

Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment & Audit Briefing Note

The Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment and Audit was undertaken by PMP consultants and completed in September 2006. The study covers informal open space, outdoor recreation facilities, children's play areas and allotments.

Why the study was produced?

The study was produced primarily to inform the planning process. PPG17 requires local authorities to carry out a needs assessment and audit of provision to inform the development of local standards for the provision of open space. The study identifies deficiencies and surpluses of provision and their spatial distribution. It also identifies key priorities for action. In addition to its use within the planning process the study can also be used to inform decisions relating to the maintenance, management and future provision of open space.

How was the study carried out?

The study was carried out in five stages:

Stage one – Identification of Local Needs – There was a comprehensive consultation to identify local needs which included a householder survey, a sports club survey, a young people survey, schools surveys, drop in sessions, consultations with external agencies and internal officers, a Parish Council survey and open space user surveys.

Stage two – Audit of Local Provision – this comprehensive audit covered informal open space, provision for children and young people, outdoor sports facilities and allotments and included a quality assessment of sites.

Stage three – Setting Provision Standards - this used the information collected in stages one and two to set standards for the provision of each of the types of open space based on the existing provision and comments made through the consultations.

Stage four – Applying Provision Standards – applied the standards set in stage three to the existing provision to identify deficiencies or surpluses of supply on a geographical basis.

Stage five – Drafting policies, recommendations and strategic priorities – this used the analysis of provision to identify priorities for action and to develop policies to ensure that the recommended standards of provision are achieved and any deficiencies in provision are addressed.

The District was split into five analysis areas to allow the data to be examined at a more detailed local level and to enable an understanding of the geographical distribution of open spaces. The five analysis areas are; Yaxley and Sawtry, Ramsey, Huntingdon and Godmanchester, St Ives and St Neots; these are the areas referred to in the summary of findings below.

Summary of findings

Overall residents are satisfied with the quantity of open spaces in the District and feel that the quality of open space has improved in recent years. However the geographical distribution of open spaces was highlighted as a concern particularly given the expected increase in population.

The study includes a chapter on each of the types of open space assessed; which are discussed below. For each type a standard has been identified for quantity, quality and accessibility. When applying this standard consideration should be given to the existing facilities in the area and the type of facilities which the study shows are needed. The study sets out in detail where there are shortfalls in provision in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility and this should be used when negotiating contributions towards open space or when considering future provision of open space funded from other sources.

Informal Open Space:

The assessment of informal open space covers parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural open spaces and amenity greenspaces of 0.2 hectares or more.

The study found that St Neots, Huntingdon and Godmanchester and St Ives analysis areas have good levels of informal open space provision although provision is lower in the Ramsey and Yaxley analysis areas. The uneven physical distribution of formal parks and gardens was highlighted.

In terms of quality the study highlighted the high quality of a number of sites in the district with parks and gardens and natural and semi-natural areas being particularly high. Amenity spaces were generally perceived to be of a slightly lower quality.

The study recommends quality and accessibility standards for informal open space as set out below:

Table 1

Type of informal open space	Recommended Quantity Standard	Recommended Accessibility Standard
Parks & Gardens (minimum size 0.2 hectares) ¹	0.48 ha per 1000 population	15 minutes walk time (720m)
Natural and Semi-natural open spaces (minimum size 0.2 hectares) ¹	0.23 ha per 1000 population	15 minutes walk time (720m)
Amenity greenspace (minimum size 0.2 hectares) ¹	1.09 ha per 1000 population	10 minutes walk time (480m)
Total	1.8 ha per 1000 population	

Although the standards of provision have been split into these three categories this is the total level of provision which should be achieved and the when applying this to a site, consideration should be given to what is already available, as in the examples below.

¹ These areas can include LEAPs, NEAPs and MUGAs

Example 1: In an area where there is an oversupply of natural and semi-natural open space but a short-fall in the supply of amenity green space and formal parks and gardens, the 1.8 ha per 1000 population could be applied to provide just these two types of informal open space

Example 2: If there is an over supply of amenity space in the area but a shortfall in formal parks and gardens then contributions could be sought to upgrade one of these amenity spaces to a formal park or garden.

Incidental Open Space

Incidental open space of under 0.2 hectares is not included within the standard and therefore these types of space would be additional to the provision required through the standard and may include Local Areas for Play (LAPs).

Structural Landscaping

Open spaces are an important element of landscaping but other elements of landscaping, such as structure planting and local features, which are not included in the study should also be included additionally within development proposals as discussed in the Huntingdonshire Design Guide.

Provision for children and young people:

Overall the audit found that provision for children and young people is good but there are variations in provision and in some areas there is an unmet demand. There was also a general view that provision for teenagers is insufficient.

On the whole sites are of good quality but 16% are considered to be poor. The area with the lowest quality level was the Yaxley and Sawtry analysis area. Overall misuse, vandalism and graffiti are perceived to be the main quality issues.

The study recommends quantity and accessibility standards for provision for children and young people as set out below:

Table 2

	Recommended Quantity Standard	Recommended Accessibility Standard
Provision for children and young people ¹	0.8 facilities ² per 1000 population (Approximately 400 houses)	Children – 10 minute walk time (480m)
		Young People (urban ³) 15 minute walk time (720m)

¹ Provision for children and young people includes LEAP's, NEAP's and MUGA's (Multi Use Games Area's)

² One facility should be considered equivalent to the average size of play facility in the District which is currently 6.6 pieces of equipment (approximately equivalent to the size of a LEAP)

³ The standard for young people has been set for urban areas only. In rural areas provision will be considered on a village by village basis.

The standard provides the total level of provision for children and young people. When applying the standard consideration should be given to what is already available, as in some examples below.

Example 1: If a development site is within the distance set out in the accessibility standard for a children’s play area and the play area has an adequate number of pieces of equipment then contributions could be sought towards a facility for young people instead. This facility should be of a similar value to that which would have been provided for children’s provision.

Example 2: If there is a play area within the distance set out in the accessibility standard for a children’s play area but the play area does not have an adequate amount of equipment or needs improving, then contributions could be made to upgrading this rather than providing a new facility.

Example 3: If there is not a play area or young persons facility within the distance set out in the accessibility standard then contributions could be split between the two types of facility or to one or the other.

Outdoor Sports Facilities

Generally the provision and variety of outdoor sports facilities across the District is good with the exception of the Yaxley and Sawtry analysis area.

The study recommends quality and accessibility standards for outdoor sports facilities as set out below:

Table 3

	Recommended Quantity Standard	Recommended Accessibility Standard
Outdoor Sports Facilities	1.61 ha per 1000 population (a minimum of 0.81 ha of this should be publicly accessible playing fields i.e. football, cricket, rugby and hockey pitches and the remainder should be tennis courts, synthetic turf pitches or bowling greens)	15 minutes walk for grass pitches and tennis courts (720m) 15 minutes drive for synthetic turf pitches and bowling greens

The standard provides the total level of provision that should be achieved for all types of outdoor sports facilities. When applying the standard consideration will need to be given to what is already available. The size of facility the standard would require should also be considered, as in the example below.

Example 1 – A development site generates a small increase in population and the resulting level of provision would not provide a useful area of outdoor sports facilities in this case contributions can be sought towards facilities offsite, this could be in the form of improvements to an existing facility in the vicinity e.g. through the provision of changing rooms or a pavilion or purchase of more land.

In addition to the assessment of outdoor sports facilities the study also includes a playing pitch strategy which looked in more detail at the provision of football, rugby, hockey and cricket pitches.

The study highlights a deficiency of 36.7 playing pitches across the District. This deficiency is predominantly of junior and mini football pitches but also includes rugby, hockey and cricket pitches. There is an over supply of adult football pitches in the District and therefore there may be some opportunities for this oversupply to address the deficiencies for other types of sport. Given the shortfalls identified the study recommends that all existing playing pitches be protected.

The database used to assess playing pitches can also be used to predict future levels of demand for playing pitches and identifies future requirements. This database has been retained by the Council and any changes to the number of playing pitches can be entered into this to assess the implications.

Allotments:

The study found the Ramsey analysis area has the highest number of allotments with distribution in other areas being fairly even. It also found that Parish Councils are an important provider of allotments in the District.

The study recommends quality and accessibility standards for allotments as set out below:

Table 4

	Recommended Quantity Standard	Recommended Accessibility Standard
Allotments	0.32 ha per 1000 population	15 minutes walk time (720m)

The study recommends a higher standard than the existing level of provision due to likely increases in demand for allotments occurring as a result of high density living and the consequential lack of garden space.

Comparison with existing standards:

Comparison of standards recommended in the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment and Audit with the Six Acre Standard included in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (1995):

Table 5

	6 acre standard requirement	New requirement
Outdoor sports – pitches, courts, greens	1.6ha (4 acres)	1.61ha (4 acres)
Informal open space/ play space	0.8ha (2 acres)	1.8ha (4.4 acres) + 0.8 facilities
Allotments		0.32ha (0.8 acres)
Total	2.4ha (6 acres)	3.73ha (9.2 acres)