport, landscape, heritage and high levels of community):

- Over 8ha
- Unrestricted public access within 2km of settlements over 5000 people
- Green Flag Award status achieved and retained for each site

For major green space (large open spaces with less defined characteristics. Emphasis of on specialist land use such as nature conservation or outdoor sport):

- Over 8ha
- Unrestricted public access
- Managed using Green Flag Award principles

For local green space (component part of green space network at a local level with varied characteristics associated with play, informal recreation and outdoor sport):

- 1.5ha to 8ha
- Unrestricted public access within 1km of settlements over 300 people

And for neighbourhood green space (component part of green space network at a neighbourhood level with varied characteristics associated with play, informal recreation and outdoor sport):

- 0.2 to 1.5 ha
- Unrestricted public access within 400m of homes in all settlements with more than 300 people

### ***Quantity of park and recreation grounds***

- Existing average level of provision in the study area is 1.57 ha/1000;
  - There is an additional 0.47 ha/1000 of private sports space which includes a variety of uses;
  - The household survey identified that 64% of people felt there were enough parks and recreation grounds (compared to 35% who felt there was a need for more);
-

- The consultation revealed that the priority was for improvements to existing facilities over new provision;
- A proposed standard of 1.55 ha/1000 is therefore proposed for assessing existing provision and for assessing requirements for new provision of publicly accessible facilities. This is in line with the existing levels of provision, and also the FIT guidelines;
- It should be reiterated that this standard is intended to provide sufficient space. The separate Playing Pitch Strategy will deal with some of the detail around pitch requirements;
- Although the importance of private sports space is acknowledged, these facilities are not afforded protection under this study, but are covered under the separate Playing Pitch Strategy.
- A hierarchy approach to provision is not recommended in order to ensure that the standard is effective and simple to apply. In small settlements, more informal amenity green spaces may provide for those communities.

### ***Access standard for park and recreation grounds***

- 23% of people want facilities to be within a 5 minute travel time, 26% within 10 minutes and 27% within 15 minutes and 78% of people walk to parks and recreation grounds. This indicates that people do not want to travel too far to reach their park and recreation ground. It is considered that the availability of parks and recreation grounds is more important than having them very close to home, nevertheless there is some demand for facilities relatively nearby.
- A standard of 720 metres (15 minutes' walk time) is therefore recommended.

### ***Quality standards for park and recreation grounds***

62% of respondents from the household survey felt that the quality of parks and recreation grounds is either good or very good, however 33% also felt they are a high priority for improvement, and a further 35% a medium priority for improvement.

National guidance relevant to this typology is provided in the 'Green Flag' quality standard for parks which sets out benchmark criteria for quality open spaces. For outdoor sports space, Sport England have produced a wealth of useful documents outlining the quality standards for facilities such as playing pitches, changing rooms, MUGAS and tennis courts plus associated ancillary facilities. The Rugby Football Union have provided guidance on the quality and standard of provision of facilities for rugby, and the England and Wales Cricket Board have provided guidance for cricket facilities. It is recommended that the guidance provided in these documents is adopted by the Council, and that all new and improved provision seeks to meet these guidelines.

## 6.5 Play Space (children and youth)

Table 16 Summary of quantity and access standards

Typology	Quantity Standard	Access Standard
Children's Play Space	0.06 ha/1000 population (minimum size for new provision is 0.01ha)	480m (10 minutes' walk time)
Youth Play Space	0.06 ha/1000 population	720m (15 minutes' walk time)

### Existing National and Local Policies

The FIT guidance 'Beyond the Six Acre Standard' recommends provision of 0.25ha/1000 population of equipped/designated play areas, with a walking distance of 100m for Local Areas for Play (LAPs), 400m for Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) and 1000m for Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs). The guidance does not specifically cover the needs of most teenagers.

The previous FIT guidance (The Six Acre Standard) recommended provision of 0.8 hectares per 1000 people for children's play of which around 0.3 hectares should be equipped provision. These standards had been criticised because they are often seen as undeliverable, and can result in a proliferation of play areas that can be difficult to maintain, as well as setting unrealistic aspirations in urban areas where insufficient land is available to provide facilities, especially higher density development on brownfield sites. The level recommended within the new guidance (0.25 ha/1000 population), although lower than previously, is still considered to be high.

The following minimum size guidelines and buffers are recommended by FIT:

#### Playable space (LAP type - need not be equipped)

- Minimum active playable space of 100 sq m (need not be equipped).
- Buffer zone of 5m minimum depth between the active playable space and the nearest dwelling

#### Equipped play area (LEAP type)

- Minimum activity zone area of 400 sq m.
- Buffer zone of not less than 10m in depth between the edge of the equipped activity zone and the boundary of the nearest dwelling and a minimum of 20m between the equipped activity zone and the habitable room facade of the dwelling.

### Teen Play including a MUGA (NEAP type)

- Minimum activity zone area of 1000 sq m divided into two parts; one part containing a range of playground equipment; and the other a hard surface MUGA of at least 465 sq m.
- Buffer zone of not less than 30m in depth between the activity zone and the boundary of the nearest dwelling. A greater distance may be needed where purpose built skateboarding facilities are provided.

The Solihull Green Spaces Strategy (2006 and 2014 Review) sets the following standards for the provision for play and informal recreation from new development:

- Door-step spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation (a small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults): Minimum activity zone of 100m<sup>2</sup>, Unrestricted public access with 60m straight line distance from home.
- Local spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation (a larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease): Minimum activity zone of 400m<sup>2</sup>, Unrestricted public access within 400m of housing in settlements greater than 500 population. Minimum of one site per 4300 population in urban areas.
- Neighbourhood spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation (a larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences): Minimum activity zone of 1000m<sup>2</sup>, Unrestricted public access within 1000m of housing in settlements greater than 1000 population. Minimum of one site per 8600 population in urban areas.
- Provision for young people (outdoor provision within green spaces specifically for 12-18 years. Facilities to include areas for wheeled activities e.g. BMX and ball games e.g. basketball): Minimum one site per Zone.

### *Quantity standards for play*

- Current study area average levels of provision of children's play space is 0.03 ha/1000 population, for youth space this is 0.01 ha/1000 population;
  - Provision varies by ward, from 0 to 0.09ha/1000 population for children's play space and from 0 to 0.03 ha/1000 population for youth space;
  - Current sizes of individual children's play spaces within the study area ranges from 0.013ha to 0.365ha, for youth play spaces the sizes range from 0.005 (a single basketball hoop) to 0.237 (a bmx track) and the average MUGA size is 0.048ha.
  - The household survey identified that 44% of people felt there was a need for more children's play areas (compared to 55% who felt there are enough); whereas for facilities for teenagers 58% felt there was a need for more (compared to 37% who felt there are enough);
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- As part of the consultation Parish/Town Councils identified that there were not enough facilities for teenagers, and the main concern regarding children's play space was quality;
- It is therefore recommended that existing levels of youth play facilities are increased with a standard of 0.06 ha/1000 population for analysing existing and required provision.
- For children's play space a standard of 0.06ha/1000 is also recommended, which includes at least 0.03ha/1000 of equipped provision (existing provision in the Borough is predominantly equipped play). The figure of 0.06ha/1000 population relates to playable space surrounding equipped provision (0.03ha/1000 population). A minimum size of 0.01ha for new provision of children's play space is also recommended, which is in line with the FIT guidance for a LAP type space and also the current smallest children's play space in the study area (0.013ha). This would apply to developments of 50-72 dwellings which would result in less than 0.01ha – also see table 29.
- These standards will result in new children and youth play space provision that is deliverable and achievable e.g. a development of 200 dwellings would result in the requirement for 0.028ha of youth play space, which is equivalent to a half MUGA or small skate park (the smallest MUGA and skate area currently within the study area is 0.019ha).
- The hierarchy approach (LAPs, LEAPs, NEAPs etc.) is a bit dated and it directs developers towards providing standardised play rather than thinking about what is needed locally, and opportunities for more creative play design e.g. natural play and landscape design. A single standard for children's play aims to move away from lots of little play areas with low play value, and providing better designed play areas with high play value in accordance with Play England guidelines<sup>17</sup>.
- It is also recognised that open space (not only equipped children's play areas and youth facilities) provides 'playable space'.

### ***Access standards for play***

- The household survey identified that for children's play space 53% of people want facilities within 10 minutes and a further 31% within 15 minutes. For teenage facilities 40% of people wanted facilities within 10 minutes, with a further 44% willing to travel up to 15 minutes;
- 79% of people walk to children's facilities, and 64% walk to outdoor teenage facilities.

In light of these findings, the following access standards are recommended:

- Children's provision – 480m (10 minutes' walk time),
- Youth Provision – 720m (15 minutes' walk time).

### ***Quality standards for play***

Children's play space was considered to be good or very good quality by 47% of respondents of the household survey, whereas 43% felt they were average quality. A similar number felt

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/design-for-play/>

that facilities for teenagers were average quality (44%), whereas only 20% felt they were good or very good quality, and 36% poor or very poor (compared to 11% for children's play space).

It is expected that the design of play would take a landscape design approach (designed to fit its surroundings and enhance the local environment), incorporating play into the overall landscape masterplan for new development, and could include natural play e.g. grassy mounds, planting, logs, and boulders can all help to make a more attractive and playable setting for equipment, and planting can also help attract birds and other wildlife to literally bring the play space alive. In densely populated urban areas with little or no natural or green space, this more natural approach can help soften the urban landscape.

The challenge for play providers is to provide the best possible play opportunities, and to create play spaces which will attract children, capture their imagination and give them scope to play in new, more exciting, and more creative ways e.g. moving away from fencing play areas (where it is safe to do so), so that the equipment is integrated with its setting, making it feel more inviting to explore and so people are free to use the space without feeling restricted.

Play England are keen to see a range of play spaces in all urban environments:

- A** Door-step spaces close to home
- B** Local play spaces – larger areas within easy walking distance
- C** Neighbourhood spaces for play – larger spaces within walking distance
- D** Destination/family sites – accessible by bicycle, public transport and with car parking.

Moving forward, Play England would like their new Design Guide; '*Design for Play*' to be referenced and added as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in standard configuration. Play England have also developed a '*Quality Assessment Tool*' which can be used to judge the quality of individual play spaces. It is recommended that the Council considers adopting this as a means of assessing the quality of play spaces in their borough. Play England also highlight a potential need for standards for smaller settlements and rural areas where the doorstep, local, neighbourhood, and destination hierarchy is unlikely to be appropriate.

Disability access is also an important issue for Play England and they would like local authorities to adopt the KIDS<sup>18</sup> publication; '*Inclusion by Design*' as an SPD. Their most recent guidance document, '*Better Places to Play through Planning*' gives detailed guidance on setting local standards for access, quantity and quality of playable space and is considered as a background context for the standards suggested in this study.

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<sup>18</sup> KIDS, is a charity which in its 40 years, has pioneered a number of approaches and programmes for disabled children and young people. KIDS was established in 1970 and in 2003, KIDS merged with KIDSACTIVE, previously known as the Handicapped Adventure Play Association.

## 6.6 Natural Green Space

Table 17 Proposed quantity and access standard

Quantity Standard	Access Standard
1.0ha/1000 population	960m (20 minutes' straight line walk time) ANGSt standards for sites above 20ha

### Existing National and Local standards

Natural England Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGSt):

ANGSt recommends that everyone, wherever they live should have accessible natural greenspace:

- Of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes walk) from home;
- at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometre of home;
- one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home; and
- one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home; plus
- a minimum of 1 hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.

The Solihull Green Spaces Strategy (2006 and 2014 Review) sets the following standard for the provision of natural green space (semi natural areas including ponds, meadows and woodlands), in accordance with Natural England Guidance:

- Local Nature Reserve – 1ha/1000: Unrestricted public access
- One 0.9 ha natural green space: Unrestricted public access within 300m of homes in settlements greater than 300 population
- One 10ha natural green space: Unrestricted public access within 2km of homes in settlements greater than 5000 population.

### Quantity standards for natural green space

- The existing level of provision across the borough is 1.58 ha/1000;
- Some wards exceed this level of provision, however the majority fall below this level;
- The household survey identified that 52% felt there is a need for more woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves, compared to 46% who felt there are enough;
- The purpose of the quantity standard is to ensure that wards with comparatively low quantities of provision against the borough average do not lose further space, and also that developments provide natural green space in the areas of need;
- It is therefore recommended that a standard of 1.0ha/1000 population is used for analysing exiting provision, and for assessing the requirements for new provision through development. As with all standards, this is a minimum requirement;
- The ANGSt standards have also been applied in order to analyse exiting provision and identify the gaps in provision. The ANGSt 300m standard for natural green space above 2ha in size is difficult to achieve and is therefore not very helpful in identifying the key gaps. Therefore, a local access standard has been developed (see below). The



ANGst 20ha/2km standard has been applied to show where opportunities could arise for new provision to reduce gaps against this standard. There are no spaces above 100ha or 500ha within the borough, however a map has been included which shows the key strategic spaces which fall outside of the borough (see figure 14);

- Just because a ward may have levels of provision above the minimum standard, it does not necessarily mean these spaces are surplus to requirement (as access and quality also need to be considered);
- The importance of natural green spaces is recognised not only in their contribution to recreation and health and wellbeing, but also importantly in terms of Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity.
- As already mentioned under the quantity standard for amenity green space, when delivering new provision, consideration should be given to combining this with the amenity green space standard (i.e. a combined standard of 1.70 ha/1000) in order to provide bigger, better, more biodiverse spaces.

### ***Access standards for natural green space***

- The household survey identified 15% want woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves within 5 minutes travel time, 16% within 10 minutes, 18% within 15 minutes, 24% within 20 minutes and 27% more than 20 minutes – of these, 54% walk and 38% drive.
- This indicates that people are generally willing to travel further to access this type of open space compared to other typologies, and therefore a standard of 960m (20 minutes' walk time) is proposed.

### ***Quality standards for natural green space***

Satisfaction levels with the quality of natural green space (woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves) are average to good, with 41% of people in the household sample survey rating their quality as good, and 39% as average. Natural green space was also noted as a high priority for improvement by significant numbers (47%) in the household survey. Consultation results also highlight the value attached to certain attributes of open space, in particular:

- Good maintenance and cleanliness
- Ease of access
- Lack of antisocial behaviour, noise etc.

This suggests that the provision of new or improved open space cannot be considered in isolation from the means of maintaining such space, perceptions of antisocial behaviour, and ease of access from within the surrounding environment.

The shape and size of space provided should allow for meaningful and safe recreation. Provision might be expected to include (as appropriate) elements of woodland, wetland, heathland and meadow, and could also be made for informal public access through recreation corridors. For larger areas, where car borne visits might be anticipated, some parking provision will be required. The larger the area the more valuable sites will tend to be in terms

of their potential for enhancing local conservation interest and biodiversity. Wherever possible these sites should be linked to help improve wildlife value as part of a network.

In areas where it may be impossible or inappropriate to provide additional natural green space consistent with the standard, other approaches should be pursued which could include (for example):

- Changing the management of marginal space on playing fields and parks to enhance biodiversity.
- Encouraging living green roofs as part of new development/ redevelopment.
- Encouraging the creation of mixed species hedgerows.
- Additional use of long grass management regimes.
- Improvements to watercourses and water bodies.
- Innovative use of new drainage schemes / Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).
- Use of native trees and plants with biodiversity value in high quality soft landscaping of new developments.

The above should in any event be principles to be pursued and encouraged at all times.

Protecting, creating, enhancing and retrofitting natural and semi-natural features in urban environments is a cost-effective and win-win-win approach to delivering positive outcomes for people and wildlife. The new Building with Nature<sup>19</sup> benchmark quality standards for the design and delivery of GI should be advocated by the council and included within their GI policy where possible.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/about>

## 6.7 Summary of open space standards

Table 18 Summary of open space standards

Typology	Quantity standards (ha/1000 population)	Access standard
Allotments	0.20 (minimum size for new provision is 0.1ha)	720 metres or 15 minutes' walk time
Amenity Green Space (sites >0.15 ha)	0.70 (minimum size for new provision is 0.15ha)	480 metres or 10 minutes' walk time
Park and Recreation Grounds (public provision only)	1.55	720 metres or 15 minutes' walk time
Play Space (Children)	0.06 (minimum size for new provision is 0.01ha)	480 metres or 10 minutes' walk time
Play Space (Youth)	0.06	720 metres or 15 minutes' walk time
Natural Green Space	1.0	960m or 20 minutes' walk time ANGSt for sites above 20ha
<b>Total for new provision</b>	<b>3.57 ha/1000</b>	

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) will be adopted by the Council as open space, provided they have amenity and biodiversity value, but these will be required **in addition** to the open space standards in table 18 above.

## 7.0 APPLYING LOCAL STANDARDS

### 7.1 Introduction

This part of the report uses the recommended standards to analyse provision across the study area. This section provides an overview of provision across the Borough and individual wards, with more detailed maps provided in Appendices 1, 2 and 3. This section includes:

#### ***Quantity analysis***

The quantity of provision is assessed using the recommended quantity standards for each of the typologies where a quantity standard has been developed. Recommended standards are expressed as hectares of open space per 1000 people.

The quantity assessment looks at the existing levels of provision, then uses the recommended standard to assess the required level of provision. From this a calculation is made of the supply, which will either be sufficient or insufficient. Within this section, levels of provision are provided by ward.

#### ***Access analysis***

This section of the report provides analysis of the recommended access standards for each typology across the study area. The maps and analysis in this section are intended to be indicative, providing an overall picture of provision and highlighting any key issues across the study area.

However, the key to access analysis, is understanding the picture at a more localised level, therefore, maps showing local access provision by ward are included in Appendix 2.

#### ***Quality analysis***

This section of the report makes analysis of each typology across the study area – it highlights any common themes or issues that have arisen from the consultation and provides a summary of the quality audit results at the district level. The detailed quality audits have been provided to the Council as part of the GIS database, and maps by parish are provided at Appendix 3 which show the ranking of each open space audited (good, average or poor).

The detailed quality audit methodology, including worked examples of how it has been applied is provided at Appendix 4.

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## 7.2 Application of quantity standards

### 7.2.1 Current supply against the Solihull standards

The tables below show the existing supply (in hectares) of open space for each typology for each of the wards, and also at the borough level. The supply is calculated using the population figures (using 2017 ONS mid year population estimates) for each ward, and the quantity of open space compared to what the requirements for open space are against the recommended standards<sup>20</sup>.

The figures of 'Park and Recreation Grounds (combined)' includes a combination of the following typologies:

- Park and Recreation Ground;
- Outdoor Sport (Fixed).

Table 19 Provision and supply of open space at the borough level

Typology	Existing (ha)	Existing (ha/1000)	Required Provision (ha)	Standard /Require Provision (ha/1000)	Supply (ha)	Supply (ha/1000)
Allotments	18.59	0.09	42.79	0.20	-24.20	-0.11
Amenity Greenspace (>0.15ha)	149.39	0.70	149.75	0.70	-0.36	0.00
Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	336.42	1.57	342.29	1.55	4.83	0.02
<i>Parks and Recreation Grounds</i>	334.42	1.56	0.00	Included in above	Included in above	Included in above
<i>Outdoor Sport (Fixed)</i>	2.00	0.01	0.00	Included in above	Included in above	Included in above
Play (Child)	5.47	0.03	12.84	0.06	-7.37	-0.03
Play (Youth)	1.55	0.01	12.84	0.06	-11.29	-0.05
Accessible Natural Greenspace	337.55	1.58	213.93	1.00	123.62	0.58

Table 20 Supply (ha) by ward against the Solihull quantity standards

Ward	Allotments	Amenity Greenspace	Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	Play (Child)	Play (Youth)	Accessible Natural Greenspace
Bickenhill	-2.08	3.57	0.86	-0.38	-0.72	19.84
Blythe	-0.59	0.15	-13.40	-0.77	-0.82	48.82
Castle Bromwich	-2.25	2.85	-6.74	-0.49	-0.56	8.26
Chelmsley Wood	-1.66	-4.16	-4.96	0.36	-0.48	33.22

<sup>20</sup> For example, for Bickenhill the population is 12,708. The existing quantity of allotments within this ward is 0.46 ha, and the required provision (using the standard of 0.20ha/1000) is 2.54ha. Therefore, the resultant supply is -2.08ha i.e. there is a shortfall against the quantity standard for allotments within this ward.

Ward	Allotments	Amenity Greenspace	Parks and Recreation Grounds (combined)	Play (Child)	Play (Youth)	Accessible Natural Greenspace
Dorridge and Hockley Heath	-1.08	0.09	14.19	-0.08	-0.60	-10.59
Elmdon	0.46	-5.17	34.73	-0.36	-0.73	36.11
Kingshurst and Fordbridge	-1.94	-1.01	14.38	-0.36	-0.65	6.95
Knowle	-0.87	-4.77	-2.49	-0.36	-0.66	7.66
Lyndon	-1.18	-4.02	7.44	-0.31	-0.35	-3.22
Meriden	0.38	3.38	-5.64	-0.48	-0.68	1.57
Olton	-2.18	-0.08	-14.81	-0.76	-0.76	-12.62
Shirley East	-0.84	-4.00	-13.92	-0.65	-0.71	-4.14
Shirley South	-1.15	5.43	-0.72	-0.75	-0.75	-3.85
Shirley West	-2.52	-3.77	-2.00	-0.40	-0.66	-7.43
Silhill	-1.38	-2.09	-19.49	-0.62	-0.75	-7.13
Smith's Wood	-2.56	8.83	-19.84	-0.70	-0.71	-7.42
St Alphege	-2.76	4.42	37.21	-0.22	-0.69	17.58

Table 14 shows that provision varies across wards and typologies, with some meeting the standards and some falling below. For example, there is insufficient youth provision across all wards. This will be an important consideration when determining the need for on-site open space as part of new development/allocated sites.

### 7.2.2 Future supply and need for open space

This section of the report considers the overall requirements for open space provision from the predicted population growth from allocated sites (based on the Draft Local Plan supplementary housing allocations consultation, which seeks to provide 6,670 dwellings) for SMBC. The projected population from the allocated sites is 15,300 (based on an average household size of 2.3 people).

The table below is indicative, and final numbers may change - there will also be development in addition to allocated sites. It also assumes that all open space provision will be provided on site.

Draft Concept Masterplans for allocated sites went out for consultation in January 2019, and it is the intention of the Council to update this document with the new open space standards.

## Overall open space requirements for allocated sites

Table 21 Borough-wide open space requirements for allocated sites (up to 2035)<sup>21</sup>

Typology	Required standard for new provision (Ha/1000 population)	Requirement for 15,300 people (Hectares)
Allotments	0.20	3.06
Amenity Green Space/Natural Green Space	0.70	10.71
Parks and Recreation Grounds	1.55	23.72
Play Space (Children)	0.06	0.92
Play Space (Youth)	0.06	0.92
Natural Green Space	1.00	15.30
<b>Total</b>		<b>54.63</b>

### Allocated site example: Barretts Farm, Balsall Common

The site has been put forward in the Supplementary Draft Local Plan to accommodate 900 dwellings. Based on an average household size of 2.3 people, this would result in a population increase of 2070.

Against the new open space standards, this would require a total of 7.38ha (also see footnote 15) of open space, with the breakdown by typology as follows:

- Allotments: 0.41ha
- Amenity Green Space: 1.45ha
- Parks and Recreation Grounds: 3.21ha
- Play Space (Children): 0.12ha
- Play Space (Youth): 0.12ha
- Natural Green Space: 2.07ha

<sup>21</sup> These figures are indicative, as they do not take account of existing open space provision and assume that all open space will be provided on site, which will not be the case in reality.

### 7.3 Application of access standards

This section provides an overview of access to different types of open space typologies across the Study Area, using the access standards summarised in table 18. The maps are intended to provide an overview and are for illustrative purposes only. More detailed maps by ward are provided for each typology within appendix 2 (see example at figure 6).

It also considers access via the public rights of way network, which form an important part of the GI network and access to open space and the wider countryside.

The maps show the walk time buffers for each open space typology and are created using QGIS and the OSM Tools plugin which relies on the openstreetmap paths and street network to accurately map realistic potential walking routes. The buffers are based on a walk time of 5 kilometres/3.1 miles an hour<sup>22</sup>.

The table below shows how walk time relates to straight line distances and pedestrian route distances. The straight line walking distances do not take into account roads or barriers to access and so the actual route walked (the pedestrian route) is generally further i.e. straight line distances are around 60% of actual distances. The more basic straight line buffer access analysis approach has been used for the ANGSt standards, as this approach is more appropriate for larger sites.

The access maps also show Census 2011 Output Areas (OAs). Each OA centroid is the lowest level of geography from the census which contains roughly 129 households. By using this point dataset, it is possible to clearly indicate those households that fall outside open space access buffers i.e. where the key gaps in access are.

*Table 22 Standard walk times and distances*

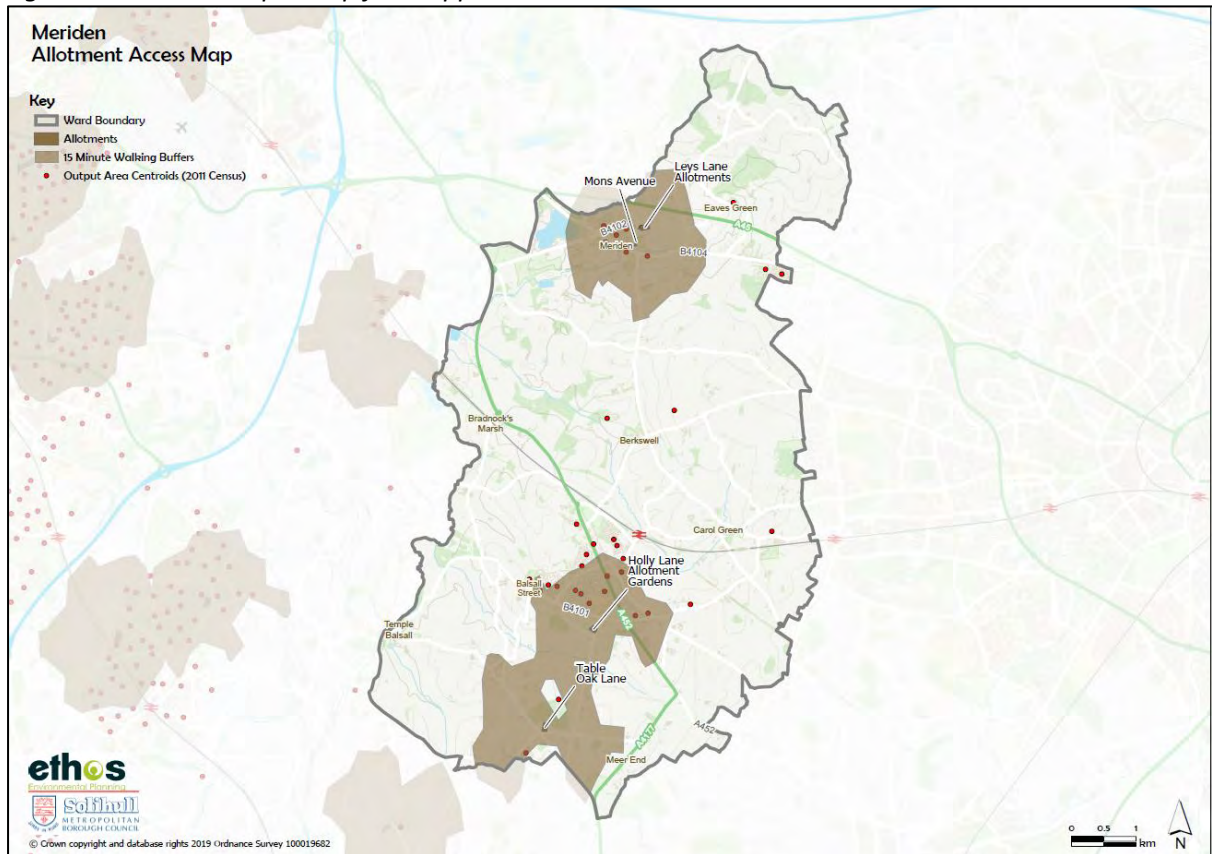
walk time (minutes)	Pedestrian Route (metres)	Straight line (metres)
1	100	60
2	160	96
3	240	144
4	320	192
5	400	240
6	480	288
7	560	336
8	640	384
9	720	432
10	800	480
11	880	528
12	960	576
13	1040	624
14	1120	672

<sup>22</sup> This is in line with the British Heart Foundation state as an average walking pace on country and forestry footpaths: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/how-you-can-help/events/training-zone/walking-training-zone/walking-faqs>



walk time (minutes)	Pedestrian Route (metres)	Straight line (metres)
15	1200	720
16	1280	768
17	1360	816
18	1440	864
19	1520	912
20	1600	960

Figure 6 Example map from appendix 2: access to allotments in Meriden ward



### 7.3.1 Access to open space across the Borough

Figure 7 Access to allotments (15 minutes' walk time buffer)

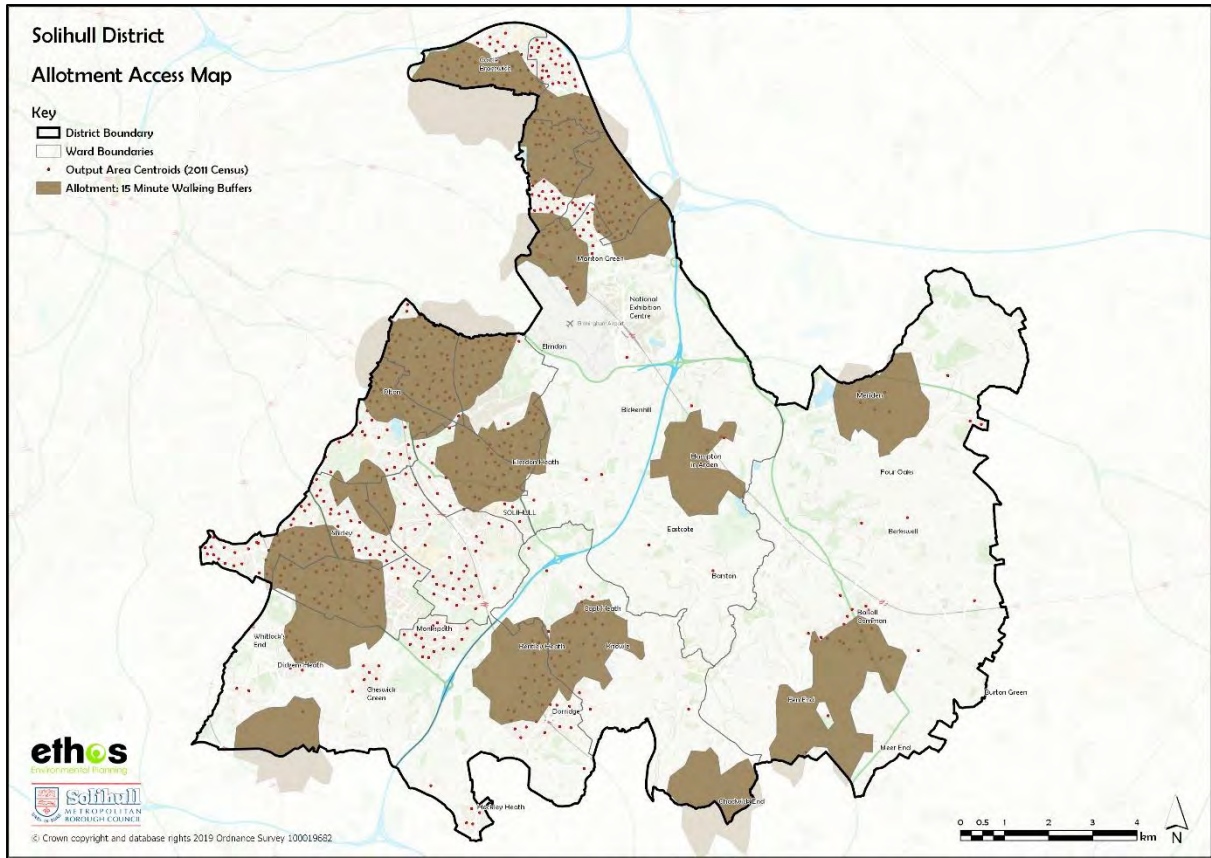


Figure 8 Access to amenity green space above 0.15ha in size (10 minutes' walk time buffer)

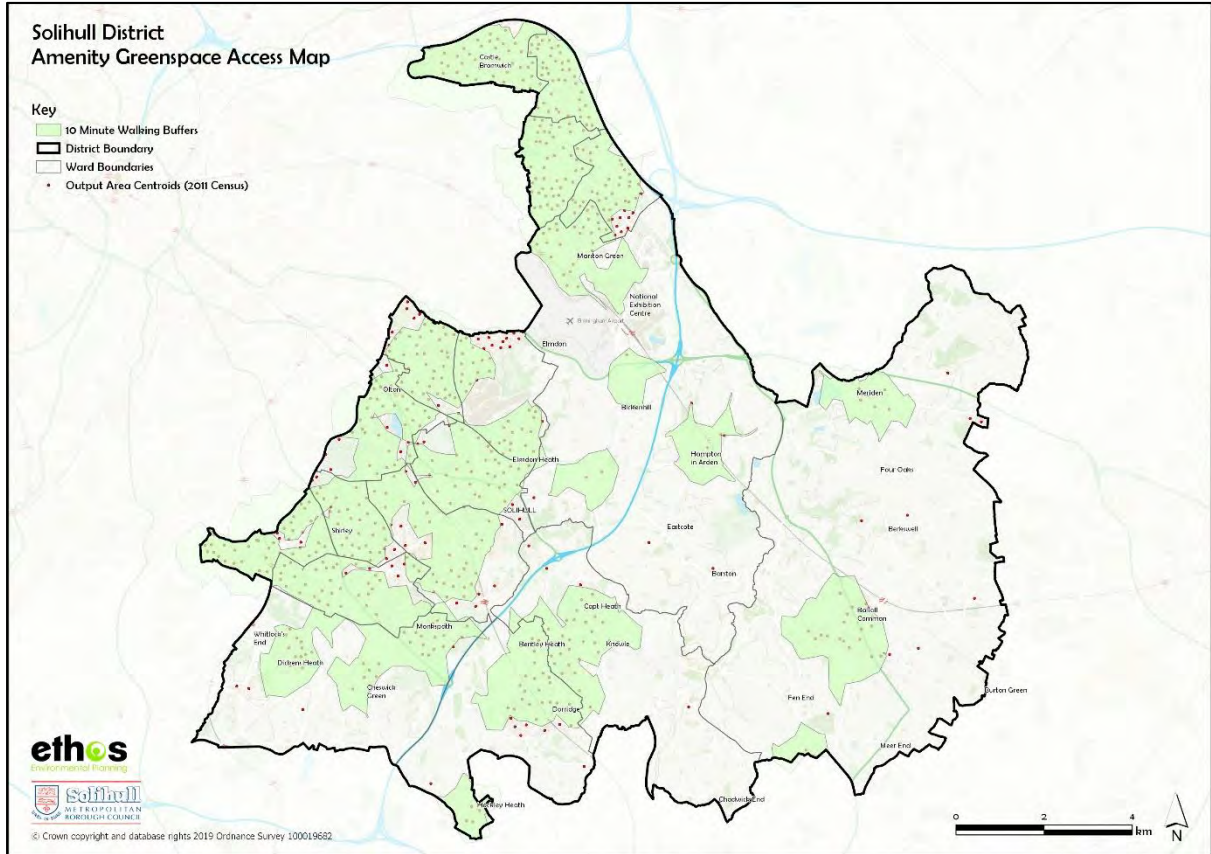


Figure 9 Access to parks and recreation (15 minutes' walk time buffer)

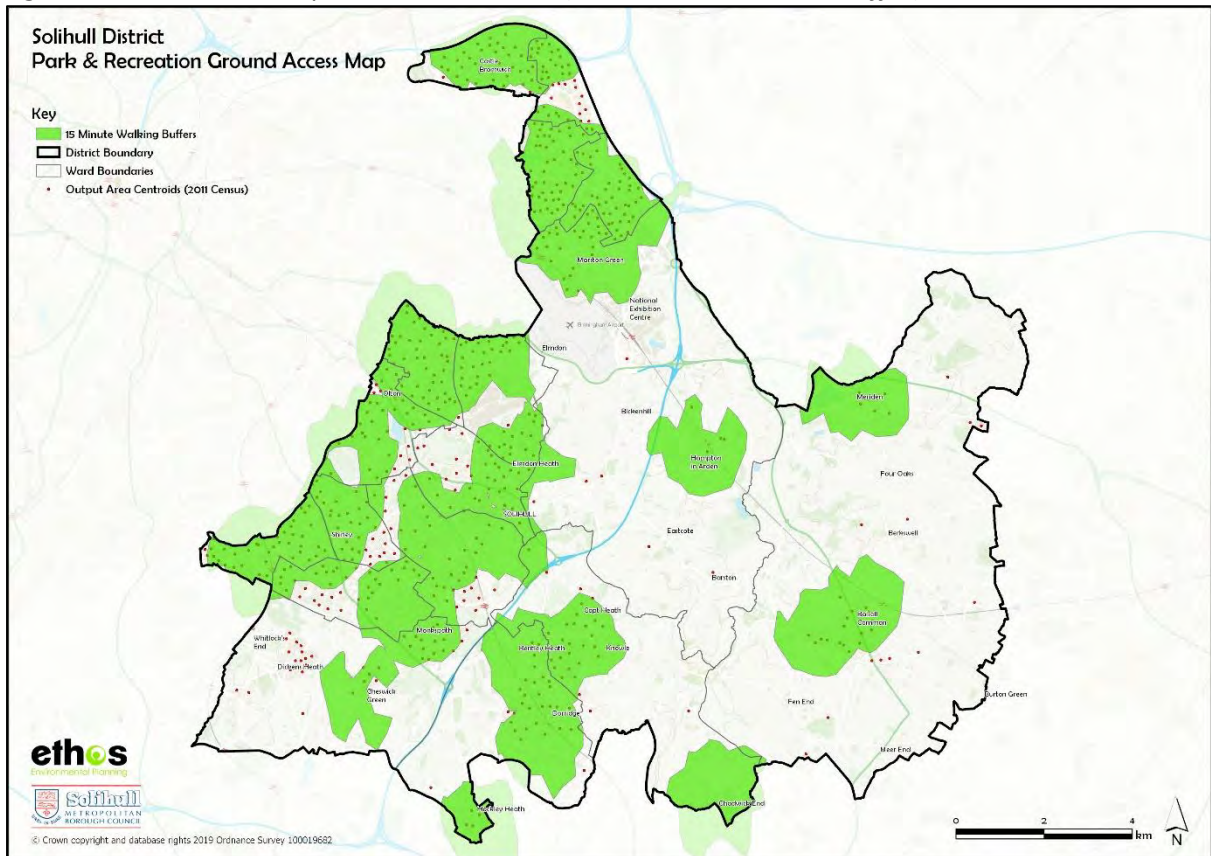


Figure 10 Access to children’s play space (10 minutes walk time buffer)

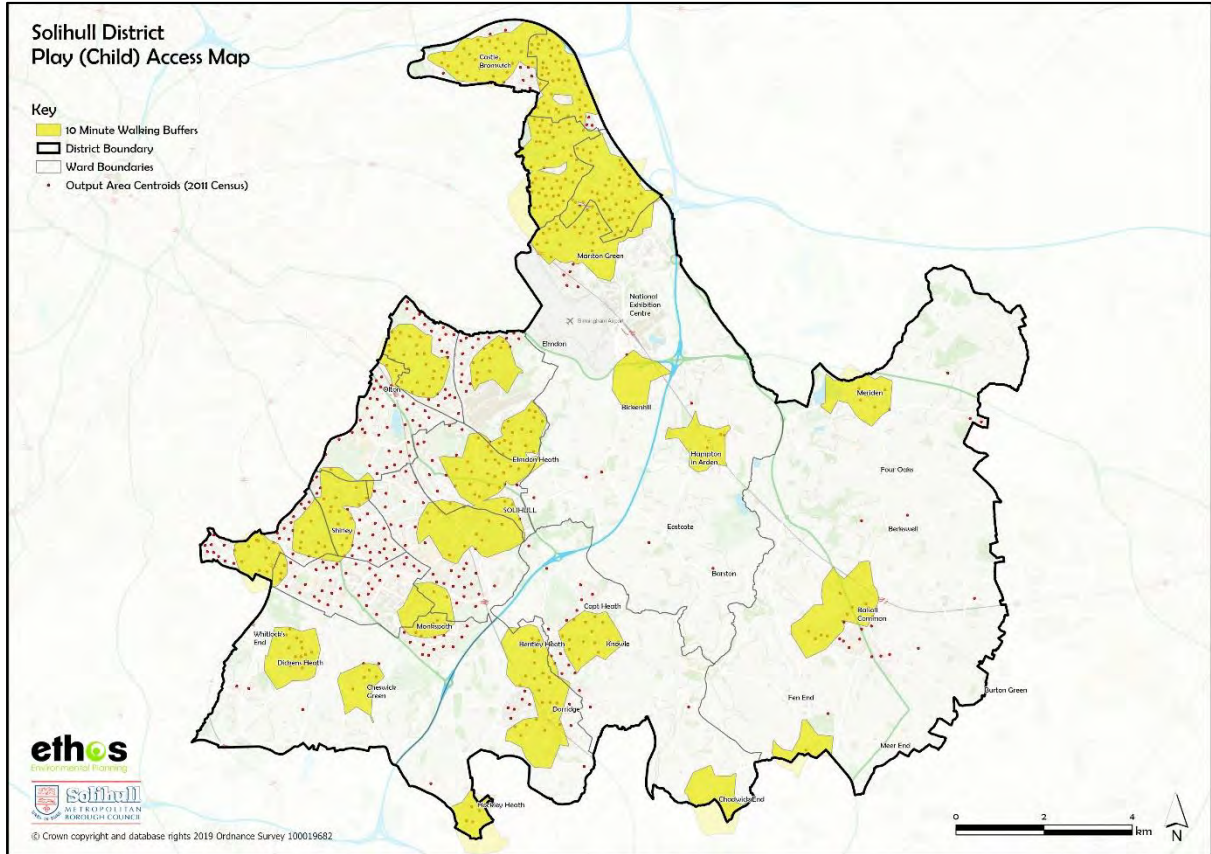


Figure 11 Access to youth play space (15 minutes walk time buffer)

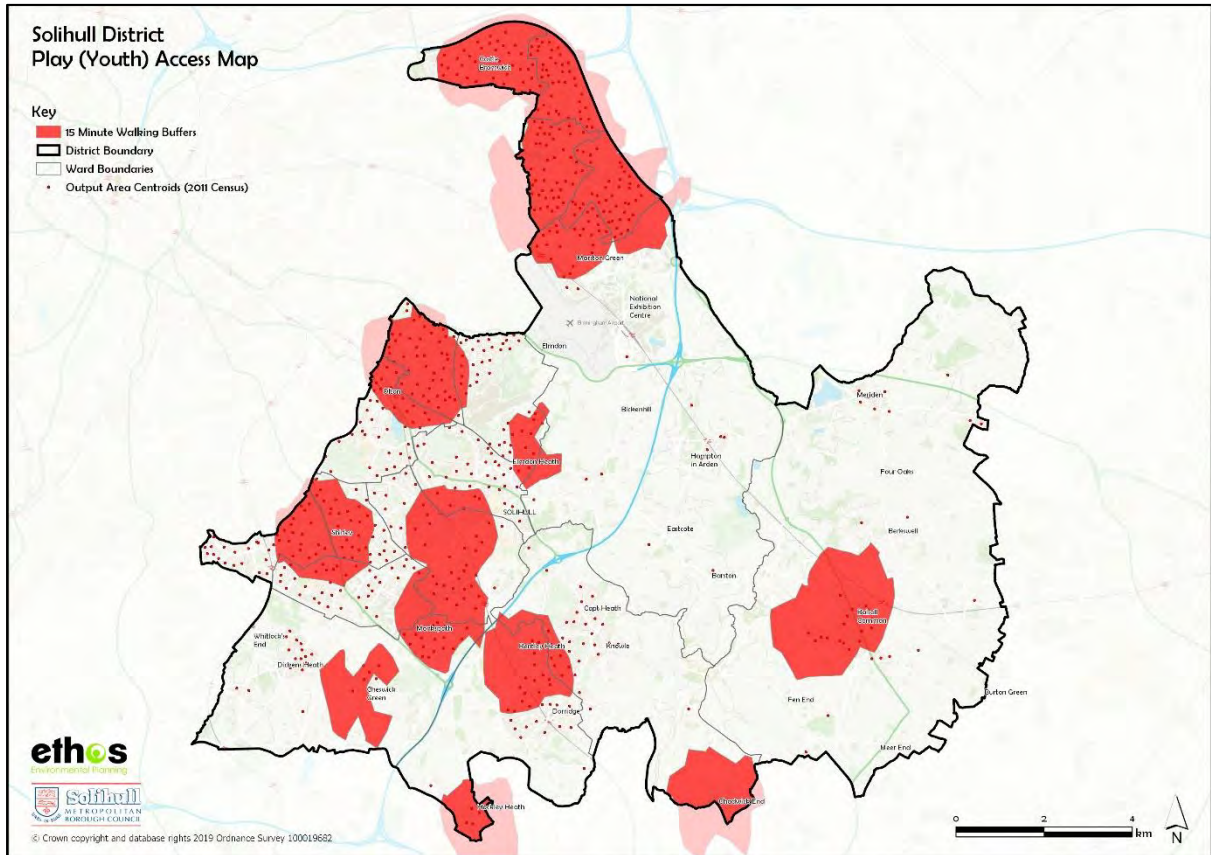


Figure 12 Access to natural green space (20 minutes' walk time buffer)

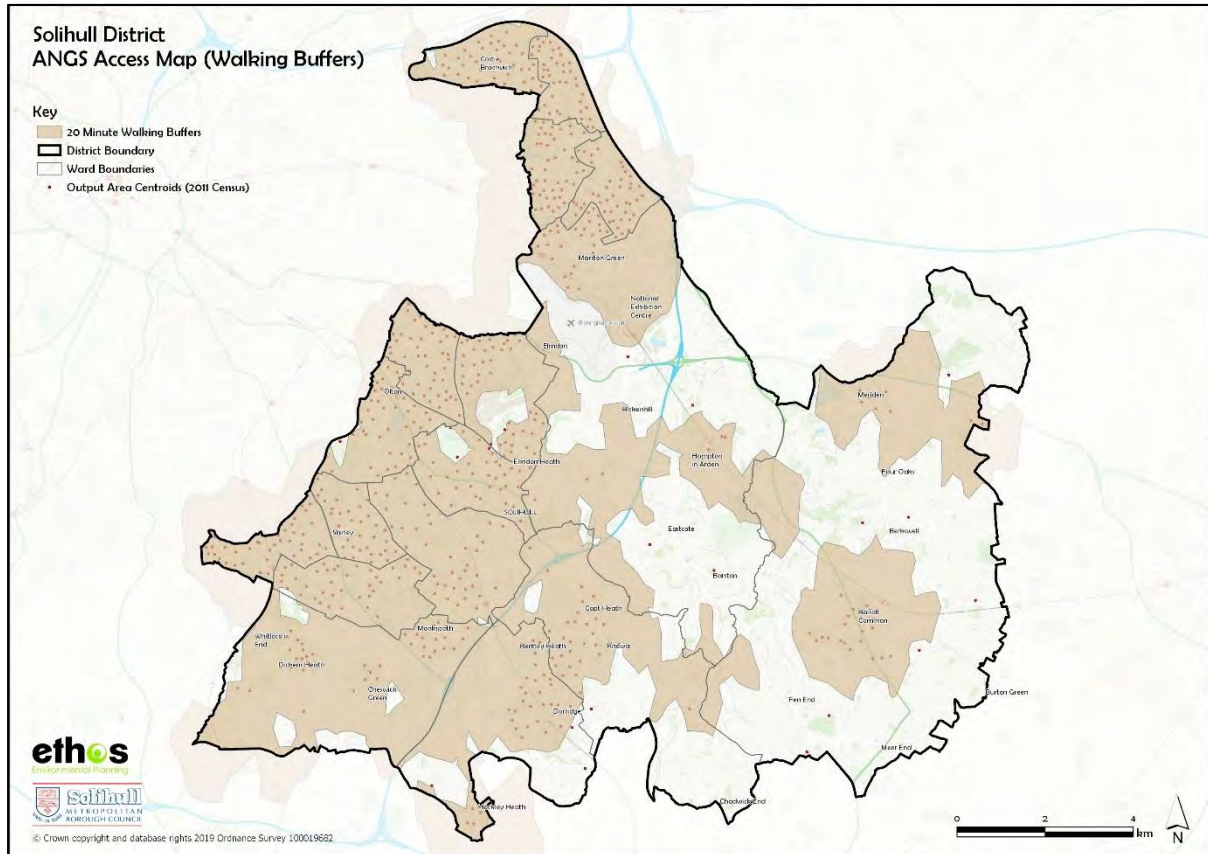


Table 23 Summary of access to open space across the borough

Typology	Key access issues
Allotments	Large gaps in access across the study area, including in Solihull, Castle Bromwich, Smith's Wood, Marston Green, Shirley, Monkspath and Dorridge.
Amenity Green Space	Generally good access across the study area, although there are some gaps e.g. in and around Shirley, Olton, Solihull and Dorridge.
Parks and Recreation Grounds	Relatively good access across the majority of the study area, however there are gaps in access, including in Dickens Heath, Shirley and Smith's Wood.
Play Space (Children)	Relatively good access in the north of the study area, large gaps across many of the wards in the highly populated (western part) of the borough.
Play Space (Youth)	Gaps in access across large parts of the borough, including in Shirley, Olton, Silhill, Dorridge and Knowle.

Natural Green Space	Generally good access across the study area. Small gaps in Olton, Silhill and Dorridge <sup>23</sup> .
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### 7.3.2 Application of ANGSt standards

This section looks at access to natural/semi-natural green space within the Borough through the application of ANGSt standards for natural green space. As already mentioned under section 5.1.5, this typology only includes those natural green spaces which have public access (and not countryside areas where the only access is via the Public Right of Way network).

#### ***Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGST)***

##### **The ANGST are:**

ANGSt recommends that everyone, wherever they live should have accessible natural greenspace:

- Of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes walk) from home;
- at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometre of home;
- one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home; and
- one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home; plus
- a minimum of 1 hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.

As already mentioned, the 300m ANGSt standard is not considered to be very achievable or helpful in identifying where the key gaps in access are (the locally developed standard of 960m/20 minutes walk time has been applied – see figure 12 above), and therefore this has not been analysed. The analysis below focuses on the ANGSt 20ha standard. There are no 100ha or 500ha sites within the borough, however those sites falling close to the SMBC boundary have also been considered.

A map is also provided showing the existing LNRs within the borough.

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<sup>23</sup> However, Dorridge wood provides access, which has been mapped as a park and recreation ground, in agreement with the project team.

Figure 13 Access to 20 ha site within 2km

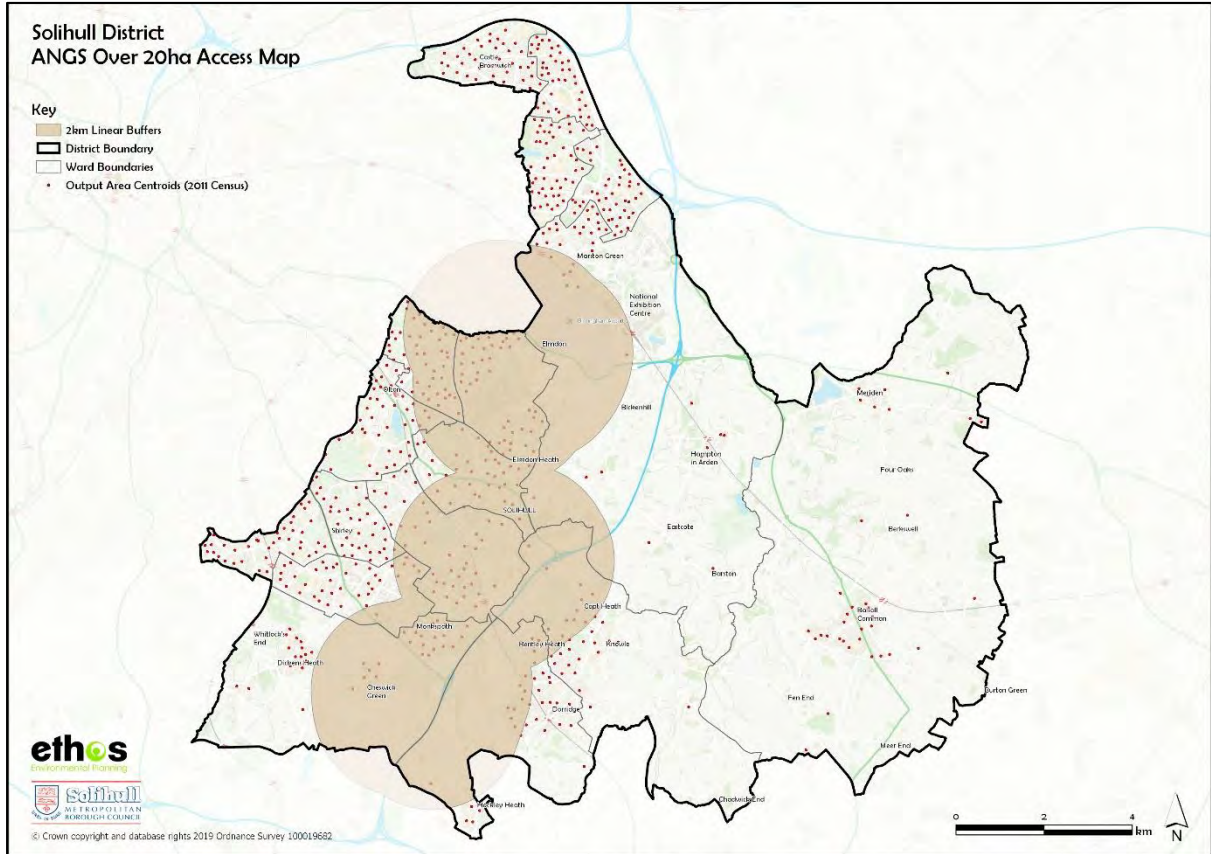


Figure 14 Access to 20ha sites within 2km, 100 ha sites within 5 km and 500ha sites within 10km (falling outside the borough)

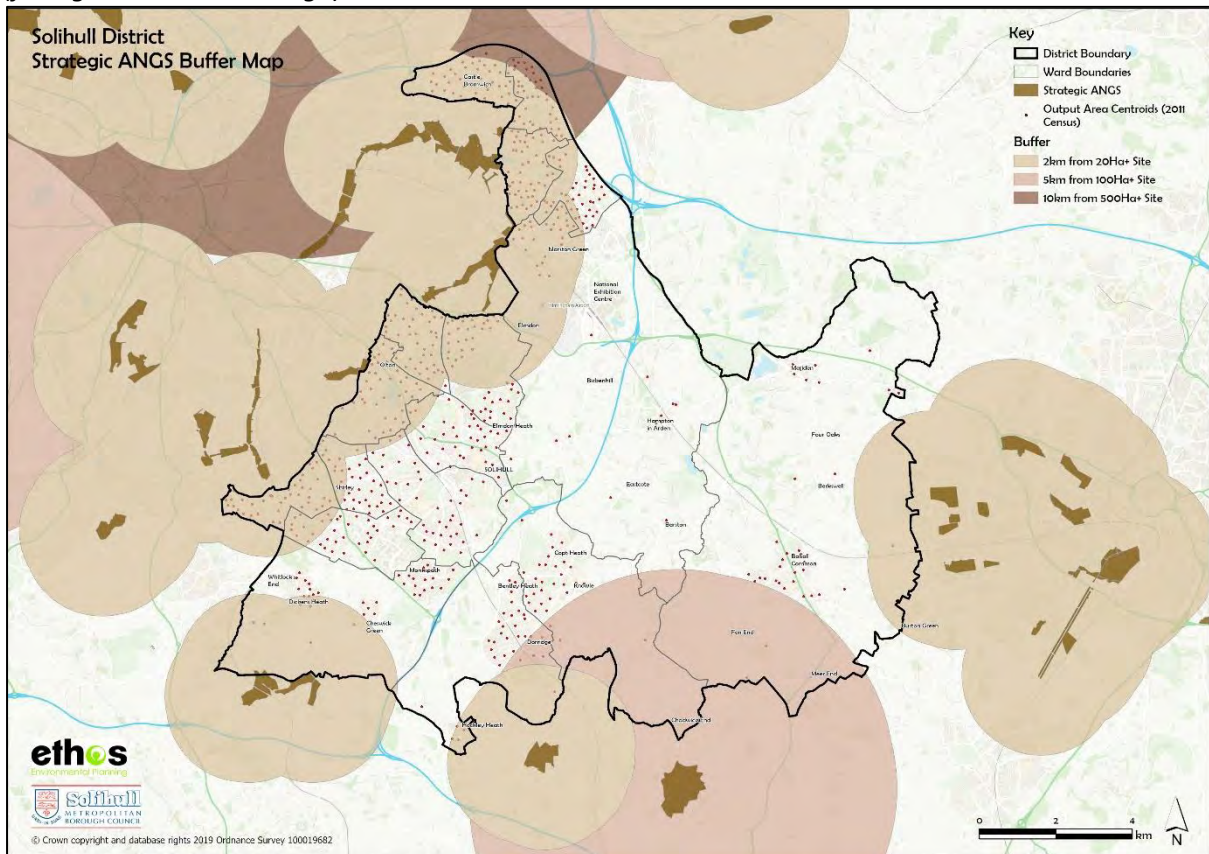


Figure 15 Local Nature Reserves

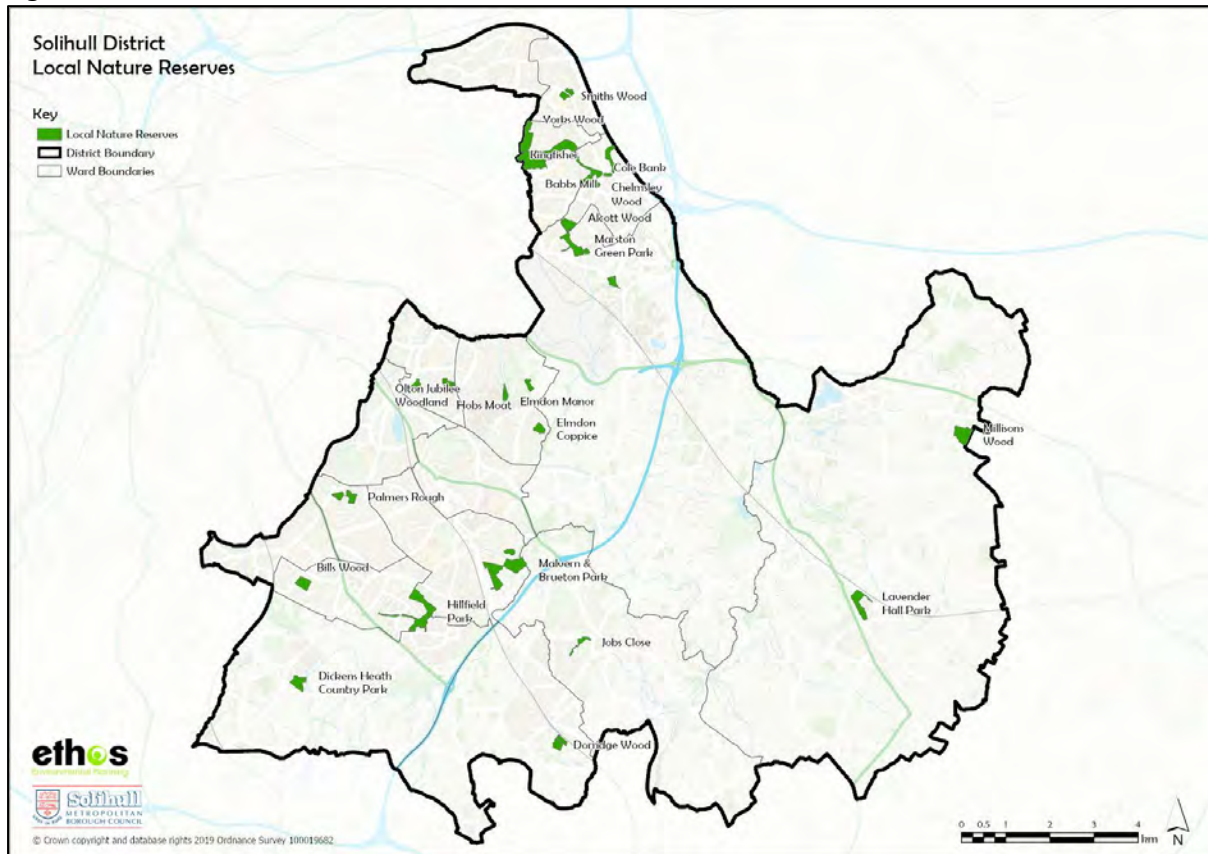


Table 24 Summary of access analysis against ANGSt standards

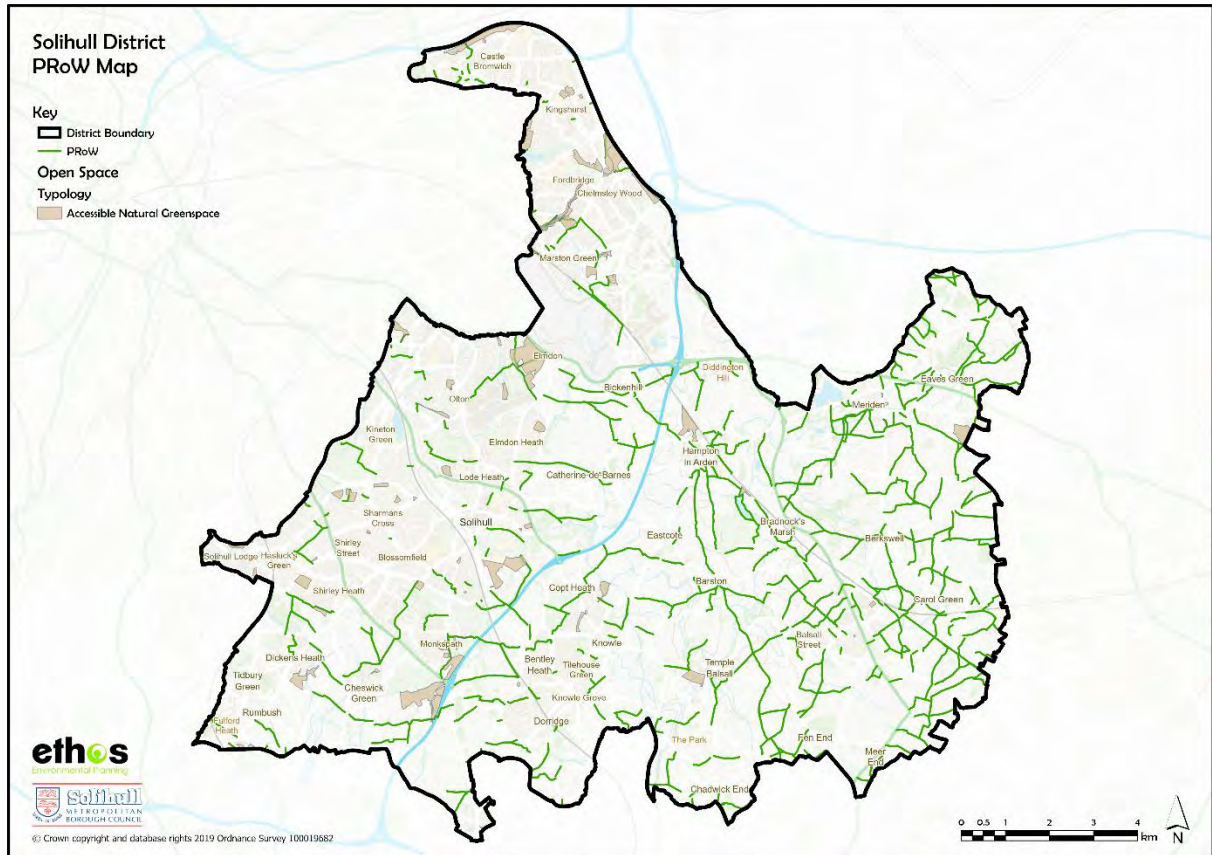
ANGST Standard	Key access Issues
at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometres of home	Generally poor access against the standard when considering sites only within the borough, however, when considering sites that fall just outside of Solihull, there is generally good access across the key populated areas.
one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home	There are no 100ha sites within Solihull, however, when considering large green spaces that fall outside of the borough, there is access to a 100ha+ site for a small part of the south of Solihull around Dorridge and Balsall Common.
one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home	There are no 500ha sites within Solihull. There is access to a 500ha+ within 10km, for the northern most part of the borough (around Castle Bromwich) only.
a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.	There are 23 Local Nature Reserves within the borough (approximately 215ha in total), the majority are situated within the western half of the study area (which is the most populated part of the borough). At the borough level, there are 1.0ha/1000 of LNRs, which meets this standard.



### 7.3.3 Access via the Public Rights of Way (PROW) Network

Figure 16 below shows the PROW network across the Study Area. The PROW network provides access between open spaces and provides an important element of access to/within the more rural parts of the Study Area.

Figure 16 Access to Natural Green Space via the Public Rights of Way Network

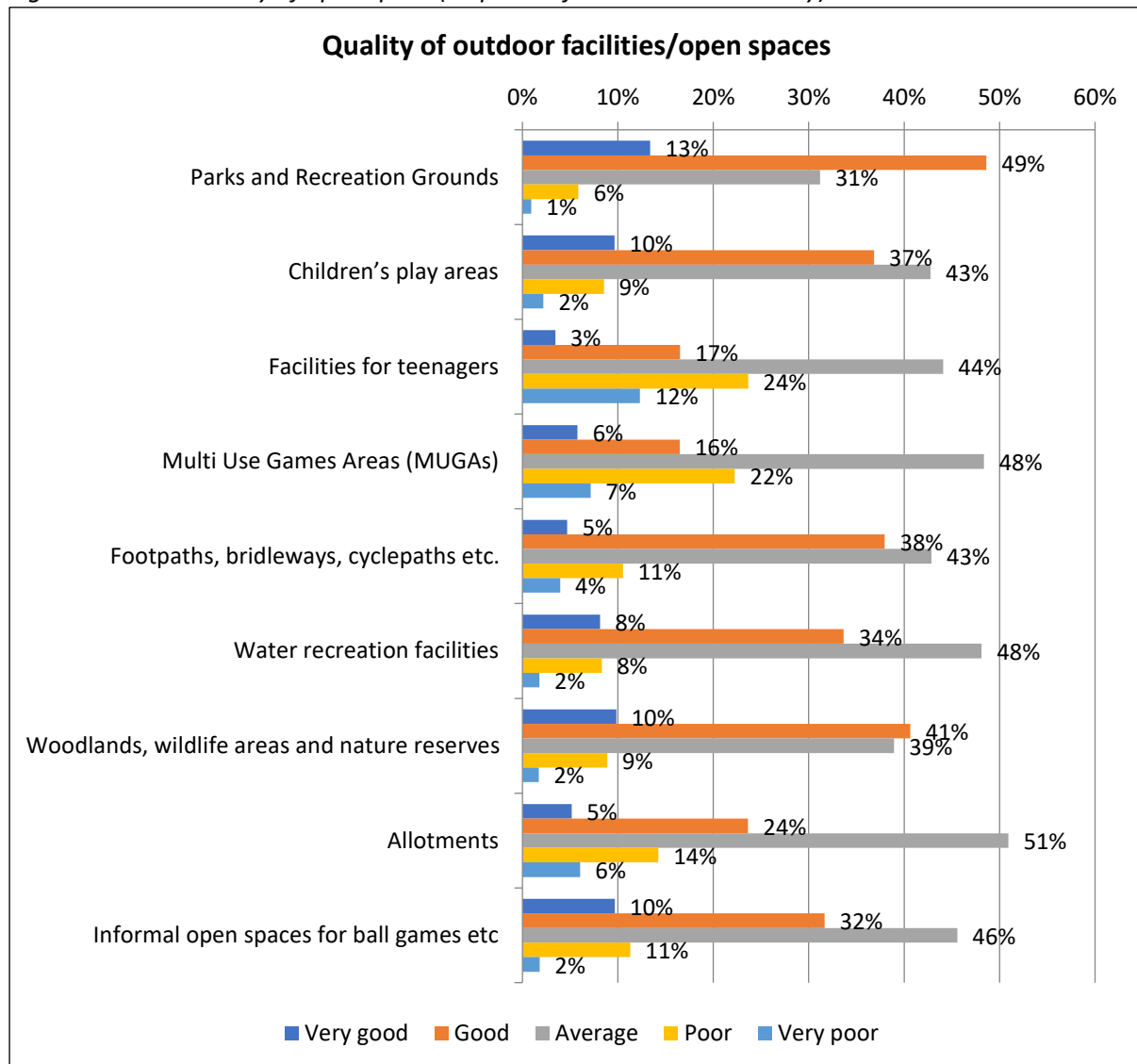


## 7.4 Application of quality standards

### 7.4.1 Quality of open space – consultation key findings

Respondents were asked how they rated various types of facilities in the study area in terms of quality. The responses of those expressing an opinion on specific categories of facility are illustrated in Figure 17 below.

Figure 17 Quality of open space (responses from household survey)



For all kinds of outdoor facilities/open spaces a majority of households suggested that in general they were of average or better quality (though the most common rating tended to be only "average"). However, for some typologies there were notable levels of dissatisfaction with general levels of quality as noted below.

36% of households highlighted the overall quality of outdoor facilities for teenagers as being either poor or very poor compared to 20% rating them as good or very good; and 29% rated the quality of MUGAs as poor compared to 22% rating them as good or very good.

In contrast some kinds of facilities/open spaces were rated highly in terms of quality. These include: parks and recreation grounds (62% rate quality in general as being good or very good); woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves (51% similarly); footpaths etc (48%); and play areas (47%).

#### **7.4.2 Quality of open space – audit methodology**

The audits were undertaken using a standardised methodology and consistent approach. However, audits of this nature can only ever be a snap-shot in time and their main purpose is to provide a consistent and objective assessment of a site's existing and potential quality rather than a full asset audit.

It was not possible to survey all sites due to access restrictions, namely private sports grounds/open space and education sites. Other sites were also excluded due to limitations of resources, these included allotments, small amenity green spaces (<0.15 ha in size, which have little or no recreational value) and churchyards and cemeteries. This has meant that the quality audits have focused on the key open spaces and play areas.

Sites were visited, and a photographic record made of key features, along with a description of the site and recommendations for improvements. An assessment of the quality of the open space was undertaken using the following criteria, which is based on the Green Flag Award criteria:

1. Welcoming
2. Good and Safe Access
3. Community Involvement
4. Safe Equipment & Facilities
5. Appropriate Provision of Facilities
6. Quality/Management of Facilities and Infrastructure
7. Personal Security on Site
8. Dog Fouling
9. Litter and Waste Management
10. Grounds/Habitat Management

Children's play space and youth play space was also audited separately using the above criteria.

For each of the criteria a score of between 1 -10 is given, where 1 is very poor and 10 is very good. The scores for each site are added together and the mean calculated based on how many criteria were scored (e.g. If 'Community involvement' is given N/A for a site, the total will be divided by 9). This mean is then multiplied by 10 to produce the final score from which sites are grouped into 3 categories – good (those sites with a score of between 70 and 100),

average (those sites with a score of between 40 and 70) or poor (those sites with a score of between 10 and 40).

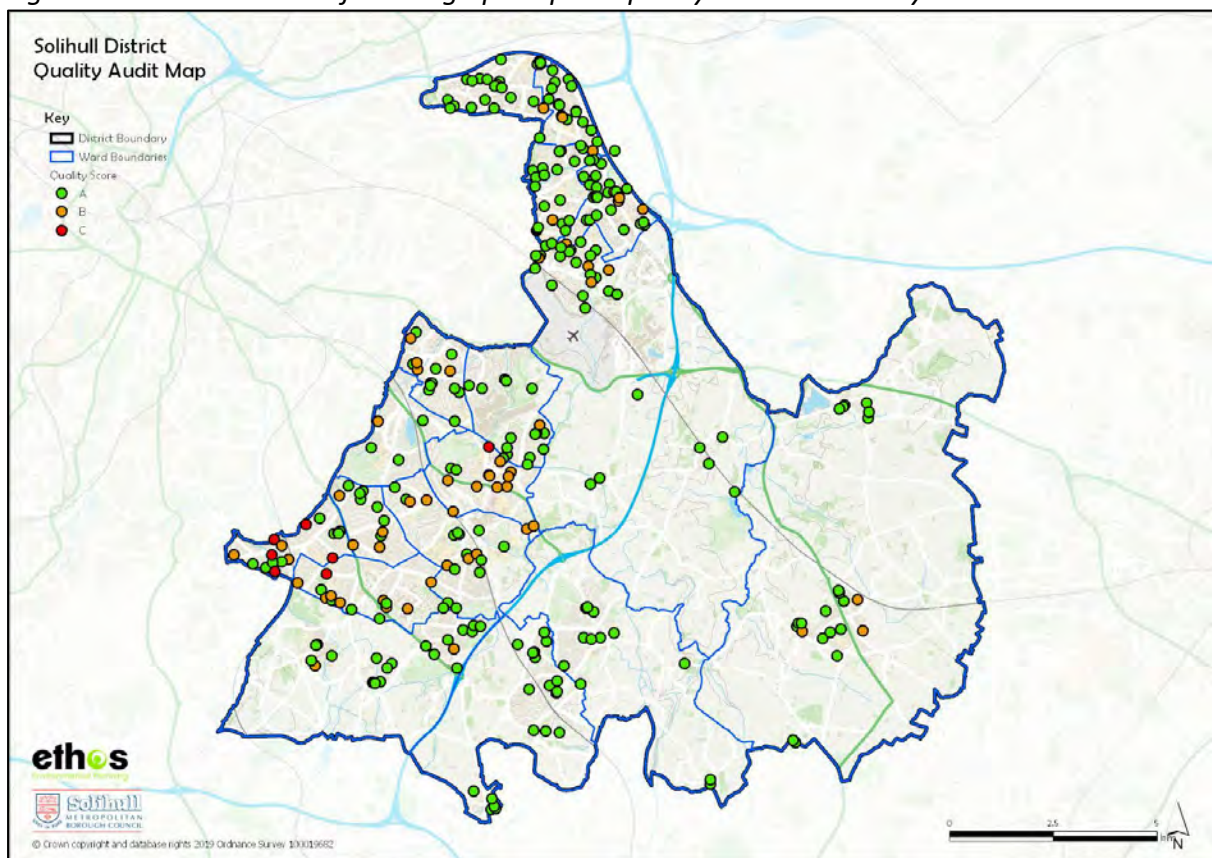
The detailed quality audit methodology, including worked examples of how it has been applied is provided at appendix 4.

### 7.4.3 Quality of open space – audit findings

The quality audit was undertaken at 242 open spaces and 64 children and youth play spaces across the Borough. Figure 18 below provides an overview of the quality audit results across the Study Area. As can be seen, the majority of open spaces were assessed as being of good quality.

The details of the quality audits are contained within the GIS database provided to the Council. In addition, for each of the wards within the Borough, a map showing the results of the quality audit has been produced, showing the sites which scored good, average or poor quality (see Appendix 3).

Figure 18 Overview of existing open space quality across the study area



## 8.0 STRATEGIC OPTIONS, POLICY & MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out strategic options and policy recommendations for open space within Solihull. It draws on all the previous steps of the study to bring together informed recommendations and addresses a number of specific requirements of the study brief.

### 8.1 Strategic Options

#### 8.1.1 Introduction

The strategic options address five key areas:

- 1) Existing provision to be protected;
- 2) Existing provision to be enhanced;
- 3) Opportunities for re-location/re-designation of open space;
- 4) Identification of areas for new provision;
- 5) Facilities that may be surplus to requirement.

#### 8.1.2 Delivering Strategic Options

The NPPF was first published in 2012 and has since been principally updated in July 2018, with further updates following in February 2019. The NPPF sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The planning system has three overarching objectives (economic, social and environmental), which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. Open spaces (provision, protection, enhancement) and their associated intrinsic benefits are key components of all three of the objectives.

Whilst Local Authorities have an important role in delivering open space, sport and recreation facilities, their role may move from that of 'deliverer' to 'facilitator'. The aim will be to work with community organisations to make local decisions about how facilities and services will be provided. Organisations such as residents' groups, voluntary organisations, sports clubs and societies will all have a key role in this.

Although local communities (e.g. parish/town councils or neighbourhood forums) are able to define their own priorities within neighbourhood plans, the information provided within this study will provide a robust evidence base to inform the review of the Local Plan and any decisions related to the provision of open space.

The following sections consider the key issues for open space in the study area, and the recommendations that emerge need to be taken in context with the Localism Act and consider how they can fit into local decision making. With this agenda still relatively new, the following sections serve to highlight issues, but do not necessarily resolve how they may be delivered.

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The information provided within this study will also form the basis for potential future strategies and any open space policies adopted by SMBC.

## 8.2 Existing provision to be protected

The starting point of any policy adopted by SMBC should be that all open space should be afforded protection unless it can be proved it is not required. Even where open spaces are in sufficient supply within a ward, this does not necessarily mean there is a 'surplus' in provision of open space, as additional factors such as the supply of other typologies of open space, the quality of open space and access to existing open space/where new development is planned or the connectivity of fragmented sites (Lawton Review – More, Bigger, Better and Joined up) needs to be taken into account (as explained further in the sections below).

Existing open space or sport and recreation facilities which should be given the highest level of protection are those which are either:

- Critically important in avoiding deficiencies in accessibility, quality or quantity and scored highly in the value assessment; **or**
- Are of particular nature conservation, historical or cultural value.

The quantity analysis, summarised in table 20 (section 7.2) shows that in every ward, there is a deficiency in at least one typology of open space. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

### ***Open Space Policy Direction (protecting open space):***

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| <b>OS1</b> | The distribution of open space varies across the study area, however, there are identified shortages of at least one typology of open space in all wards. It is therefore recommended that priority is placed on protecting those open spaces where there is an existing shortfall of supply. |
| <b>OS2</b> | Sites which are critical to avoiding deficiencies, or making existing deficiencies worse, in quality, quantity or accessibility should be protected unless suitable alternative provision can be provided which would compensate for any deficiencies caused.                                 |
| <b>OS3</b> | Sites which have significant green infrastructure, nature conservation, historical or cultural value should be afforded protection, even if there is an identified surplus in quality, quantity or accessibility in that local area.  |

The importance of privately managed spaces (e.g. sports grounds) as a community facility has been highlighted in this study, although these spaces are not afforded protection through policy recommended as part of this study, as they are not covered by standards. The SMBC Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan (June 2017) provides the basis for policy relating to these spaces.

### 8.3 Existing provision to be enhanced

In areas where there is a quantitative deficiency of provision but no accessibility issues then increasing the capacity of existing provision may be considered. Alternatively, in areas where facilities or spaces do not meet the relevant quality standards, qualitative enhancements will be required.

This includes those spaces or facilities which:

- Are critically important in avoiding deficiencies in diversity, accessibility or quantity, **but**
- Scored poorly in the quality or value assessment.

Those sites which require enhancement are identified within the quality audit that was undertaken. Some of the key observations related to site enhancement include:

1. The importance of providing high quality provision and maintenance of formal facilities such as Parks and Recreation Grounds and Play Space.
2. The need for additional and improved facilities for young people.
3. The role of private sports spaces to some local communities and the need to provide opportunity for investment.
4. The need to ensure high quality open spaces are designed and provided through new development where feasible.
5. The importance of rights of way and natural green space within the study area, and the need to maintain, manage and enhance provision for biodiversity.
6. The role of open space in contributing to wider initiatives and strategies.
7. Extending and enhancing the network of green infrastructure including the connectivity between sites and improved accessibility to existing sites.

Appendix 3 provides maps by ward showing the sites that were quality audited and their overall score (good, average, poor), as identified within the quality audit database. An overview of the open space quality audit scores is provided in section 7.5.3. The following recommendations are made in relation the quality of open space:

#### ***Open Space Policy Direction (enhancing open space):***

##### **OS5**

Where new housing development is proposed, should provision not be able to be provided on site/is not practicable on site, consideration should be given to improving existing open spaces within the ward or neighbouring ward where the development is located. Priority should be given to those sites identified as poor or average as detailed in the quality audit database and the maps at Appendix 3.

- OS6** Neighbourhood Plans and any potential future open space strategies should consider the opportunities for creating and enhancing a Green Infrastructure network, including utility and recreation routes for use by foot and bike.
- OS7** The findings of the assessment make recommendations for improving the quality of open space across the study area. However, a long term strategy for achieving improvements to the wider components of GI is also required, and could be delivered through a strategic GI/Green Space Strategy.
- OS8** The highest priorities for improvement identified in the household survey include footpaths, bridleways, cyclepaths etc; and woodlands, wildlife areas and nature reserves.
- OS9** Management plans (if not already established) should be developed for the main/Principal Parks. These priorities could also be considered in neighbourhood plans and by the local community.

#### **8.4 Opportunities for re-location/re-designation of open space**

In some areas it may be possible to make better use of land by relocating an open space or sport and recreation facility, especially if this will enhance its quality or accessibility for existing users or use land which is not suitable for another purpose. Consideration of the quality, quantity and accessibility of facilities could principally be undertaken through neighbourhood plans, but with recognition that in some cases a wider/higher level assessment may be required.

Such plans could outline the spatial and investment opportunities for green space and set foundations for green space provision (e.g. for the lifetime of a plan period). Plans should outline where different types of facilities and space – such as children’s playgrounds, young people’s facilities etc. are to be located. The Plan should also identify if any open space is no longer needed and how its disposal or re use can be used to fund improvements to other spaces.

Plans should apply the standards and be in accordance with the policies adopted by SMBC (as informed by this study) and seek to ensure that where significant investment is anticipated for green spaces that this is prioritised and realised with the help of key stakeholders and the local community. The standards agreed in this study can determine a minimum level of quality and quantity of green space provision and the maximum distance people should have to travel to access different types of green space.

This study provides information on the existing supply of different types of open space, an analysis of access and identifies local issues related to quality. It will act as a good starting point for feeding into strategies for future decision making in consultation with the local community.

Although it is up to local communities to define their own priorities within neighbourhood plans, the information provided within this study will form a good basis to inform any



decisions related to the provision or replacement of open space, sport and recreation facilities. Some settlements may seek a consolidation of facilities on a single site, such as a new sports hub.

An example of determining the potential opportunities for re-location or re-designation of open space is provided below for Bickenhill ward, considering the quantity, accessibility and quality of open space within the ward. This is purely an example/recommendation but could be used to guide SMBC in applying similar solutions to other wards as required/identified.

Table 25 *Opportunities for 're-designating open space'*

Ward	Existing open space provision	Opportunities for re-location/re-designation of open space
Bickenhill	Shortfalls in allotments, children's play space and youth play space. Sufficient supply of amenity green space, parks and recreation grounds and accessible natural green space.	There may be potential for amenity green space and/or parks and recreation grounds to accommodate allotments or food growing areas such as a community orchard to reduce shortfalls in supply and access e.g. at Church Hall Playing Fields. There may also be potential to expand existing allotments to reduce the shortfall in supply, if the need were identified e.g. at Elmdon Lane. Youth provision within the ward is limited to a MUGA in the very north of the ward, and there is opportunity for parks and recreation grounds to accommodate new youth facilities. Existing children's play spaces could also be expanded, or quality/capacity improved in order to reduce shortfalls in supply. There may also be potential for amenity green space to accommodate new children's play provision in order to reduce gaps in access.

## 8.5 Identification of areas for new provision

New provision will be required where there is a new development and a planned increase in population, and/or an existing deficiency in supply or access to facilities exists. Section 7 outlines the existing situation with regards to supply and access to open space. As previously discussed, neighbourhood plans would provide a good mechanism to determine exactly where new provision is required, however, this study can be used as the basis for decision making, as follows:

### **Quantity**

Within the study report, for each typology, there is an identified 'sufficient supply' or 'under supply' for each of the wards. If an area has an existing under supply of any typology, there may be need for additional provision. This could be delivered through developing a new site (for example as part of a housing development), acquiring land to extend the site or changing the typology of an existing space (which may be in over supply).

The supply statistics should be used as part of the decision-making process in development management to determine if a new development should provide facilities on-site or enhance provision off site through developer contributions.

The use of the quantity statistics should not be in isolation and should be considered alongside the access standards.

### **Access**

This study considers how access to different types of open space varies across wards against the proposed standards. The maps in section 7 (and Appendix 3) show where there are deficiencies and potential over supply of facilities. This information can be used alongside the quantity statistics to determine if new provision or improved accessibility (and connectivity) is required in an area. For example, if a new development is proposed, the maps should be consulted to determine if there is an existing gap in provision of a particular typology which could be met by the development.

Therefore, even though the quantity statistics may identify a sufficient supply of a particular typology, there may be gaps in access/connectivity and thus new provision may still be required.

### **Delivering new provision**

There are a number of opportunities for delivering new facilities through new development – developer contributions and to a lesser extent through capital and grant funding.

#### *New development, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and developer contributions*

SMBC adopted its Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedule in April 2016.

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The Council currently has a Regulation 123 list, which includes which infrastructure items are expected to be funded by Section 106 contributions and which by CIL. Strategic Green Infrastructure can be funded by CIL, whereas the provision of GI (including open space and play areas) required to mitigate direct impacts of development is funded via S106.

The Government has recently responded to its consultation on Developer Contributions, going forward local planning authorities will be expected to publish an Infrastructure Funding Statement on an annual basis. This will replace the Regulation 123 list and set out how infrastructure will be funded via developer contributions.

New development will also be required to provide on-site open space in line with the standards outlined in this study. Whilst not all developments will be of a size that will generate the requirement for on-site open space (see table 29), when considering future housing numbers for Solihull, there will be many that will. This study should be used to make local decisions about where and when new on-site provision will be required.

Figure 19 shows an example flow chart/decision making process to help developers/council officers determine the need for on or off-site provision of open space. This is only a guide and requirements will be determined on a case by case basis using the standards and assessment within this study. Where possible, this should be determined through pre-application discussions with the applicable council.

#### *Capital and grant funding*

Although the availability of capital and grant funding has diminished in recent years, nevertheless funding does become available for providing facilities for open space, sport and recreation. National and governing bodies for individual sports should be consulted where new infrastructure is required, such as changing rooms and sports pitches. Environmental grants and stewardship schemes are available for managing natural green space. As neighbourhood plans are developed and open space priorities are established within these, funding requirements will be identified and delivery through grant funding could be considered.

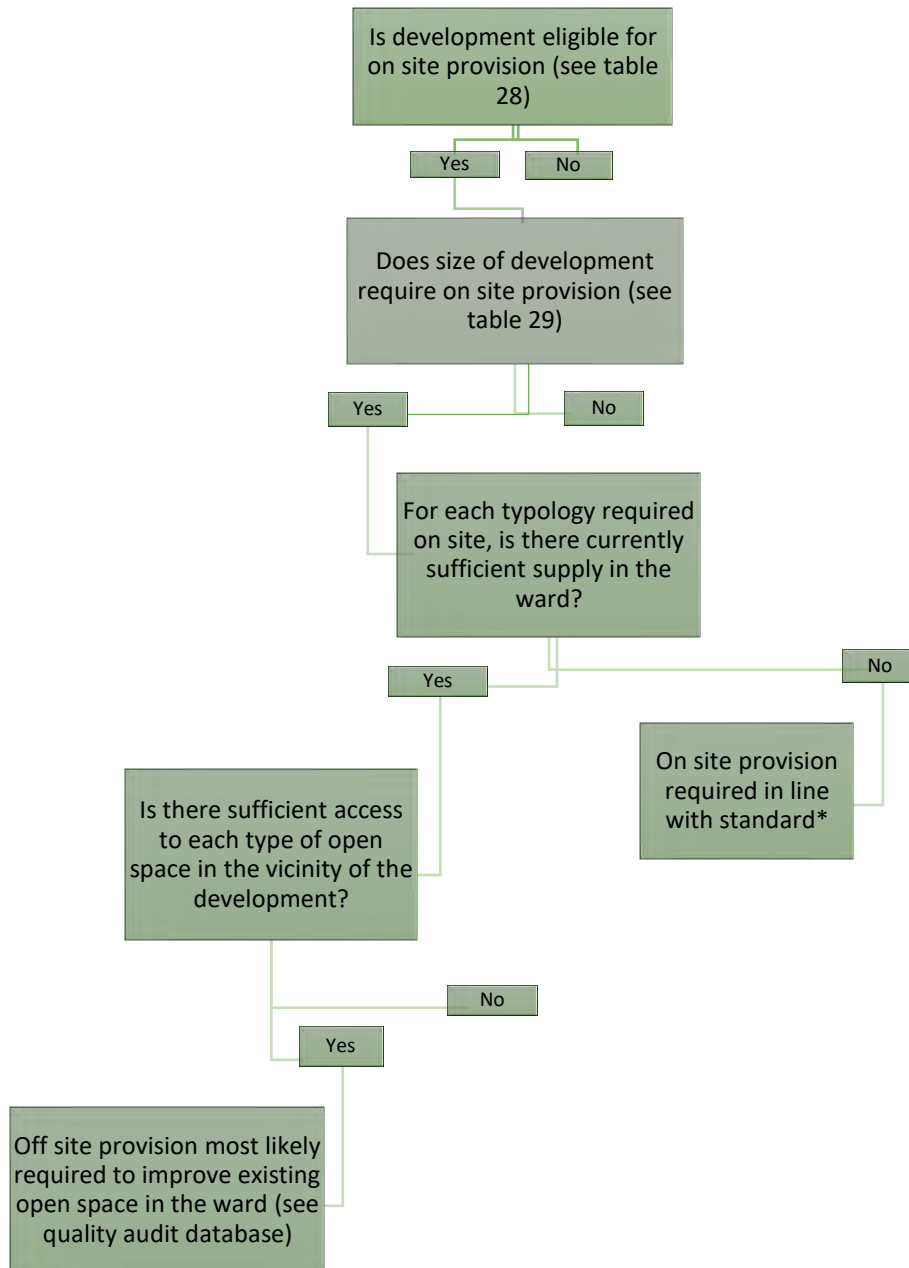
For example, in April 2017, SMBC were successful with a funding application to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to undertake a wide range of habitat and nature improvement projects across the borough. The application was made under the ERDF Priority Axis 6d: Preserving and Protecting the Environment and will result in improved conservation status for 121 hectares of habitat. The three-year programme of *woodland, grassland, wetland and water quality* improvements will be delivered across publicly accessible green space within Solihull. The funding will be used to undertake 28 individual habitat improvement schemes that collectively will increase and strengthen the capacity of the natural environment to deliver ecosystem services across the region. All of the proposed schemes are located in the urban areas of Solihull. The Environment Agency and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust are strategic partners on the delivery of the project.

### *Requirements for open space from new housing*

Section 7.2.1 outlines the variation in supply of different typologies of open space across wards. As identified, every ward has a shortfall in at least one typology of open space, therefore, the starting point for new housing (of a certain size – see table 29 for recommended thresholds) is to assume that some form of on-site open space provision would be required.

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Figure 19 Decision making process for on-site provision of open space, or off-site contributions to enhance existing open space



\*if it is not feasible to deliver open space on site due to exceptional circumstances e.g. viability or land availability, then potential to make off site provision will be considered on a case by case basis.

**Open Space Policy Direction (new provision of open space):****OS10**

New provision of open space will be required as part of new development (in accordance with the flow chart at figure 19<sup>24</sup>). Where on-site provision is required, it should be provided in line with the proposed open space standards.

Where on-site provision is deemed impractical, or not required e.g. for small sites, consideration will be given to opportunities for off-site provision and/or improvements, including through pooling (subject to pooling restrictions<sup>25</sup>) of S106 contributions.

Improvements to existing open space will be considered first in the ward within which the development is located, then in open spaces in neighbouring wards. open spaces requiring improvements will be identified using the results from the quality audits (those sites which were assessed as being of poor or average quality being the highest priority) and also from site management plans and the council's own knowledge of their sites.

## 8.6 Facilities that are surplus to requirement

In addition to the strategic options outlined above, consideration should also be given to facilities that are surplus to requirement. There are important issues to resolve in terms of getting the correct balance of open space across the study area before any disposal can be contemplated. Whilst there is under provision relative to the minimum standards in several areas, there are other areas where provision compares favourably with the standards. However, it is once again emphasised that the proposed standards are for *minimum* levels of provision. Particularly in relation to Natural Green Space, where the supply exceeds the quantity standard, this does not mean it is surplus to requirement as the site may form an important part of the GI network and have biodiversity value e.g. Elmdon Nature Park is one of the few 'bigger, better, connected' sites within the Borough. Factors to be taken into account before any decision to release open space for alternative uses can be taken include:

- The local value and use of a given open space - as it may be a locally popular resource.
- Whether future local development/population growth might generate additional demands for open space.
- Whether there is a demonstrable need for some other type of open space within the locality that a given space (subject to a change of management regime) would be well placed to meet.

<sup>24</sup> Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) will be adopted by the Council as open space, provided they have amenity and biodiversity value, but these will be required **in addition** to the open space standards in table 18.

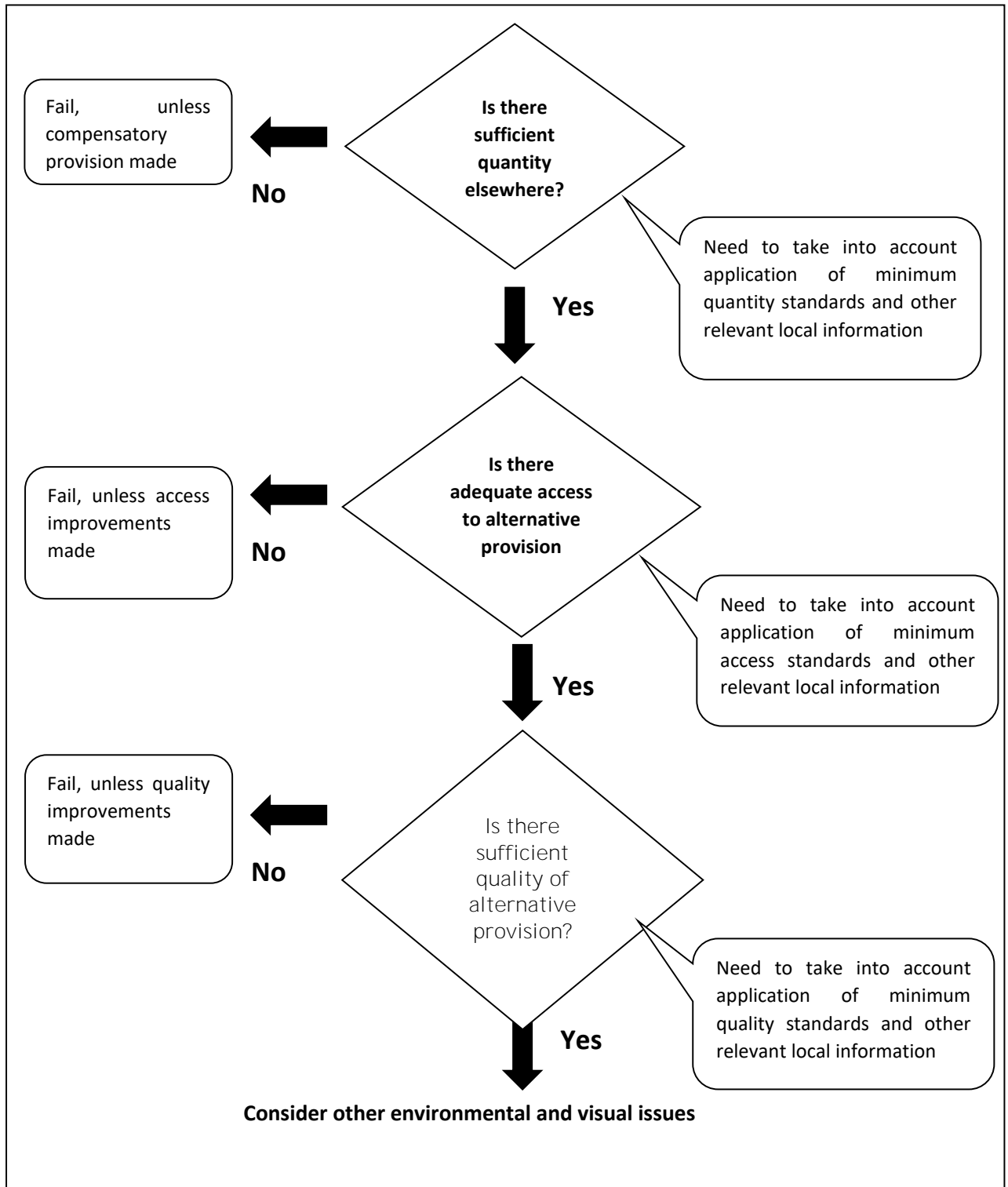
<sup>25</sup> The CIL regulations currently restrict the pooling of Section 106 contributions to no more than five obligations towards the provision of new infrastructure – however, the Government have proposed that this restriction is lifted, so this may change in the near future:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developer-contributions-reform-technical-consultation>

- Other non-recreational reasons that suggest a space should be retained (which might include ecological, conservation of the historic environment, landscape character/local distinctiveness and/or and visual amenity reasons).

Figure 20 and the associated paragraphs below suggests an outline of the decision process that should be followed before the development/alternative use of an open space can be seriously contemplated.

Figure 20: Outline decision making process in relation to sanctioning (re)development of open space





**Q. Is there sufficient quantity?**

**A.** If the minimum quantitative standard for amenity green space is exceeded in a defined geographical area, the relative provision of other forms of open space must then be considered. (Amenity green space can in principle be converted into other forms of open space where the need arises). If a) provision meets the minimum quantitative standard; b) there is no significant local information suggesting a need to retain the site; and, c) there is not a perceived lack of other forms of open space. The next question can be addressed.

**Q. Is there adequate access to alternative provision?**

**A.** Within the defined geographical area there may be good overall provision of amenity green space relative to the quantity standard, but is it in the right place and can it be easily reached? Applying the accessibility component of the minimum standards will help to answer this question. If other similar open space cannot be easily reached, the site's disposal for other uses may be unacceptable.

**Q. Are other accessible and similar opportunities elsewhere of sufficient quality?**

**A.** If it can be demonstrated that alternative opportunities are sufficient both in quantity and accessibility, there may still exist issues with the quality of these alternative provisions. The quality component of the proposed standards may indicate that certain improvements to alternative opportunities must be made which should be funded and secured before development is permitted.

The quality audit provided as part of this study provides a useful framework for identifying and prioritising open spaces that require improvements as identified at the time of the assessment. Those open spaces which have existing quality scores of C or D (moderate/poor), and 'potential' scores of A, B or C have the highest potential for improvement. If existing open spaces in the vicinity of new development are of poor/moderate quality, then funding for their improvement (e.g. access improvements, signage, improvements to facilities and/or habitats – as recommended in the quality audit database provided to SMBC) would need to be secured before any 'surplus' in a particular open space typology could be considered.

Even if these three tests are passed there may be other reasons for the site to remain as open space. For example, it may have value as a natural habitat or be visually or historically important. Such considerations are important, but beyond the scope of this report.

## 8.7 Developer Contributions

This section draws on the policy recommendations in the previous section and outlines a process for calculating developer contributions for on and off site provision.

### 8.7.1 Developer Contributions and CIL

This section sets out higher level strategic recommendations and recommends an approach to developer contributions which can be used to inform policy for both on-site and off-site contributions.

#### 1) *Capital cost of providing open space (on and off site).*

In order to calculate developer contributions for facilities, a methodology has been adopted which calculates how much it would cost SMBC to provide them. These costs have been calculated by Ethos Environmental Planning using Spon's<sup>26</sup>. A summary of the costs are outlined in table 26 below. These are guidance costs (at the time of writing this report), which may be adopted by SMBC, however up-to-date costings may also be considered from other sources and may include indexation to cover inflation.

Contributions towards the provision or improvement of open space are calculated using the capital cost of provision. The same charges apply to both provision of new facilities and the upgrading/improvement of existing facilities, which more often than not includes new provision. Contribution per person is therefore taken to be a reasonable measure of that impact, irrespective of whether new provision or improvement of existing facilities is required. The calculated costs have drawn on the standards of provision summarised in table 18. These are estimated costs that will be reviewed by the council.

Table 26 *Costs for providing open space*

Typology	Standard (m <sup>2</sup> ) per person	Cost of provision	
		Cost / m <sup>2</sup>	Contribution per person
Allotments	2	£22.34	£44.68
Parks and Recreation grounds	16	£92.94	£1487.04
Play Space (Children)	0.3	£168.76	£50.63
Play Space (Youth)	0.3	£168.76	£50.63
Amenity green space	7	£20.24	£141.68
Natural green space	10	£20.24	£202.40
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.60</b>		<b>£1977.06</b>

<sup>26</sup> Spon's Architects' and Builders' Price Book 2017

Table 26 shows that it costs £1977.06 per person to provide new open space to meet the Solihull standard for open space in full<sup>27</sup>. These calculations may be used to calculate developer contributions for on-site provision and where required for off site contributions. Costs should be updated at least annually to account for inflation based on the Bank of England inflation rate.

## 2) **Maintenance Contributions for on-site provision**

Where new open space is provided, the developer would be expected to provide the open space and either maintain the open space through a management company, or if, the site is to be adopted by the Local Authority, then maintenance fees of at least 10 years will be included in the Section 106 legal agreement. If the open space is maintained by a Management Company then the open space should also meet accessibility standards and be publicly accessible in perpetuity. It is expected that a management plan for the open space would be submitted and approved by the council as a planning condition or part of the legal agreement. Details of how the Management Company will be established and managed, and the provisions put in place should the management company fail etc. would also need to be approved by the council.

In the event that the open space would be adopted by the council/parish council, they may be willing to accept a commuted sum and make arrangements for management of the open space. The amount payable for the commuted sum will be calculated using the figures in table 27. These figures do not include professional fees, monitoring, inspection costs, set up costs and admin etc.

*Table 27 Maintenance costs for open space*

<b>Typology</b>	<b>Cost/sq m per annum</b>
Play Space (Children's and Youth Provision)	£4.59
Parks and Recreation Grounds	£4.59
Amenity and Natural Green Space	£0.62
Allotments	£0.13

The figures in table 27 provide guidance on how much it costs to maintain open space per metre squared. The costs have been provided from maintenance costs estimated by Ethos Environmental Planning. An inflation rate based on the Bank of England inflation rate should be applied.

## 2) **Eligible types of development for on-site provision**

Table 28 acts as a guide showing the types of housing that could be considered eligible for making contributions towards open space to meet the needs of future occupants.

<sup>27</sup> These costs do not include land costs or professional fees such as contract administration, maintenance and handover. The cost of provision for parks and recreation grounds does not include the cost of providing playing pitches or fixed facilities such as tennis or bowls, which are additional costs and would need to be agreed in addition to the open space costs. Costs of a range of types of facilities are set out in Sport England's Kitbag Facility Costs: <https://www.sportengland.org/media/13346/facility-costs-q2-18.pdf>

Table 28 Eligible types of residential development

Category	Open Market Housing / Flats	Housing for the active elderly	Permanent mobile homes
Play Space	✓	×	✓
Outdoor Sports Space	✓	✓	✓
Parks and Gardens	✓	✓	✓
Amenity Open Space	✓	✓	✓
Natural Green Space	✓	✓	✓
Allotments	✓	✓	✓

#### 4) Thresholds for provision

The required open space, sport and recreation facilities should in the first instance be provided on-site, with off-site provision/contributions only to be considered where on-site provision is not possible/practicable. In some cases, provision (i.e. strategic provision, where funding needs to be pooled) could be delivered through funds collected via CIL (if included on the CIL Regulation 123 list). Otherwise, off-site provision would be via developer contributions (subject to pooling restrictions) – the developer will not pay for both CIL and S106 for the same type of infrastructure (known as ‘double dipping’). Where facilities are to be provided on-site, the SMBC will expect the developer to provide the land for the facility and either:

- Design and build the provision to the satisfaction of the Council; or
- Make a financial contribution to the Council so that it may arrange for the construction and development of the required facility.

The decision on whether facility provision is to be on-site, off-site or both depends on the following considerations<sup>28</sup>:

- The scale of the proposed development and site area;
- The suitability of a site reflecting, for example, its topography or flood risk;
- The existing provision of facilities within the neighbourhood and/or the sub area;
- Other sites in the neighbourhood where additional provision is proposed; and
- Existing access to facilities within the ward/neighbourhood.
- Additional natural capital benefits and the ecosystem services it provides to people such as air quality regulation and climate regulation.

Table 29 provides a guide to assess which scales development sites generate a need for facilities in the categories listed to be provided on-site. The flow chart at figure 19 should also be referred to, as it shows how the quantity, accessibility and quality analysis needs to be taken into account e.g. if a development is of a size that generates the need for on-site provision of open space, if there is sufficient provision (quantity and access) of an open space typology within the vicinity, then consideration will be given to improving existing facilities as an alternative to new on-site provision.

<sup>28</sup> Also see flow chart at Figure 19

The minimum size of amenity green space considered acceptable as part of new development on-site is 0.15ha. Therefore, developments that require on-site provision, but which would result in less than 0.15ha of amenity green space against the standard, would still be expected to provide for a minimum of 0.15ha on-site (depending on site circumstances and context), in order to avoid a proliferation of small amenity spaces with limited recreational value.

While table 29 acts as a useful guide to the recommended types of provision in relation to the size of a scheme, each proposal will still be considered on a site by site basis, with on-site provision always to be considered as the first solution.

*Table 29 Requirement for open space, sport and recreation facilities*

Type of Provision	6-19 dwellings	20-49 dwellings	50-99 dwellings	100 – 199 dwellings	200+ dwellings
Allotments	X	X	X	X	✓
Amenity Green Space	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parks and Recreation Grounds	X	X	X	X	✓
Play Space (children)	X	?	✓	✓	✓
Play Space (Youth)	X	X	X	X	✓
Natural Green Space	X	X	X	✓	✓

KEY: ✓ on-site provision normally sought  
 ? on-site provision may be sought, subject to circumstances  
 X off-site provision/improvements to existing open space normally required

## 9.0 CONCLUSION

This study provides a robust analysis of the status of open space within Solihull in 2019. It includes an audit of provision and a local needs assessment (consultation) with findings used to produce new recommended standards for access and quantity, with quality standards also recommended based on Green Flag criteria. The study also includes a suite of policy recommendations and methodologies for interpreting and informing the needs for the assessed typologies over the proposed revised plan period, up to 2035, as well as process for calculating developer contributions. It should be read in conjunction with the Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report (2018).

The role and value of open space in contributing to the delivery of national and local priorities and targets is clear from this assessment. It is important that the policies and recommendations included within this assessment are considered for inclusion in the revised Local Plan, and acknowledged in relevant strategies and policy documents, as and when they are reviewed. Council officers and elected members play a pivotal role in adopting and promoting the recommendations within this assessment and ensuring that key stakeholders such as town and parish councils, community groups and agents and developers are suitably informed and engaged in the open space process.

The Council intend to manage and update the mapping of open space on a regular basis, to ensure that the GIS database remains as up-to-date as possible in order to inform any future re-refresh of the Study e.g. through reinstatement of the Project Board.

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