

# ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL



## OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2017



ASHFORD  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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## Executive Summary

Open spaces enrich the quality of our lives and contribute towards a healthy lifestyle. They help define and add to the character and history of a place as well as provide vital green infrastructure for wildlife, biodiversity, water, tranquillity, recreation, play, food production and safe off-road pedestrian and cycling routes.

Ashford borough currently enjoys a wide range of open spaces across its urban and rural environment. The borough has the benefit of existing wildlife sites, protected landscapes and a network of accessible countryside. It also has the benefit of having many organisations and groups of people active in the community who take great interest in their current and future green environment.

This Open Space Strategy attempts to focus on what's important for Ashford's open space provision up to 2030 in consideration of previous studies and strategies, recent audits, consultation and the emerging Local Plan.

It is seen as a continuation of the good work prepared and being implemented by many organisations and individuals across the Borough. The aim is to join up the aspirations from across these organisations and give a strategic direction in relation to public open space provision to match the demands of predicted population growth.

The overarching intent of the strategy and its recommendations follow five themes:

1. Protect the existing open space network;
2. Enhance and improve the accessibility and quality of existing provision;
3. Provide new open space to expand the network strategically;
4. Create multifunctional strategic hubs of open space; and
5. Work together to protect, deliver and effectively manage open space provision across the borough.

The evidence prepared for this Open Space Strategy steers where to apply these themes and how they may be implemented. A key recommendation is the need to spatially plan future provision, to ensure the right type of open space is provided in the right location.

The Open Space Strategy will provide a robust framework to help strengthen Ashford's open space provision by providing a series of interrelated actions that are all working towards the same goal, which is to protect, enhance and provide an open space network across the borough to create a thriving landscape of well-located and well-connected open spaces, which supports our existing and future community.

## Section 1: Introduction

*This section details definitions of open space and describes the underlying influences regarding public open space. It sets the context for the overall strategy.*

- 1.1. This Open Space Strategy is for the borough of Ashford. It was prepared in 2017 and sets out how Ashford Borough Council, in partnership with a range of organisations, plans to protect, enhance and provide open spaces to 2030. The strategy has been prepared by Ashford Borough Council with help from Allen Scott Ltd and Mike Marsh Associates Ltd and will be reviewed annually and updated every five years.

### Purpose

- 1.2. The strategy has been prepared to:
- Provide a body of evidence for developing open space policies within the new Local Plan;
  - Identify key opportunities and strategic imperatives, that inform future action plans and a suite of projects for the delivery of improvements to existing open spaces and new open spaces triggered by development; and
  - Test standards for open space provision in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility, to inform regular and future review.

### Definition of Open Space

- 1.3. The principle of public access lies at the heart of this emerging Open Space Strategy. Therefore, for the purpose of this strategy, open space is defined as:

Public open space which provides:

- generally unlimited **free** public access;
  - genuinely **useable** open space for people; and
  - **accessibility** over the great majority of the open space.
- 1.4. For the purpose of this strategy ‘open space’ is a collective term that refers to the current provision of parks, amenity greenspace, children’s play areas, outdoor sports facilities such as sports grounds, natural and semi-natural greenspace, allotments and cemeteries. This strategy also includes the typology of Green Corridor, detailed in the table below.

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

- 1.5. This strategy does not include open space which is provided as private or paid for provision, e.g. playing fields within school grounds, golf courses, private estate gardens and water recreation spaces such as the lake at Conningbrook. It also does not include incidental areas, such as verges or streets, or public rights of way. It does not include areas of open space that have the sole purpose of protection of wildlife without public access, or areas designed as part of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS). Although all these sites are excluded, it is recognised that they form an important part of the borough's green infrastructure, and have a visual value.
- 1.6. This strategy includes an audit of publically accessible Churchyards and Closed Cemeteries, as they are considered to be part of the general public open space offer within an area. Obviously their primary use is for burial, however as open space, cemeteries provide recreational and social value offering space for quiet contemplation, and are often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation, biodiversity, and heritage.
- 1.7. With reference to the primary use of cemeteries, at this stage cemeteries are being considered within a dedicated study that will consider the capacity of the current provision and demands for future burial space.
- 1.8. PPG17 previously reflected the Government's policy objectives for open space, sport and recreation. This has now been superseded by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). PPG17 set several different typologies for open space and these definitions were used in Ashford Borough Council's 2008 Open Space Study. As a result these are now well recognised typologies and have been further refined for the 2017 audit, to reflect open space provision in the borough.

### Typologies of Open Space

- 1.9. For the purpose of this Open Space Strategy and for the audit of existing open space the following typologies have been defined by their *primary* use:

Typology	Description	Primary Purpose
Strategic and Prestige Parks	High profile areas of open space, the majority of which will be publically accessible, close to public transport links and provide a range of facilities and features offering recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural or green infrastructure benefits. The typology includes urban parks, country parks, and formal gardens.	Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events
Example: Conningbrook Lakes Country Park		

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Natural / Semi-natural Greenspace	Informal and natural green space provides the opportunity to promote meaningful and safe recreation. This open space typology covers a wide range of uses, including woodland areas, wetland areas, heath-land meadow and open downland.	Wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness
Example: Kings Wood		
Green Corridors (refer Appendix 2)	<p>Relatively continuous areas of the Green Corridor leading through Ashford's urban area which may include spaces of water recreation. This typology also contains inaccessible areas of land under private ownership.</p> <p>The Green Corridor is a designation that has been central to Ashford's planning strategy and approach to green infrastructure since it was adopted in the 1994 Local Plan. It comprises a connected network of largely green open areas that are predominantly located alongside the Great and East Stour rivers, the Aylesford Stream, and other watercourses which flow through Ashford's urban area. These riverside areas are largely undeveloped, due to being within the flood plain, and provide a unique opportunity for improving the quality of the urban environment. Visually, the Green Corridor provides welcome breaks in the built up areas from the Town Centre and through the urban areas of Kennington, Willesborough, Kingsnorth, Singleton and South Ashford into the countryside beyond.</p>	Open space connections: walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife mitigation
Example: Bowens Field		
Outdoor Sport	Outdoor sports space includes all formally laid out sport and playing pitches for a number of different sporting activities (including rugby, football, netball, hockey, tennis and basketball). This does not include indoor sports provision or facilities. The Council has produced an Ashford Borough Playing Pitch Strategy to be adopted later in 2017.	Participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports
Example: Boughton Aluph cricket pitch		

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Amenity space	Most commonly (but not exclusively) in residential areas including informal recreation spaces, green space in and around housing, village greens. This may also include areas for water recreation, and playing fields where outdoor sport is not the primary use e.g. there are no marked out pitches and goals.	Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work, and enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
Example: Recreation Grounds		
Play areas	This covers provision for children and teenagers, and includes play areas, skateboard parks, MUGA's, and other more informal areas (for example teenage shelters, kick walls). This typology typically sits within other open space typologies such as General Amenity or Strategic Parks.	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, ball courts, wheeled play and teenage shelters.
Example: St Stephen's Walk		
Allotments	Allotments, community gardens and community farms	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce
Example: Gas House Fields		
Urban Fringe	Areas of public open space accessible countryside on the fringe of Ashford Urban Area that provide recreation space as well as help form the transition between Rural and Urban.	Open space buffer zone between urban edge and rural settlements
Example: Kingsnorth		
Cemeteries and Churchyards	Publically accessible churchyards and closed cemeteries.	Burial; space for quiet contemplation
Example: Great Chart		

- 1.10. These categories are not always mutually exclusive. For example, a Green Corridor can contain informal kick about and play space and most typologies can contain provision for wildlife. Therefore, open spaces are categorised according to their primary use.
- 1.11. Within rural sites the open spaces tend to be multi-functional, typically providing a play area, amenity provision and outdoor sport. Where feasible the spaces have been split and categorised within the obvious primary use.

- 1.12. There are some acknowledged limitations on access to public open space. Generally residents will have free and continuous access to public open space regardless of ownership or where the responsibility for management lies. In some cases some limitations on access will be necessary in order to protect private property, protect wildlife, enable specialist management, maintain public safety or comply with statutory obligations. The principle restrictions will be:
1. Allotments - access will be restricted to allotment holders but any member of the public within the borough can apply for an allotment.
  2. Cemeteries – access is usually restricted to the daytime.
  3. Wildlife areas – protection from disturbance will be needed:
    - a. Seasonal restrictions and restrictions on access by dogs to protect wildlife breeding areas
    - b. Occasional or permanent restrictions on the level and type of use to protect sensitive habitats from excessive pressure of use and damaging activities.
    - c. Areas of conservation grazing – seasonal restrictions to protect livestock from dogs and generally ensure the welfare of grazing animals.
  4. Special sports areas – to ensure that playing surfaces and facilities are maintained in a good useable condition and up to any approved/recommended sports standards.
- 1.13. Wherever restrictions are placed on public access all reasonable steps will be taken through the design of spaces and management of restrictions to ensure that:
- a) Members of the public retain peripheral routes around restricted spaces and
  - b) Landscape quality and views are preserved so the spaces can still provide the best possible visual amenity.

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Strategic Park - Conningbrook Lakes Country Park



Natural / Semi-natural greenspace

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Green Corridor



Outdoor Sport –cricket pitch

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



Amenity space – recreation ground



Play area

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



Allotments



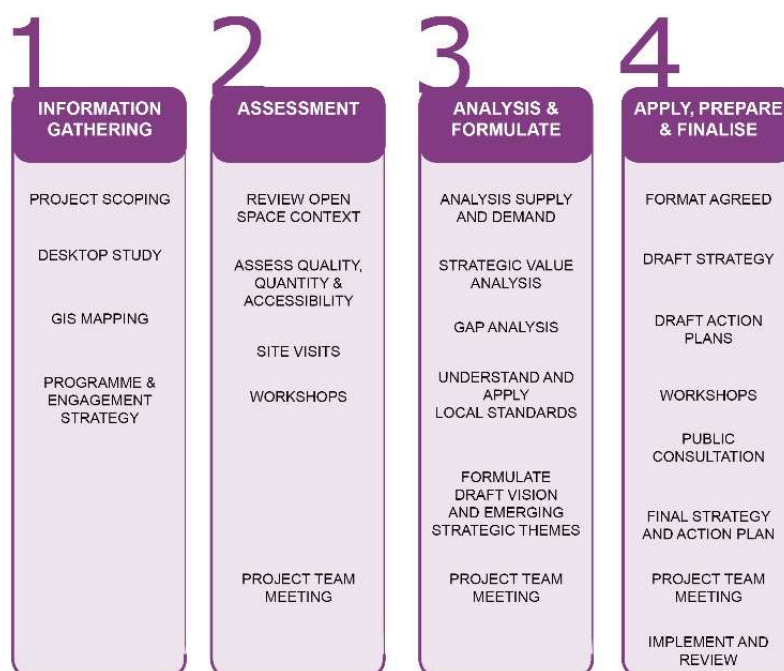
Urban fringe



Churchyard

## Methodology

- 1.14. The methodology for the strategy draws on best practice guidance from CABE for the preparation of Open Space Strategies<sup>1</sup>, and the PPG17 companion guide<sup>2</sup>. The following describes an overview of the robust and evidence based methodology applied in preparing this Open Space Strategy:



## Project Extent

- 1.15. Open space has been mapped and reviewed across the whole borough. This strategy includes an audit and assessment of urban sites, a list is attached as Appendix 1. Rural sites are subject to further discussion with Parish Councils who are key advocates of quality open space.
- 1.16. The mapping and the assessment process separates open space between Urban and Rural provision. Urban provision is defined as the Greater Ashford Area, and includes open space provision within the fringe parishes of Great Chart with Singleton, Stanhope, Kingsnorth, Sevington and a proportion of Boughton Aluph. This follows the approach of the 2008 Open Space Study, and also allows for quantitative analysis of specific areas.
- 1.17. Rural provision includes all the rural parishes and the town of Tenterden.

<sup>1</sup> Open space strategies – Best practice guidance, CABE Space

<sup>2</sup> Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17

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- 1.18. The evidence used to help assess the current supply of and needs for open space has been gathered by Ashford Borough Council (the Council). This involved complex desk top and site assessment work by Council Officers in relation to understanding the design and condition quality of the current provision of open space, and the strategic value of existing and potential open space.
- 1.19. In addition to these audits, the Council has researched and developed ideas around various spatial models for open space provision. This included the concept of creating hubs for open space, sport and recreation provision in strategic locations across the Ashford urban area, supported by smaller local and neighbourhood open spaces that serve the needs of its surrounding community. The evidence and the intent of this Strategy is to explore and help justify this concept and provide evidence to support the need and potential benefits of implementing it.
- 1.20. The emerging Local Plan was being prepared for consultation during the time of preparing this initial evidence. The early findings and ideas for the Open Space Strategy have been presented within the Draft Local Plan consultation 2016. Other influencing strategies and reviews, such as the Playing Pitch Strategy, Green Corridor Plan and Play Area Audit were also underway during the development of the Open Space Strategy and have influenced the outcomes.
- 1.21. From April 2017, consultants Allen Scott Ltd and Mike Marsh Associates Ltd were engaged to help utilise and streamline the initial baseline evidence and support the Council in preparing the Open Space Strategy and provide strategic open space objectives to be embedded in the Local Plan.
- 1.22. The current Public Green Spaces and Water Environment (PGS & WE) SPD (2012) has a robust and sound set of Quality Standards, which have been applied in this Strategy. However, there are some areas within the SPD that require updating, given the emerging observations of this strategy, particularly around future spatial planning and accessibility, adoption and governance of open space. This Strategy provides approaches for changes to be taken forward and considered in more detail as part of the PGS & WE SPD review.
- 1.23. Consultation on this Open Spaces Strategy with key stakeholders (refer Appendix 2 for list) consisted of three separate workshops during May 2017 and further meetings and information exchanges following these. Questionnaires have been sent out to the Parish and Town Councils, which will inform the final strategy. A summary of the consultation response themes are detailed in Section 2.

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- 1.24. An Action Plan will be developed following further consultation and feedback, which will support the delivery of the adopted Open Space Strategy. There will also be other discrete project plans that will cascade from this Strategy, which the council and other providers will lead.
- 1.25. The Green Corridor Plan is one such project plan, and is attached as Appendix 3. It focuses on important parts of the strategic approach for a network of interlinked green spaces that forms part of this Strategy.

## Section 2: Our Vision

*This section details the stakeholder engagement, consultation and research process that has informed the Open Space Strategy's Vision.*

### Benefits of Open Space

- 2.1 Open spaces enrich the quality of our lives and contribute towards a healthy lifestyle. They help define and add to the character and history of a place as well as provide vital green infrastructure for wildlife, biodiversity, water, tranquillity, recreation, play, food production and safe off-road pedestrian and cycling routes.
- 2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) details “three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental”<sup>3</sup>. These dimensions have provided a framework and shaped the approach to assessing public open space.
- 2.3 Good quality open space provides well recognised benefits for people, the environment, health and the economy:

For people, open spaces:

- Provide an area for recreation and play
- Enable lifelong learning and education
- Encourage equality and diversity
- Promote community development and regeneration
- Establish community cohesion and social inclusion
- Tackle community safety issues
- Empower communities.

For the environment, open spaces:

- Encourage biodiversity
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Promote education
- Contributes to sustainable environmental resource management
- Create a natural amenity
- Give safe, sustainable transport routes
- Alleviate flood risks
- Regulate the local microclimate supporting air quality
- Can instil unique character to an area, and provide a sense of place and local identity.

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<sup>3</sup> National Planning Policy Framework 2012 – Promoting healthy communities, para 7

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For health, open spaces:

- Improve physical health through exercise
- Contribute to good mental health and well being
- Provide positive community health through sense of space

For the economy, open spaces:

- Attract economic development and local investment
- Provide local employment
- Increase land and property values
- Encourage ongoing revenue streams through tourism
- Improve the image and standing of an area
- Influence location decisions for both employers and employees.

2.4 Recently a number of reports have been produced that conclude that local authority commitment to parks does make a difference (source: State of Parks HLF report 2016 <https://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks-2016>). Councils that consider their parks to be a priority, have a parks strategy in place, and an elected member as a parks champion tend to have better parks. Also, that public parks have the opportunity to evolve to meet the demands and aspirations of both current and future generations.<sup>4</sup>

2.5 The Council's Corporate Plan (up to 2020) embraces the benefits that open space can deliver, particularly for a growing borough. It establishes four priorities, Priority 3 and 4 are most relevant to this Open Space Strategy:

- Priority 3: Active and Creative Ashford: healthy choices through physical, cultural and leisure engagement. Our Aspiration: To provide or enable a range of quality leisure and cultural activities where people can make healthy and affordable lifestyle choices and enjoy assets that create attractive, desirable and active communities.
- Priority 4: Attractive Ashford: Our Aspiration: To achieve an environment that creates higher standards of public space design, alongside improved standards of presentation of key green spaces. To safeguard and conserve our local heritage and areas of outstanding landscape quality to ensure the very best attractive environment with thriving and vibrant town centres.

2.6 This strategy's vision compliments the Council's corporate focus and looks at what's important for Ashford's open space provision up to 2030. The

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<sup>4</sup> Rethinking Parks report by NESTA, 2013  
[http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/rethinking\\_parks.pdf](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/rethinking_parks.pdf)

emerging vision considers the views of stakeholders, studies and recent audits, and the Local Plan.

### Local Stakeholder Views

- 2.7 There are many voluntary, public and private sector partners already involved in looking after the boroughs' open spaces. Some act in an advisory role, others actively manage spaces, provide key services, perform community liaison or help with funding for specific projects. Such partnerships can bring significant benefits. Similarly, integrating open space improvements with wider programmes of neighbourhood working often delivers better outcomes.
- 2.8 Collective knowledge is invaluable in helping to shape the future of existing and further open space provision.
- 2.9 To capture views of stakeholders on the new Open Space Strategy, three stakeholder consultation sessions took place in May 2017, with invitations issued to 124 community organisations; parish/town and Borough Councillors; wildlife, sport, recreation, youth and health interest groups and Housing Trusts to attend one of the specific sessions for Urban Ashford, Rural Ashford Borough and Specialist Groups.
- 2.10 Following an introduction to the key issues facing the borough's open spaces as highlighted in the emerging Local Plan, the stakeholders were asked to identify:
- What do we need? Current issues and opportunities relating to public open spaces; and
  - A future vision for Ashford's Public Open Spaces.

### Themes from May 2017 stakeholder consultation

- 2.11 A number of common themes emerged across all three stakeholder engagement sessions. These were:
- Connectivity
  - Raising standards
  - Quality maintenance
  - Value of public open space to rural communities
  - Improved awareness of open space
  - Protecting wildlife and habitats
  - Maximising health benefits
  - Support for open space Hubs
  - Improving play spaces
  - Accessibility

- 2.12 There was a shared agreement that the borough has a range of open spaces and a broad offer, and there is a perception there may not be a requirement for additional general space to be provided. The exception is for new provision supporting new housing developments and projected population growth (Ashford 2011 Census 118,000; 2030 projected population 145,300<sup>5</sup>).
- 2.13 However, there was strong support for the quality of the spaces to be improved with greater connectivity between key spaces and clustering of quality facilities to provide 'destination' hubs. It was suggested that destination sites could have modest admission charges or paid for parking to generate income for their ongoing maintenance and investment in facilities.
- 2.14 The common themes from stakeholders have been collated into the following future open space outcomes:
- A network of high quality open spaces linked by cycle routes and improved green corridors
  - Wildlife spaces connected: differentiating between natural oasis and recreation spaces
  - The multi-functionality of open spaces means that they provide many benefits to the urban environment and the rural population;
  - Strategic functions: defining and separating urban areas, better linking town and country and providing for recreational need over a wide area
  - Urban quality – helping to support regeneration and improving quality of life for communities by providing visually attractive green spaces close to where people live
  - Promoting health and well-being through connectivity – providing opportunities for people of all ages for informal recreation, or to walk, cycle or ride within parks and open spaces or along paths, bridleways and riverbanks
  - Allotments may provide physical exercise or other health benefits
  - Support for strategic open space Hubs: Conningbrook Lakes Country Park, Discovery Park and Victoria Park
  - Havens and habitats for flora and fauna – sites may have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another and may contribute towards achieving objectives set out in local biodiversity action plans
  - Accessibility for all, increased provision for young women and people with disabilities, for an aging population, with focus particularly in rural areas
  - As a community resource – as a place for congregating and for holding community events, religious festivals, fetes and fairs

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<sup>5</sup> ONS sub national 2014 population projections

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- Support rural villages to protect and enhance their open spaces and improve access particularly for the young and ageing population.
- 2.15 Further stakeholder and public consultation on the approved draft Open Space Strategy was undertaken August to September 2017.
- 2.16 The document was publically available for viewing on the Ashford Borough Council website, with a questionnaire format for all comments.
- 2.17 The responses are available to view on the council website, as part of the Cabinet report November 2017.

### *The Vision:*

Our Vision is to protect, enhance and provide an open space network across the borough to create a thriving landscape of well-located and well-connected open spaces, which supports our existing and future community.

- 2.18 The mix of open space in the borough provides a wide and diverse range of green spaces across its urban and rural environment. The borough has the benefit of existing large parks, wildlife sites, protected landscapes and a network of accessible countryside and local open space. It also has the benefit of having many organisations and groups of people active in the community who take great interest in their current and future local environment.
- 2.19 To meet our vision, this Open Space Strategy identifies key areas and strategic recommendations which are summarised below:
- 2.20 In the Ashford Urban Area to:
- Protect and enhance the open space provision we have
  - Make best use of the existing Green Corridors and grow this network to make better ecological and recreation connections and provision
  - Invest in strategically located hubs of multifunctional open space and recreation provision that benefits the whole of the Ashford area
  - Work closely with the community to sustain high quality, well respected open spaces
  - Provide new open space that meets local need and is of high quality, in the right place and adds value to the wider open space network
  - Promote the benefits open space has for people and wildlife.

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### 2.21 In the Ashford Rural Area to:

- Continue to work in partnership with Parish and Town Councils to maintain and improve the existing provision of open space
- Enable better connections to the wider network of pedestrian and cycle routes across the rural areas
- Support Parish and Town Councils in assessing the quality of proposed new open space in relation to proposed development.

## Section 3: Planning Context

*This section explains the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied as part of the planning system. There are other plans and strategies summarised below that also help inform this Open Space Strategy.*

- 3.1. The key current policy is the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** 2012. In relation to the provision of public open space the NPPF states: "...The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities..."<sup>6</sup> and 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."<sup>7</sup>
- 3.2. Planning policies and decisions should promote: "Safe and accessible developments, containing clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas."<sup>8</sup>
- 3.3. The NPPF requires that: "Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required."
- 3.4. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
  - an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
  - 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
  - the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss."<sup>9</sup>
- 3.5. The NPPF also make specific reference to biodiversity and geodiversity: "To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should:

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<sup>6</sup> National Planning Policy Framework – Promoting healthy communities, 69

<sup>7</sup> National Planning Policy Framework – Promoting healthy communities, 73

<sup>8</sup> National Planning Policy Framework – Promoting healthy communities, 69

<sup>9</sup> National Planning Policy Framework – Promoting healthy communities, 73-74

- plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries;
  - identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation;
  - promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan;
  - aim to prevent harm to geological conservation interests; and
  - where Nature Improvement Areas are identified in Local Plans, consider specifying the types of development that may be appropriate in these Areas.”<sup>10</sup>
- 3.6. The NPPF also details “three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental”<sup>11</sup>. These dimensions have provided a framework and shaped the approach to assessing public open space.
- 3.7. **PPG17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation** was current at the time of the preparation of the Ashford Borough Council Local Plan 2000, and has now been replaced by the NPPF. However, the specific requirement of PPG17 for an open space audit is considered good practice. A new open space audit has therefore been undertaken to accompany this strategy and to inform the planning of priorities for management of open spaces. The approach of the audit has considered guidelines and recommendations within PPG17.
- 3.8. **Accessible Natural Green Space Guidance NE265 (Natural England 2011)** is the latest review of work begun by Natural England in the early 1990s to establish standards for accessible natural green space. The Guidance retains Natural England’s existing Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGSt). The standards are non-statutory but are very widely accepted as representing an ideal quantitative and qualitative standard which should be used to inform the provision of natural open space in new developments and the management of existing open space.
- 3.9. This strategy will have due regard for the guidance and will achieve access to natural green space in new residential areas through the Green Corridor

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<sup>10</sup> National Planning Policy Framework – Promoting healthy communities, 117

<sup>11</sup> National Planning Policy Framework – Promoting healthy communities, 7

network which as it develops will provide small natural areas close to homes and off-road connections to larger natural green spaces.

- 3.10. **Open Space Study for Ashford Borough 2008** provides an audit of open spaces and informed the current Public Green Spaces and Water Environment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2012. As part of this Open Space Strategy a new audit has been undertaken. All public open space standards and recommendations provided by the Open Space Study 2008 will be superseded by this strategy.
- 3.11. **Ashford Borough Council Public Green Spaces and Water Environment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2012** sets out quantitative and qualitative standards for all types of public open space in new residential developments. These standards have been applied since 2012 and have been shown to be generally acceptable to developers in terms of their contributions, and sufficient in delivering appropriate quantities and quality of new open space.
- 3.12. The standards are based on a combination of the existing quantities of open space types within the Ashford urban area and the Borough Council's aspirations to improve the quality of and access to open space. The defining test of the 2012 SPD standards has been its application to the masterplanning of Chilmington Green, a major site comprising 5,700 new homes with all associated facilities and infrastructure. The SPD standards have informed the Chilmington Green Area Action Plan and the Chilmington Green Design Code. The result has been a high quality, deliverable and sustainable public open space proposal to serve the new residents and bring incidental benefits to existing residents.
- 3.13. The quantitative standards provided by the 2012 SPD have therefore been considered within this strategy and inform the outcomes. The SPD will be reviewed as an outcome of the Open Space Strategy process, and brought into line with current costs, new spatial planning principles and the Borough's current Playing Pitch strategy.

### **The Ashford Local Plan (Dec 2016 Draft)**

- 3.14. The draft Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with the NPPF and will supersede the Ashford Local Plan 2000. The Local Plan is the principle planning document for the Borough and will translate the public open space standards and strategic approach contained in this strategy into planning policies.

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- 3.15. The draft Local Plan responds to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning Act 2008 and Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 which is legislation that enables and controls the requirements for open space contributions that are placed on developers by local planning authorities. The changing legal provisions for securing contributions of open space has left local planning authorities with particular challenges with regard to delivery of all community facilities including public open space.
- 3.16. The draft Local Plan provides a vision for the borough up to 2030, and is due to be adopted in 2018. Of relevance to open space: “The Borough’s green spaces will be protected and enhanced to serve expanding populations including two new strategic parks at Ashford and the promotion of sporting and recreational hubs in accessible locations; the retention of flood storage areas; reinforcement of wildlife corridors and an improved cycle network to foster healthier lifestyles for residents and workers.”
- 3.17. Section D in the draft Local Plan details the Natural and Built Environment and helps to inform the strategy. The section provides: “the policy framework for the promotion, enhancement and protection of both the natural environment, including its biodiversity and geological interests, landscapes, green corridors, informal open space, water resources and opportunities for harnessing renewable energy, and the built heritage of the Borough, including its wealth of listed buildings, conservation areas and other heritage assets.”
- 3.18. Section E – Community Facilities, provides the policy for open space, Policy COM2 – Recreation, Sport, Play and Open Spaces. This section of the draft Local Plan seeks to deliver a number of Community Hubs across the urban area to provide for consolidated facilities and amenities for sports, recreation, play and community.
- 3.19. This emerging Open Space Strategy considered the Community Hubs as detailed in the draft Local Plan, and reviewed the approach in terms of public open space provision at a strategic, neighbourhood and local level. This is further explored in this Open Space Strategy in Section 5.
- 3.20. Within the draft Local Plan is a policy (Policy ENV2- the Ashford Green Corridor), that protects and enhances a designation that is identified as the Ashford Green Corridor. This approach to green infrastructure has a dedicated plan that will be adopted as part of the emerging Local Plan and this strategy.

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

3.21. Figure 1 shows the indicative new development, green corridor expansion and sports and recreation hubs that are being considered in the draft Local Plan.

MC82 - Updated Key Diagram - Revised Ashford Urban Area Figure 2 Insert

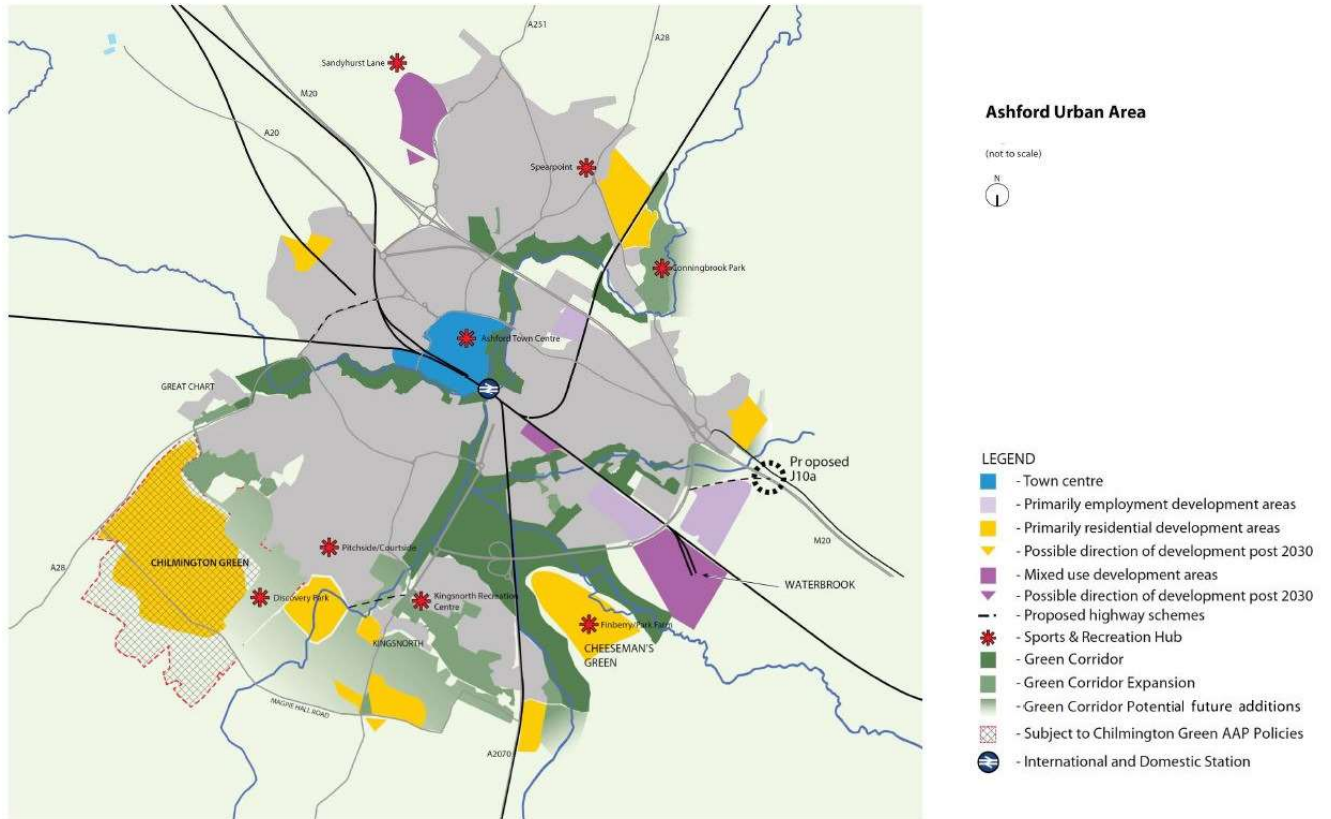


Figure 1. Ashford Urban Area - Ashford Local Plan 2030 (2017)

3.22. The Green Corridor Plan (GCP) identifies the extensive areas of green corridor that follow the flood plains of the Great Stour, East Stour and their tributaries. These green corridors provide a well-connected branching system of green spaces of very high value for recreation, off-road transport and wildlife. The GCP defines the area of the Green Corridor, and includes aspirations for further extensions of the Green Corridor both within and outside the riparian corridors.

3.23. The GCP also presents and co-ordinates principle proposals for improved access, recreational and educational value and improvements benefitting wildlife.

3.24. The GCP is an important part of the Local Plan and compliments this Open Space Strategy. It is attached as Appendix 3 to enable feedback from stakeholders and the community and ensure the plan is embedded in this strategies implementation.

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

- 3.25. Further opportunities to extend and maximise the use of the various areas beyond that which are identified in the Green Corridor Plan should be considered as part of a three year review.

### **Other Ashford Borough Strategies**

- 3.26. The Open Space Strategy has been informed by the Playing Pitch and Sports Facilities Strategies (2017 - 2020), and the Play Area Audit 2017. A Cycling Strategy is under review and will be partly informed by the Open Space Strategy. There are also linkages to be developed with the findings of the 2017 Heritage Strategy which advocates the enhancement of historic assets within public open space such as Boys Hall (a scheduled monument in Willesborough which is part of the Green Corridor) which is in the ownership of Ashford Borough Council.

## Section 4: Summary of Audits

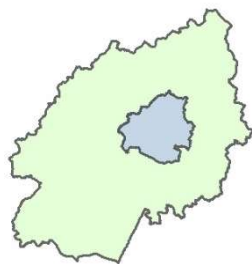
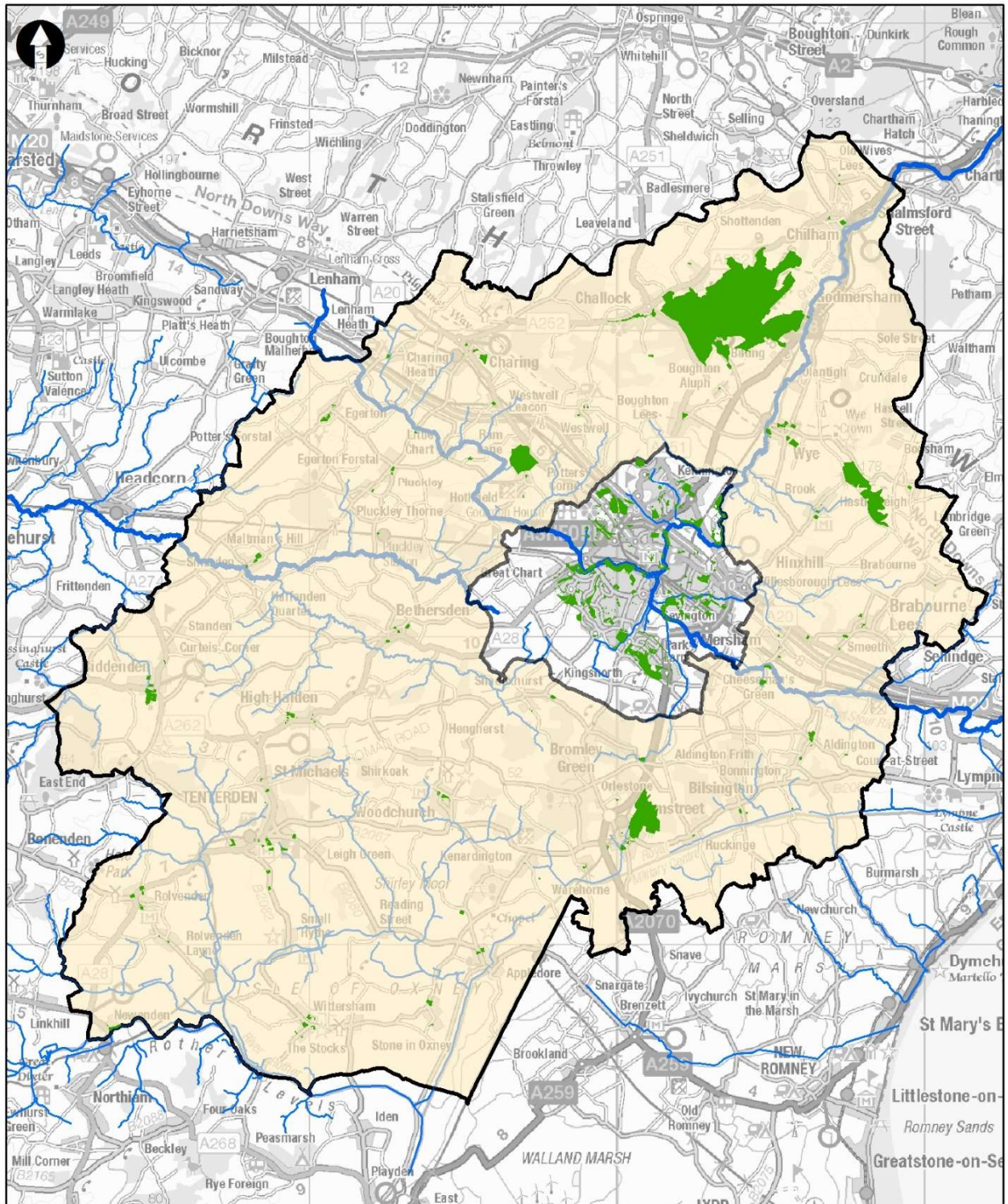
*This section provides a summary of findings from the Open Space Audits completed as part of this Open Space Strategy. It also considers previous audits, studies and reviews such as the Open Space Study 2008 and the Play Area Audit 2017.*

- 4.1 The audit and assessment of existing open space is broadly focused on three considerations:
- Quantity – measured in terms of the amount of provision
  - Quality – determined by two factors, the design of the site, and its condition
  - Accessibility – measured as a distance between the open space and residential dwellings
- 4.2 In addition to these, the audit has considered and tested an approach which considers the ‘value’ that open space provides to the wider urban open space network and community, in terms of environmental, social and economic benefits.
- 4.3 The main purpose of the value audit is to provide a process of assessment for new open spaces offered as part of proposed development, and to assess existing open spaces in terms of their potential value as part of any potential financial investment. The value audit can also serve as an evaluation for determining hubs, i.e. locally important open space.
- 4.4 The following pages in this section provide key findings from these audits and a description of how the audits were prepared.

### QUANTITY AUDIT

- 4.5 The quantity of existing open space has been calculated by using GIS data kept by Ashford Borough Council at the time of the audit.
- 4.6 The current provision for public open space across the borough of Ashford is calculated as 1701.04 Hectares:
- 376.37 ha of this is within the defined Urban Area
  - 1324.67 ha of this is within the defined Rural Area (including Tenterden)
  - Of which 46.39 ha is within Tenterden.
- 4.7 Figure 2 maps the open space provision in the Ashford Urban and Rural Area.

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



- Legend**
- Open Spaces
  - Rural Area
  - Main river channel
  - Other channel

## Open Space Provision Ashford Urban Area

Figure 2. Open Space Provision Ashford Urban and Rural Area

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

The table below provides a useful picture of how the quantity of open space is split per typology and per urban and rural.

**Table 1. This table summarises the quantity of borough wide open space using Ashford Borough Council's mapping system.**

Open Space Typology	Total Quantity	Quantity in Urban	Quantity in Rural
Strategic / Prestige Park	27.6 ha	27.6 ha	0
Natural / Semi Natural	1242.73 ha	61.13 ha	1181.6 ha
Green Corridors	83.23 ha	83.23 ha	0
Outdoor Sport	97.74 ha	32.41 ha	65.33 ha
Amenity Space	139.16 ha	97.46 ha	41.7 ha
Play Areas	9.9 ha	6.23 ha	3.67 ha
Allotments	17.7 ha	9.3 ha	8.4 ha
Churchyards and Closed Cemeteries	37.86 ha	13.89 ha	23.97 ha
Urban Fringe	45.12 ha	45.12 ha	0

### Applying the current standard

- 4.8 The current standard has been applied against the existing quantity of open space in 2017. It uses a predicted population figure in order to provide a baseline in which to compare the quantity standards set out in the PGS&WE SPD. This provides a quantity gap analysis.
- 4.9 Comparison is based on a population of 127,700 for 2017<sup>12</sup>. The quantity needs for outdoor sport provision can be found in the emerging Playing Pitch Strategy 2017. Play provision is reviewed as part of the Play Area Audit 2017. The quantity provision of churchyards will be considered within a dedicated study that will consider the capacity of the current provision and demands for future burial space.

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<sup>12</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) sub national 2014 population projections to 2017

**Table 2 to 4. These tables apply the green space types and quantity standards set out in the Public Green Spaces and Water Environment SPD (2012)**

Table 2: BOROUGH WIDE PROVISION – 2017 population estimate 127,700				
Type of green space	Current provision	2012 SPD Standard	Required by applying standard	Gap Analysis
Strategic / Prestige Park	27.6 ha	0.3 hectares per 1000 persons	38.31 ha	10.71 ha required
Informal open space: Natural / Semi Natural + Green Corridors + Urban Fringe + General Amenity	1510.24 ha	2.0 hectares per 1000 persons	255.4 ha	1254.84 ha over provision
Allotments	17.7 ha	0.2 hectares per 1000 persons	25.54 ha	7.84 ha required

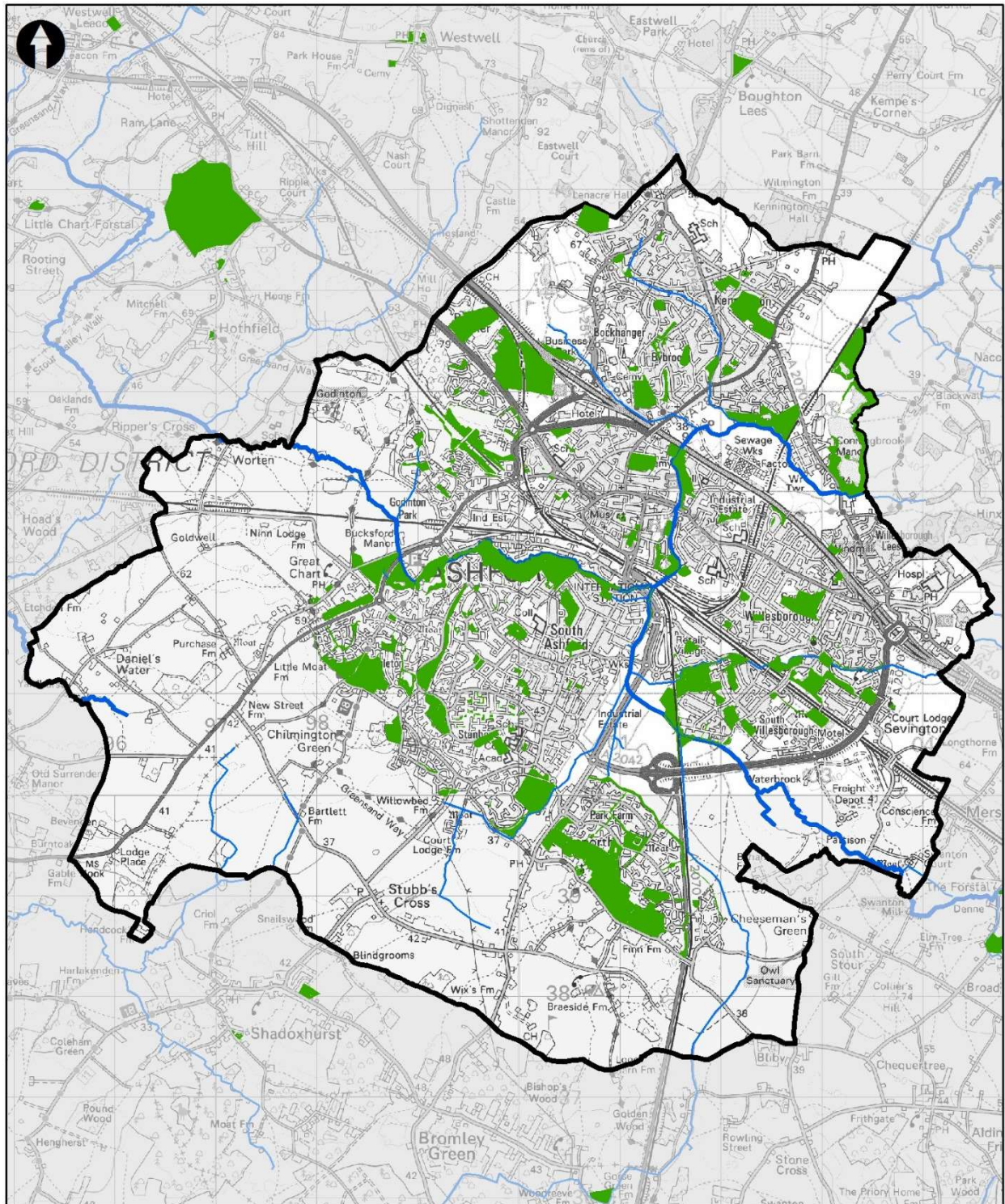
Table 3: URBAN PROVISION – 2017 population estimate 81,281				
Type of green space	Current urban provision	2012 SPD Standard	Required by applying standard	Gap Analysis
Strategic / Prestige Park	27.6 ha	0.3 hectares per 1000 persons	24.38 ha	3.22 ha Over provision
Informal open space: Natural / Semi Natural + Green Corridors + Urban Fringe + General Amenity	286.94 ha	2.0 hectares per 1000 persons	162.56 ha	124.38 ha Over provision
Allotments	9.3 ha	0.2 hectares per 1000 persons	16.26 ha	6.96 ha required

4.10 Splitting the table between urban and rural provision requires division of the population data. The ONS population profiles do not provide data per parish; therefore quantities have been estimated based on known census data per parish for 2011. Appendix 4 provides details on the estimated population per parish for 2017, and how this has been calculated. The urban population for 2017 is estimated at 81,789; rural population at 46,710.

Table 4: RURAL PROVISION – 2017 population estimate 46,419				
Type of green space	Current rural provision	2012 SPD Standard	Required by applying standard	Gap Analysis
Strategic / Prestige Park	0 ha	0.3 hectares per 1000 persons	13.93 ha	13.93 ha required
Informal open space: Natural / Semi Natural + Green Corridors + General Amenity + Urban Fringe	1223.3 ha	2.0 hectares per 1000 persons	92.84 ha	1130.46 ha Over provision
Allotments	8.4 ha	0.2 hectares per 1000 persons	9.28 ha	0.88 ha required

4.11 Figure 3 illustrates urban provision of open space.

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



- Legend**
- Open Spaces
  - Urban Area
  - Main river channel
  - Other channel

## Open Space Provision Ashford Urban Area

Figure 3 – Open Space Provision – Ashford Urban Area

## General Quantity Observations

- 4.12 There is an under supply of strategic parks within the borough; however the Local Plan identifies plans to improve, extend and provide significant pieces of strategic park i.e. Conningbrook Lakes Country Park and Discovery Park. Thus, it will be important to ensure this expected provision is delivered in a timely and appropriate manner.
- 4.13 Strategic parks are considered to offer open space provision of borough wide benefit; the spaces are typically high profile and destination sites. Within the borough, all the designated strategic parks are within the Ashford urban area; it is unlikely that there is scope for a strategic park within the rural area, although provision at Tenterden is considered an important local hub, with the combination of informal open space, play and sport.
- 4.14 Allotments are typically provided as a local provision per parish and ward, however it is accepted that users will travel to these facilities and therefore provision is considered broadly strategic; the potential under-provision in terms of quantity requires assessment alongside accessibility and demand, to ensure there is a genuine need.
- 4.15 The informal open space provision for the borough appears as an oversupply particularly in the rural quantity. This is because of the nature of the natural/semi natural typology, which includes large areas of woodland and downland:
- Hothfield Common LNR – 56.11 ha
  - King's Wood – 876.59 ha
  - Wye NNR – 103.95 ha
  - Hamstreet Woods NNR – 93.23 ha
  - The Warren and Hoads Wood – 35.65 ha
- 4.16 These spaces combined provide 1198.13 ha open space. This typology has a recreational value, makes an important contribution to biodiversity, and provides open access. However, in reality access can be limited owing to the nature of the landscape i.e. vegetation and topography can restrict genuine use, or specific landscape management techniques. Caution is therefore given to the value of this data in terms of assessing quantity; the quantity dominates provision, particularly within the associated rural areas, where the issue is more the quality of access.
- 4.17 Within the urban provision the informal open space provision appears high. This is because the quantity includes some large open areas, located on the fringes of the built up area of Ashford. Examples include:

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

- Urban Fringe within Kingsnorth parish – 45.46 ha
  - The Warren and Hoads Wood – 35.65 ha
  - Ashford Community Woodland – 13.86 ha
- 4.18 Ideally, informal open space should be distributed across the urban area, to achieve safe and convenient access within a minimum of 400m of all properties (as per current access standards in the SPD).
- 4.19 Therefore, although the data indicates over provision the location is not necessarily of convenience to users.
- 4.20 It is vital to evaluate open space quantity for every proposed development, given its location to allow for appropriate open space provision at both a local and strategic level.
- 4.21 Similarly, the rural quantity data has required a per parish gap analysis which cannot collectively be commented on. Neighbourhood planning supports this approach to local spatial planning which Open Space provision should adhere to. The Parish Council's involvement in such data gathering is crucial to understand the current uses and local value of spaces. The parish maps and comments received to date are detailed at Appendix 5.

### QUALITY AUDIT

- 4.22 A detailed assessment of the quality of existing open space within the Urban Area has been completed using a comprehensive audit criteria. Appendix 6 provides a detailed list of the criteria used, which covers the quality of design and management of the open space.
- 4.23 Parish Councils were asked to provide a quality statement using a range of questions about their view of the quality of provision and comment on any future improvements, needs and issues with the standard of open space.
- 4.24 The results of the questionnaire are detailed in Appendix 5, as part of the rural audit results. Additional information will be added to this self-assessment as part of further consultation.

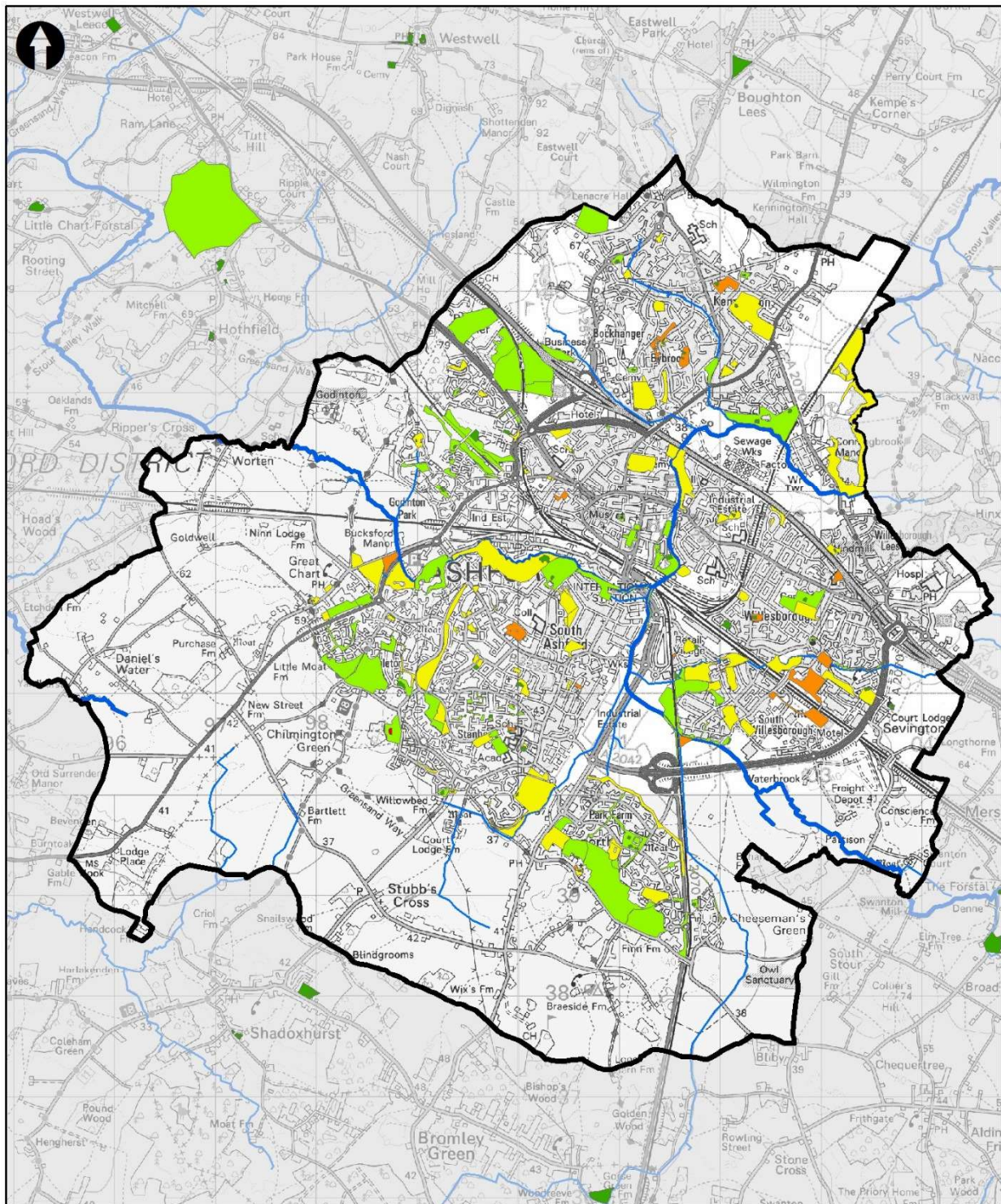
### Urban Area Quality Audit methodology

- 4.25 The Quality Audit of existing open space within the Urban Area has been compiled over a period of approximately six months. This has been completed by Council officers by means of a combination of a desktop study and through specific site visits. The Quality Audit within the Urban Area is made up of two scoring criteria lists looking at Design Quality and Site Condition.

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

- 4.26 The criteria used to assess the quality is based on best practice and reflects the types of criteria found in the Green Flag Programme, ILAM Parks Management Guidance and the Tidy Britain Scheme.
- 4.27 Audits are, of necessity, a 'snapshot' in time. Some open space characteristics can change more rapidly than others. The condition audit is more susceptible to change than the other audit levels. The site condition audit was undertaken in spring 2017, when it is expected for the condition of open spaces to be at their best, before the impact of new weed growth, peak use during the summer months, lighter evenings etc.
- 4.28 It is recommended that this level of the audit is fully reviewed on a two-year cycle. The relevant open space sites should also be reviewed when applications for development are put forward, so that the 'snapshot' audit is up-to-date.
- 4.29 Outcomes from the quality audit are visually represented for the Ashford Urban Area in Figures 4 and 5 and listed in Appendix 7.
- 4.30 The quality of existing open space will vary following specific capital improvement projects so this level of audit can be updated on a site by site basis as needed.

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



### Legend

#### Open Spaces Design Value

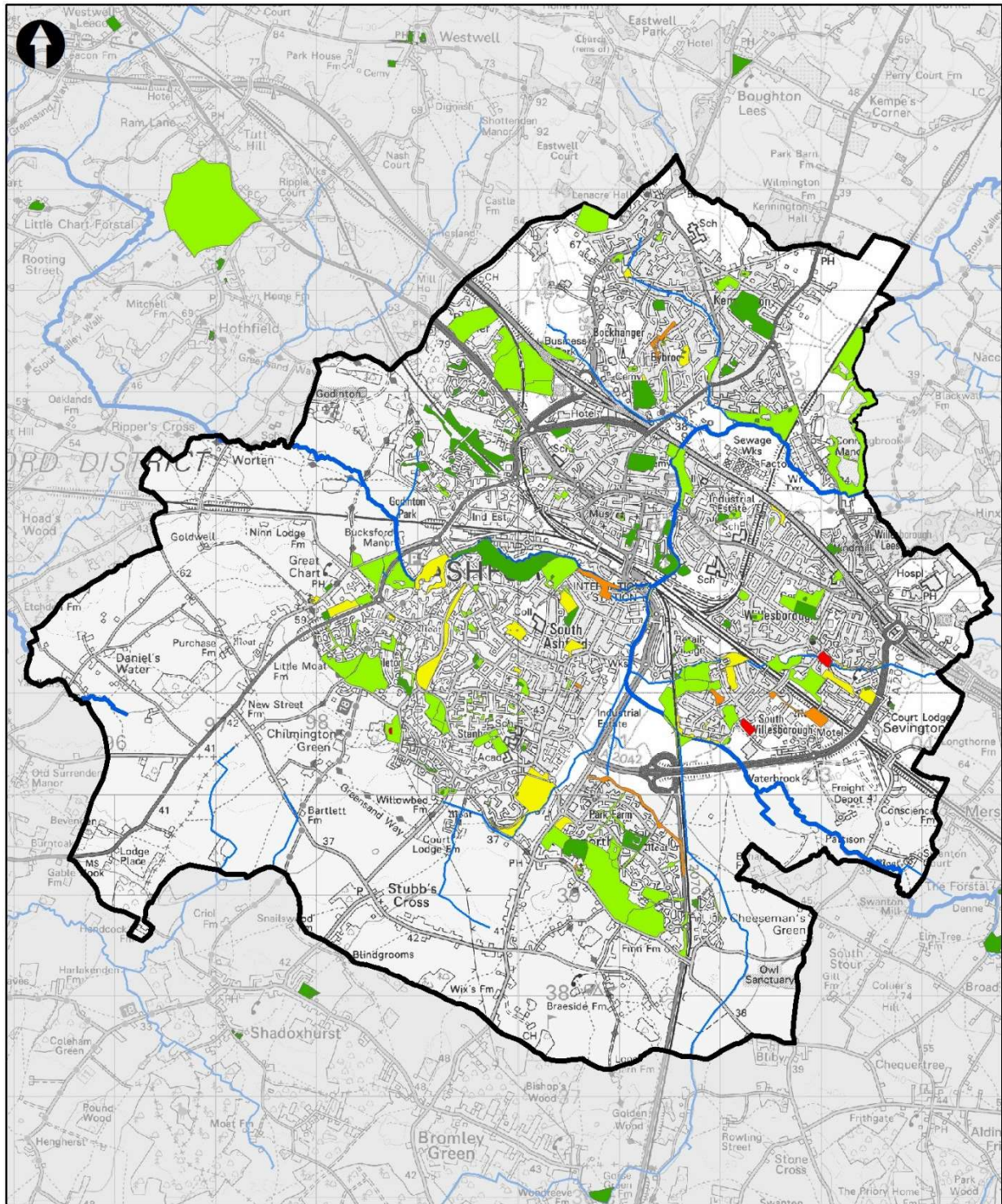
- Very Poor
- Poor
- Satisfactory
- Good
- Very Good

- Urban Area
- Main river channel
- Other channel

### Open Space Quality Ashford Urban Area

Figure 4 – Open Space Design Quality – Ashford Urban Area

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



## Legend

### Open Spaces Condition

- Very Poor
- Poor
- Satisfactory
- Good
- Very Good

- Urban Area
- Main river channel
- Other channel

## Open Space Condition Ashford Urban Area

Figure 5. Open Space Condition – Ashford Urban Area

## Summary of Quality of Open Spaces per typology in the Urban Area

4.31 The table below lists the individual typologies and their overall average score for all the assessed sites.

**Table 5.**

Open Space Typology	Average Design Quality Score	Average Condition Score
Strategic / Prestige Park	3.17	4.06
Natural / Semi Natural	3.30	3.54
Green Corridors	3.05	3.09
Sports Provision	3.18	3.68
General Amenity	2.82	3.38
Allotments	2.65	3.64
Churchyards and closed cemeteries	2.30	2.79
Urban Fringe	3.07	3.17

4.32 The scoring hierarchy used for the assessment process:

- 0 – 1 Very poor
- 1.1 - 2 Poor
- 2.1 - 3 Satisfactory
- 3.1 - 4 Good
- 4.1 - 5 Very Good

## General Quality Observations in the Urban Area

1. The majority of the sites scored Satisfactory and Good for Design Quality, at least 50 scored Good and 16 scored Poor.
2. No sites in the urban area scored Very Poor using the Design Quality criteria; there are two sites that scored Very Poor on the Condition audit.
3. No typology average score falls into the Very Good although the average condition scoring for Strategic / Prestige Parks comes close due to the Very Good condition of Memorial Gardens in the centre of the Town.
4. The majority of sites in the Urban Area were scored Good and Very Good for Condition Quality.
5. All typologies generally have Good Design Quality apart from Churchyards and Closed Cemeteries, Allotments and General Amenity. Conningbrook Lakes Country Park scored Satisfactory under this audit.
6. All typologies are in Good Condition apart from Churchyards and Closed Cemeteries which has an average score of Satisfactory.

7. Lessons need to be learnt from the high scoring sites, such as Memorial Gardens where the level of investment is reflected in the quality of the condition.
8. Sites that score Poor or Very Poor need appropriate measures in place to change this. Most were scored low due to poor management with too much litter in place at the time of the visit, not easily accessible, poor amenities on site or not clear that the site is an open space.
9. Given the recent formation of the Aspire management organisation, the potential to improve condition quality is high.

### **Summary of Open Space Comments in the Rural Area**

- 4.33 Of the 40 parishes consulted, including Tenterden Town Council, 24 parishes returned the questionnaire. The comments are summarised in Appendix 5.
- 4.34 The parishes were not asked specifically to provide detailed comments on all their different open space types. The approach to the audit was to check, amend and add to existing known information on the open spaces within the parishes, as an update to the information captured as part of the Open Space Study 2008, and capture any specific open space issues.
- 4.35 The majority of parishes did not comment regarding future improvements and community needs. Broadly common themes include new and improved play and teenage provision. Where comments have been provided there is clearly interest in providing open space facilities for the benefit of the whole community.
- 4.36 It is recommended that given the low level of feedback, that consideration should be given for more face-to-face work with the Parish Councils to identify specific issues, agree the value of their open spaces and consider open space projects.
- 4.37 There is potential for this work to be included as part of a Neighbourhood Planning process, which provides a useful tool for gathering open space information and planning new provision.

## ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT

### Accessibility Audit methodology

- 4.38 The accessibility audit of existing Open Space in the Urban Area has been completed by using GIS information held by Ashford Borough Council.
- 4.39 Figure 6 shows an illustration of applying a blanket 400m walking catchment to the current provision of accessible open space (excluding strategic provision of Allotments, Cemeteries and Outdoor Sport), including the proposed Discovery Park. Strategic Parks are included as they have a value in providing a local provision. The 400m walking catchment is based on the current access standard detailed in the SPD, for informal / natural greenspace.
- 4.40 This produces a fairly basic picture of accessibility to open spaces and does not take into account physical barriers, the 'offer' provided by the open space, future development and the Green Corridor Plan. For example, the following elements would change the picture of open space accessibility:
- The removal of spaces of low value
  - The inclusion of barriers such as the M20 motorway, River Stour, railway line.
- 4.41 The SPD provides current access standards. These standards are partly based on the 2008 Open Space Study, which proposed standards based on a process of public consultation and national recommended accessibility standards provided by the Natural England standard for Accessible Natural Green Space (ANGSt).
- 4.42 The 2008 Open Space Study included a household survey. The survey 'identified that a large majority of respondents are prepared to travel up to 10 minutes to use most forms of open space, with the preferred mode of travel by foot.'<sup>13</sup>
- 4.43 The current SPD sets out accessibility standards, which are detailed in Table 6. The access standards are defined by the use of the public highway or footpath network, as opposed to straight 'as the crow flies' distances.

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<sup>13</sup> Open Space Study for Ashford Borough, 2008, p 49

**Table 6. Current Public Green Spaces & Water Environment SPD access standards**

Type of Green Space / Water Environment	Access Standard
Outdoor Sports Space (Formal pitches)	Safely and conveniently located within 800m (c.10 minutes walking time). For larger strategic sites a distance of up to 5km by motorised transport may be acceptable
Informal / Natural Greenspace	Safely and conveniently located within 400m
Children and young people’s play space (with buffer space)	Safely and conveniently located within 400m

- 4.44 These distances are defined by use of the public highway or footpath network as opposed to straight ‘as the crow flies’ distances. These access standards do not apply to strategic parks, cemeteries or allotments, as these are strategic facilities.<sup>14</sup>
- 4.45 The current accessibility standards have been compared to neighbouring authorities as part of a benchmarking exercise, detailed in Table 7.
- 4.46 At Ashford, informal / natural greenspace provision provides the highest quantity of open space, and the largest variety in terms of area. Unlike Swale Borough Council, Ashford does not currently distinguish between Destination, Local and Neighbourhood, and therefore Ashford applies a catch-all distance of 400m distance.
- 4.47 Canterbury City Council distinguishes between the different types of play spaces, which is roughly according to their size. Again Ashford currently provides a blanket 400m distance.

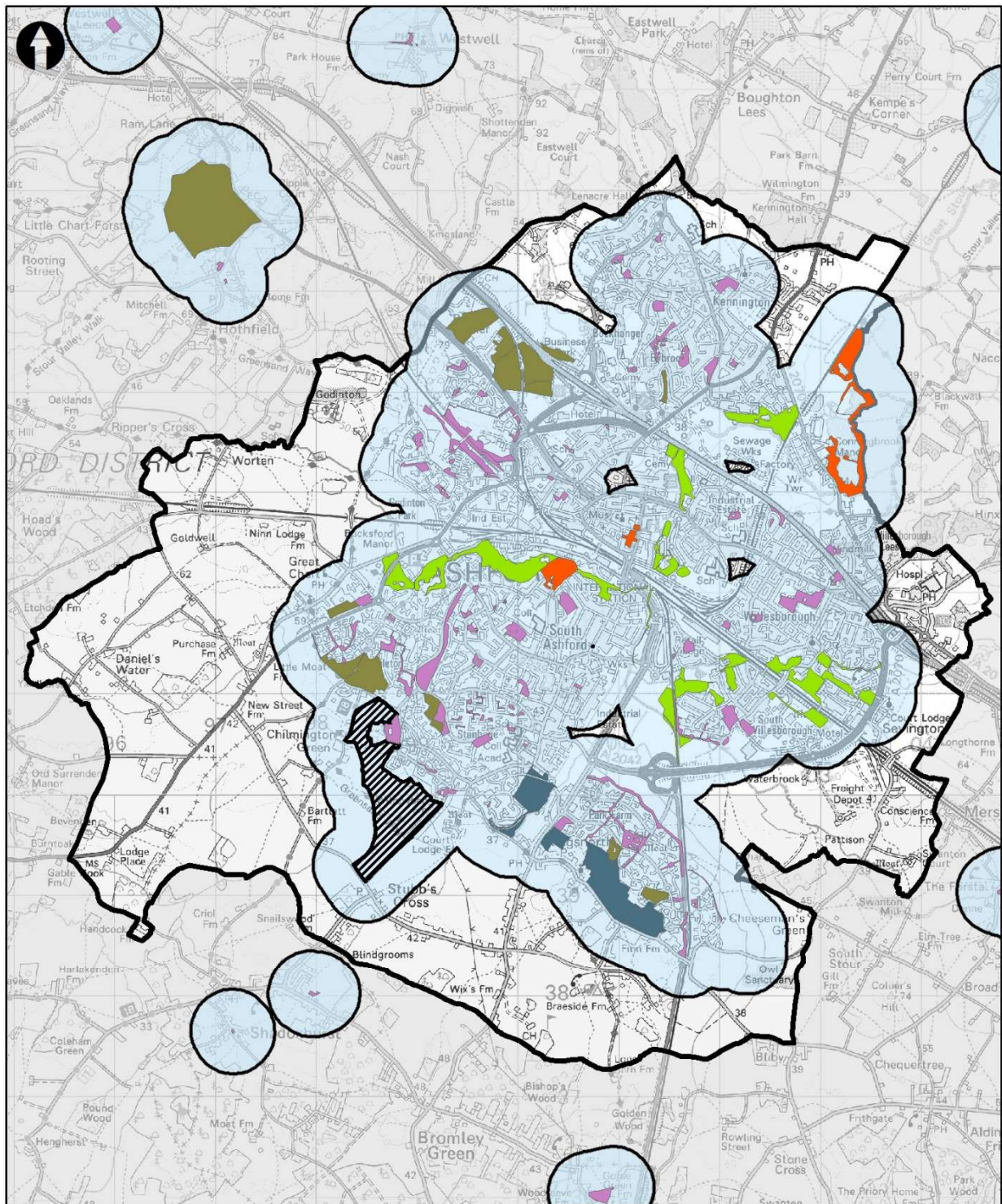
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<sup>14</sup> Public Green Spaces and Water Environment SPD, 2012

**Table 7. This table summarises access standards for Ashford, and neighbouring authorities Swale Borough Council and Canterbury City Council**

Type	Ashford Borough Council	Swale Borough Council	Canterbury City Council
Strategic Parks	Strategic	2,000m	2,000m
Natural / Semi-natural Greenspace	400m	2,000m of a destination site 800m of a local site 400m of a neighbourhood site	1,000m
Green Corridors	400m	Not included	300m
Outdoor Sport	800m	800m	1,000m
Amenity space	400m	400m	1,000m
Play areas	400m	400m	LAP: 100m LEAP: 400m NEAP: 1,000m Destination play: 20 minutes' drive time
Allotments	Strategic	800m	N/A
Urban Fringe	400m	Not included	Not included
Cemeteries and Churchyards	Strategic	No standard	Not included

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



### Legend

- Amenity Space
- Green Corridor: Accessible Open Space
- Natural/Semi-natural Green Space
- Strategic Parks and Prestige Parks
- Urban Fringe
- Discovery Park
- 400m\_Buffer
- Urban Area

### Open Space Accessibility Parks, Amenity Spaces and Green Corridors Ashford Urban Area

Figure 6. Open Space Accessibility – Ashford Urban Area

## General Accessibility Observations

- 4.48 Benchmarking accessibility standards concludes that the SPD standards are appropriate but could be further layered given the diversity of informal space.
- 4.49 Children and young people's play space distances have been reviewed as part of the play audit. The current recommendation is to consider a distance of 600m (15 minute walk). Further explanation is under 'Play Review.'
- 4.50 Although allotments are currently considered a strategic provision, they are equally a local facility and it is expected that some users will walk to their site. Therefore, there is some potential for consideration of an access standard to ensure local provision. Similar to comments regarding quantity of allotments, this would need to be as part of a detailed assessment alongside existing and potential demand, to ensure there is a genuine need.
- 4.51 Strategic Parks do not currently have an access standard. However, they clearly have a dual value as neighbourhood open space and have therefore been mapped with a distance of 400m, to allow for open space provision where there is a potential gap in Informal / Natural Greenspace provision.
- 4.52 Beyond the 400m mapped distance, consideration should be given to applying a walking distance standard for strategic provision, as well as allowing for motorised access. Strategic parks and allotments both have a local amenity value and therefore it is not unreasonable to expect users to access the sites on foot.
- 4.53 A more sophisticated approach to accessibility mapping, taking account of physical barriers, the quality of the route, barriers along the route or the value of the open space offer e.g. the facilities on offer, the quality of the open space and other supporting open space types such as the Green Corridor needs to be undertaken as part of spatial planning for new open space.
- 4.54 Therefore, the SPD review must consider an approach which assess' the value of the open space and location issues, and applies this to an accessibility standard.

## PLAY REVIEW

- 4.55 The Play Review is a current process which is underway; the audit of all spaces across the borough has been undertaken and mapped.
- 4.56 The review sits within the Open Space Strategy and will inform the play element of the SPD revision.
- 4.57 Play areas are seen as an important part of open space. They are often the main attractor to an open space, providing social, health and learning opportunities.

## Play Quality Audit

- 4.58 A specific Quality Audit for existing equipped play areas across both Urban and Rural Areas has been developed (Play Area Audit 2017). Appendix 1 provides the list of sites.
- 4.59 The criteria used for auditing the sites is detailed in Appendix 8. Play areas were comparably assessed to provide a score that identifies each area as either good, satisfactory or requiring improvement. The criteria assessed accessibility, quality and usage.

ACCESSIBILITY (each cat. 10 max)		QUALITY (each cat. 10 max)		USE (max 10)				
Secluded/Overlooked	10	Site Condition	10		10			
Restricted/Not	10	Missing kit	10					
DDA Accessible	10	Kit condition & Longevity	10					
		Play Value	10					
		Design and layout	10					
	30		50		10			
Weighting (x1)	30	Weighting (x3)	150	Weighting (x3)	30		Overall score	
							210	

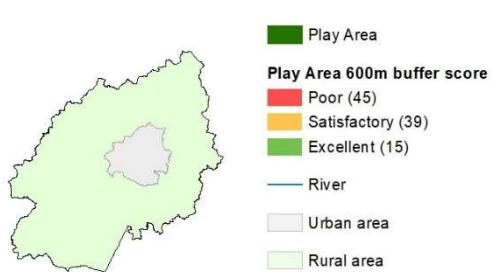
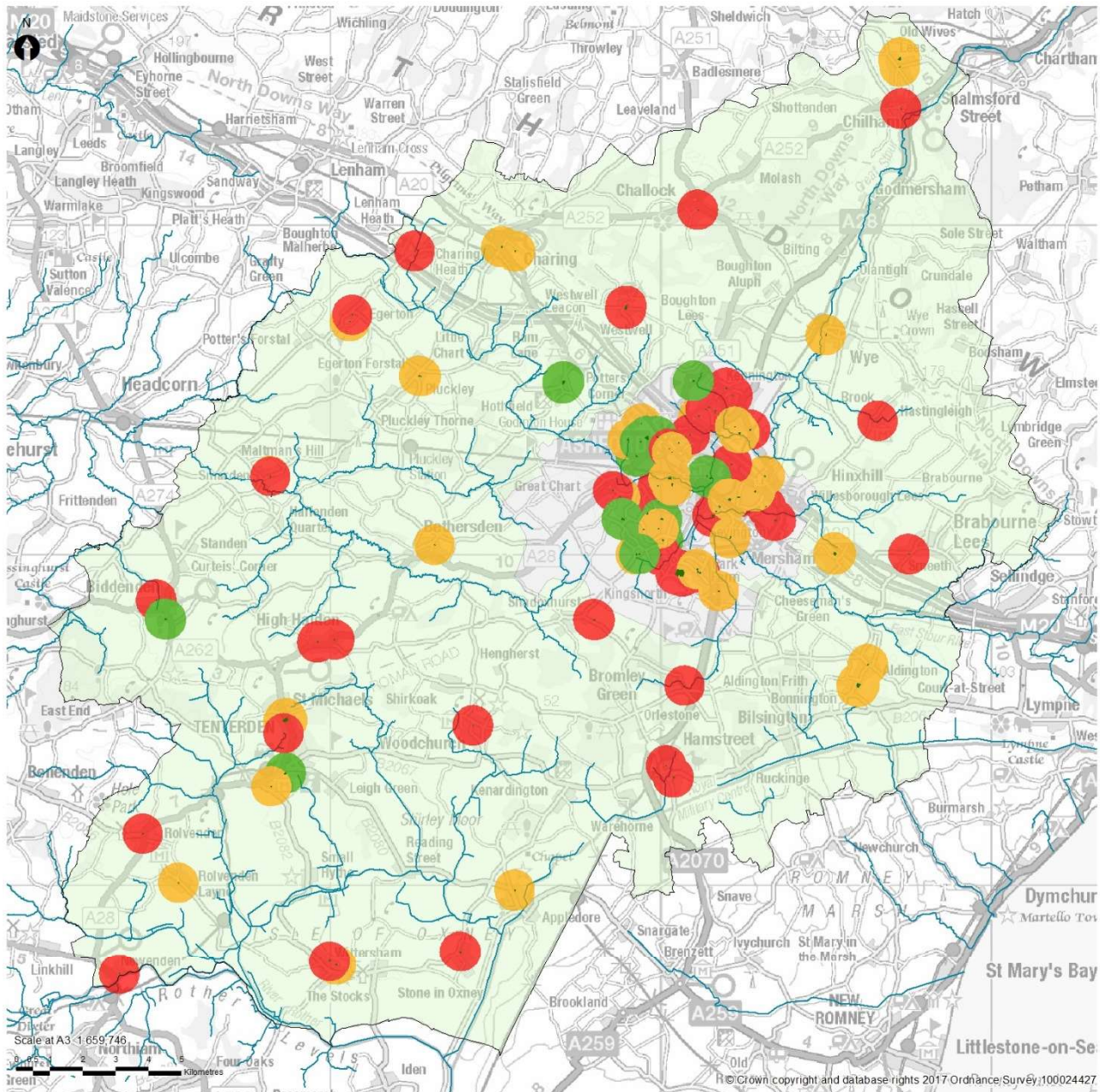
- 4.60 Scoring was weighted towards quality as this was considered the most significantly changed factor when refurbishment takes place.
- 4.61 Figure 7 illustrates the emerging outcome from this Quality Audit. Further work with the Parish and Town Council’s will follow to validate the assessment.
- 4.62 Within the quality assessment are questions around accessibility (based on average walking times for residents). Currently the access standard is 400m; Figure 8 tests the use of a suggested catchment buffer of 600m around play provision. The plan overlays the outcomes from the Quality Audit within the Urban Area and applies a 600m walking zone (buffer) around each play area.

- 4.63 Better green connectivity and access means that Local Areas of Play (LAP) can become part of green routes, and walking to play spaces becomes part of the recreational experience enjoyed. Therefore walking distances to play areas become less relevant as the quality of access improves. This in turn allows people's needs to be better met by fewer but larger, better provided, better supported and more sustainable open space and play provision.

#### **General emerging observations (existing play areas in the urban area)**

1. There is a good level of overall equipped play provision across the Urban Area.
  2. There are small gaps in walkability to existing provision, namely in Beaver Ward (around the Whitfield Road/Torrington Road area); the edge of Willesborough next to Hinxhill Road; and in Stour Ward around the Hardinge Road Area.
  3. Although there is play provision circling the Town Centre within 600m, the centre lacks an equipped play area immediately available to shoppers using the High Street. An aim is to identify a space for play within the town centre. Currently there is private play provision provided at the Ashford Outlet which is a strong draw for shoppers, and indicates the value of play combined with retail.
  4. There are currently 23 play areas identified as Requiring Improvement (out of 57 play areas in the Urban Area). In some areas residents only have walkability access to play areas that are of poor condition. Play Areas that score Requires Improvement need detailed analysis to identify the appropriate measures to improve these areas.
  5. There are currently ten privately owned play areas managed by Management Companies that are used openly by the public; they have been included within the audit process.
  6. The three play areas at Victoria Park are scored as Satisfactory. As a key destination for formal open space close to the town centre, these should be of a Good standard. Refurbishment plans are proposed, which will raise the standards of the play areas.
  7. In some areas where there are no natural boundaries (such as main roads, the river and the railway) there is an overlap of provision.
- 4.64 Further observations about the quality of existing Play Areas in the Rural Area will need to follow after consultation with the Parish and Town Councils.
- 4.65 A quantity audit will be undertaken once a final walking catchment has been defined.

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



Play Review  
Ashford Urban Area

Figure 7. Play Area Quality Audit – emerging data

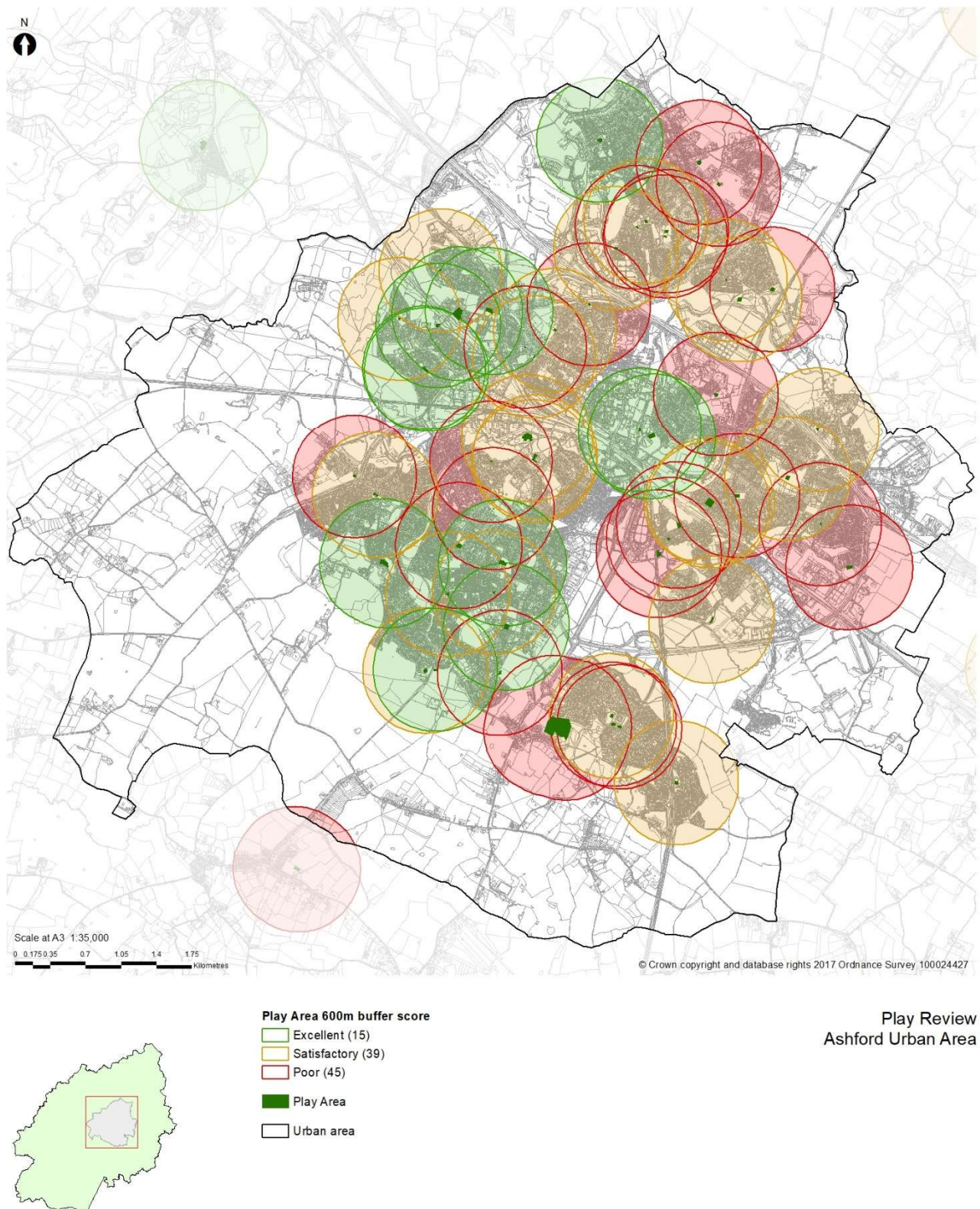


Figure 8. Play Area Quality Audit – 600m walking catchment for the Urban Area

## VALUE AUDIT FOR OPEN SPACE

- 4.66 In addition to auditing each open space for its quality, quantity and accessibility, this Open Space Strategy considers an approach to assess the value that existing and future identified sites could bring to the wider open space network.
- 4.67 The Value Audit looks at the inherent potential of the open space to deliver the benefits sought for its specific location. The benefits considered are those which support the NPPF's requirements for sustainable development, that is:
- **An economic role** – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
  - **A social role** – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and
  - **An environmental role** – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.<sup>15</sup>
- 4.68 The value audit was prepared and tested over a period of 12 months and has evolved to its current format presented in this Open Space Strategy for simplicity and clarity.
- 4.69 As part of this audit, it was considered important to appreciate both the existing and future potential that each site has. The criteria used for the value audit is detailed in Appendix 9, and includes the environmental, social and economic functions of open space.
- 4.70 This provides a comprehensive scoring of the Value shortfall each assessed space has or doesn't have. The value measurement ranges from 'value target met', to 'potential for significant improvements to value'. Where improvements are identified this highlights where investment can be targeted.

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<sup>15</sup> National Planning Policy Framework March 2012, p2

4.71 The value audit has been tested on Strategic and Prestige Parks, Cemetery sites and a number of amenity sites. The following are summary comments from the value audit for Strategic and Prestige Parks:

- **Conningbrook Lakes Country Park** is designated a Strategic Park and is already an important focus for outdoor sport, water recreation, nature and wildlife. Significant housing development is planned adjacent to the site. With investment the site has high potential to become a hub site, with activities and infrastructure appropriate to create a destination site for the borough. There is also potential to expand the site to the opposite side of the river Stour.
- **Victoria Park** has considerable potential for improvements in terms of facilities e.g. café offer, improved toilets, investment in play and heritage. With additional development planned for north of the river Stour, there will be increased pressure on this strategic open space. The Council has produced a masterplan for the site and has secured a development grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which will enable further planning work in order to secure major capital funding.
- **The Memorial Gardens** are a key piece of public open space within the town centre. The gardens are opposite the Gateway building which provides a wide community offer in terms of facilities, including a library. There is scope to improve the value of the open space by providing showcase landscaping of high horticultural merit, and improving the heritage offer, especially as there will be extra pressure on this site from students attending the new town centre college campus that will be opening in autumn 2017. It provides a key green link from the station to the town centre that should be enhanced. Proposals to extend and enhance the space are being considered.
- **The Old Burial Ground** is an awkward piece of open space which sits between a car park and Station Road. However, given the lack of open space within the town centre, the site is of strategic value and would benefit from investment to improve its visual quality and integration with the surrounding urban landscape. Strategically there is value in considering improvements to the Old Burial Ground in tandem with the Memorial Gardens and within future town centre development plans.

#### **Summary value observations in relation to the existing Strategic and Prestige Parks assessed:**

1. The value measurement ranges from 'value target met', to 'potential for significant improvements to value'. Where improvements are identified this highlights where investment can be

2. Victoria Park (Prestige Park) scored with a Moderate value shortfall, which means there is potential for improvement to fill this gap.
3. Memorial Gardens and Old Burial Ground (Prestige Parks) both scored with a Minor shortfall.
4. Conningbrook Lakes Country Park (Strategic Park) scored with a Moderate short fall, which means there is potential for improvement to improve its value.

### KEY FINDINGS OF THE OPEN SPACE AUDIT

- The Green Corridor and the river network play an important role in providing connections and 'natural' open space across the Urban Area and the transition between Urban and Rural.
- Neighbourhood and local General Amenity spaces are relatively small, are of poorer design, are in poorer condition and are fragmented across the urban area.
- A minimum value has not been placed on the typologies of open space i.e. there is no minimum area, minimum facility offer. A blanket approach would not necessarily be helpful as some small spaces are of inherent value to open space provision. Therefore, there is a benefit in providing a hierarchy to open spaces, as part of a value assessment.
- There are a number of barriers in terms of accessibility that need to be explored in more detail. This includes existing road and rail network, rivers and land ownership. This would provide more quality information in terms of accessibility, and help steer the spatial planning process.
- There is an opportunity to align enhancements of play provision with enhancement to open space.
- The current supply of Strategic and Prestige Parks are in the centre of town (Victoria Park, Memorial Gardens and Old Burial Ground) and to the North East (Conningbrook Lakes County Park). However, the proposed Strategic Park (Discovery Park) located in the south west, part of Chilmington Green proposals should help with this provision, and increase the quantity per head of population.
- The Value Audit criteria provides a robust and comprehensive guide for assessing any potential future open space provision to be added to the network.
- Quantity data indicates there is an under provision of allotments. However, there is a continual turnover of allotments sites, which over the long term balances with the waiting list; without the waiting list there would be vacant plots.
- The existing profiles of allotment holders also suggests that allotment users are willing to travel to sites; as an example residents within Ashford will travel to Wye to use the allotment site located there.

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

- Cemeteries and Churchyards provide useful breathing spaces in respect of open space provision. The spaces typically have a unique quality, and provide quiet spaces within built up locations. They are a key part of green routes, often in tandem with public footpaths.
- Quantity data for the rural area is considered to provide an accurate picture of provision; open space within parishes is patchy and varied, which is to be expected. There is a lack of quality data and feedback from Parish Councils and rural providers of open space.
- Parishes should not be considered in isolation; the benefits and opportunities provided by parish open space are not necessarily confined to a parish boundary.

## Section 5: Future Needs and Demand

*This section looks at the open space required to meet the needs of the future population and suggests approaches on standards for future provision which can be used as part of the review of the Public Green Spaces and Water Environment Supplementary Planning Document 2012 (SPD).*

### The Future Population of Ashford

- 5.1 The borough of Ashford's population is estimated to be 145,300 by 2030.
- 5.2 In addition, the Ashford age profile is changing, by 2030 there are expected to be 35,000 people over the age of 65.
- 5.3 Ashford Borough Council is in the process of producing its Local Plan which will set out the level of housing growth that is needed to come forward by 2030. Currently, the evidence base which supports the draft Local Plan is suggesting that an additional 16,120 houses will be required (2011 – 2030). Factoring in completions since 2011, this figure is reduced to 12,943 between 2017 and 2030.<sup>16</sup> The majority of this future growth will be focused towards the built up area of Ashford, approximately 85-90% in the urban area, and 10% to 15% in the rural areas.
- 5.4 The updated draft Local Plan indicates where development is proposed and the likely dwelling quantities. This is important to help plan for new open space areas and reflect on current provision. Potential new open space provision will most probably be a mix of off-site financial contribution towards existing or allocated open spaces, and on-site provision dependant on each development.
- 5.5 Table 2 on page 30 details the current provision of open space, the SPD standards, and the current 'gap' in provision. This should be considered when new development is planned, as well as the need to provide open space given the rise in population.

### Local Plan Spatial Target

- 5.6 As discussed in Section 4, the information within Table 2 provides a simple quantum of open space, and does not consider other factors including the location and distribution of open space, barriers to access, and the quality of provision.

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<sup>16</sup> Ashford Borough Council – Main Changes to the Local Plan 2030 Consultation Document (Part 1) July 2017, p7

- 5.7 The draft Local Plan provides a Total Spatial Target for play and open space (Table 8). This target is based on ‘new development proposed in this Local Plan that do not already have planning permission (circa 7,000 new dwellings).<sup>17</sup> This equates to an estimated 16,800 increase in population, based on an average household size of 2.4 persons per dwelling.

**Table 8. Draft Local Plan total spatial target for play and open space, required borough wide**

Open Space Typology	Quantitative Standard	Total
Informal space	2.0 hectares per 1000 persons	33.6ha
Children’s Play	0.5 hectares per 1000 persons	8.4ha
Strategic Parks	0.3 hectares per 1000 persons	5.04ha
Allotment provision	0.2 hectares per 1000 persons	3.36ha

- 5.8 Not all residential development coming forward will be required to deliver a proportion of these provisions. For example, some development will be excluded on viability grounds such as most proposals coming forward in the town centre, and a number of developments will fall below the threshold that trigger a requirement for provision.
- 5.9 Where open space is not delivered as new provision, the required financial value will be used to improve the quality of existing open space, to allow better use of the space to mitigate for the impact of increased use given a rise in the local population.
- 5.10 The spatial target within the draft Local Plan will not address the gap in provision with regards Strategic Parks and Allotments, as detailed in Table 2. The proposed Discovery Park as outlined in the Chilmington Green Area Action Plan will address this gap to some extent. What is not clear at this stage is where future provision of open space will be allocated, either on or off site, or as raising standards to existing provision.
- 5.11 The Green and Blue Grid Strategy 2008 provides some context for the location of proposed strategic sites:
1. Conningbrook Lakes Country Park
  2. Discovery Park
  3. Willesborough Dykes Wetland Park
- 5.12 Conningbrook Lakes Country Park is now underway and Discovery Park is detailed as part of the Chilmington Green Area Action Plan. Both sites have the potential to be extended beyond their existing planned boundaries and will have detailed masterplans.

<sup>17</sup> Ashford Borough Council – Main Changes to the Local plan 2030 Consultation Document (Part 1) July 2017, p79

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

- 5.13 Willesborough Dykes Wetland Park has not progressed, but is still considered a potential strategic park with constraints and opportunities which require further investigation.
- 5.14 Thus a spatial plan to identify the location of new and required open space provision and improvements to existing open space is vital to visualise how and where such provision will be allocated.
- 5.15 It will highlight future allocation of open space provision, not already accounted for either by existing sites (e.g. Conningbrook) or outlined within policies as part of the draft Local Plan 2030.
- 5.16 This spatial plan process will result in projects as part of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- 5.17 When spatially planning a set of quality standards should be applied the current audits will help identify and maximise the value of open space.
- 5.18 In order to determine the quantum and type of provision required for each qualifying proposal, development applicants will be expected to use the relevant standards in the SPD. Aside from informal space – which will normally be delivered on site and form part of the wider landscaping/ SUDs strategy, incidental space around buildings, discussions with the Council must then take place as to what exact provision will be sort from any S106 monies to be collected, using the projects identified within the supporting Infrastructure Delivery Plan schedule as the starting point.<sup>18</sup>

### **Ashford Borough Council's Local Open Space Standards**

- 5.19 Every new home will add to the demand for additional green space and new residential developments will be expected to contribute sufficient provision to ensure that needs for open space are met.
- 5.20 Specific provision should be made for each type of open space. The standards set out in the SPD are based on evidence provided by the Open Space Study for Ashford Borough Council (2008). The standards provided by the SPD have been broadly followed during the development of this Strategy but will be reviewed where the Sports Strategies (2017) and the revised Green Corridor Plan (2017) have provided up to date evidence of changing needs.

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<sup>18</sup> ABC Draft Local Plan, version June 2016

- 5.21 Guidance on how these standards are to be applied will be developed as part of reviewing the SPD. The SPD will also review guidance on assessment of developer's open space proposals regarding compliance with the Council's aspirations on adoption, maintenance and management
- 5.22 There is also the opportunity to further maximise the contribution open space can make to:
- Sustainable transport - wherever possible, ensuring that homes are within walking distance of open space and that access routes are safe, pleasant and as far as possible form part of the positive recreational experience associated with using green open space. One key feature of the hub model described in this section is the extension of the Ashford Green Corridors and the promotion of green routes.
  - Healthy living - This involves maximising the amount of time spent within green open space as well as promoting physical activity.
  - Future sustainability of the borough - to achieve the very best cost benefit balance in the provision of open space and ensure that long-term quality and care can be delivered within the resources available.

### Meeting Quality Standards for New Open Space

#### *Access Standards*

- 5.23 It is proposed that all residents should live within easy access of public green open space. The distance people have to travel to reach open space should be reasonable in terms of the time and effort needed to get there. This will vary according to the type of open space and a person's reason for going there.
- 5.24 In rural areas access standards will not always apply, as open space provision applies to the whole parish, and not just a targeted built-up area within a specified distance of a proposed development.
- 5.25 Access standards have manifest themselves in the setting down of travelling times or distances. The usefulness and practical reality of access standards has depended on the degree to which en-route deterrents and attractions are also considered. The impact of these deterrents and attractions is what this document refers to as access quality.
- 5.26 The revised SPD will consider the quality of the open space provision, and the quality of the route. The access standard should consider:
- The type of open space: Neighbourhood, Local or Destination
  - The quality of the route: On / off road, barriers to access
  - The value of the open space.

5.27 Potential distance thresholds for access to open space delivered on site are reviewed in Table 9.

**Table 9.**

Open Space type	Actual maximum distance for on-site provision. <i>Note that this is the maximum acceptable distance and shorter distances may be required if necessary to meet local needs.</i>
Outdoor sports	Typically Local / Destination sites To be determined by recommendations in the Playing Pitch Strategy
Informal/ natural open space	Typically Neighbourhood / Local sites 300m for access to green corridors and green routes 400m for access to amenity spaces, informal play, urban fringe
Formal Play Areas, including MUGAs and outdoor gyms	Typically Neighbourhood / Local sites 800m where access is predominantly through informal/natural open space; the play space is part of a destination open space 600m where more than 250m of the journey is other than informal/natural open space
Allotments	Currently strategic provision and therefore no access standard is applied. However given the <i>local</i> nature of the typology, provision should be evenly distributed within the urban area, and consideration should be given to an access standard that allows for access on foot.
Cemeteries	Strategic provisions. On-site and distance thresholds do not currently apply. However, Strategic Parks have a local value and therefore consideration should be given to an access standard that allows for access on foot.
Strategic Parks	

***Distance thresholds for off-Site Provision for new developments:***

5.28 *Where a development meets the size thresholds for on-site delivery – off-site provision may be allowed where this is in the best public interest. For instance:*

1. Where the configuration of the development site is such that it wraps around suitable off-site land.
2. Where the development area is partitioned by a major obstacle to access such as a river, main road or railway so that a central provision that meets the minimum size threshold cannot serve the whole development.

3. Where there is a sufficient area of available land nearby and that land is:
  - a. Within the distance thresholds for residents of the new development and,
  - b. Of sufficient strategic value.

5.29 *Where the size thresholds for provision of open space on-site are not met by a development* - there will be a requirement for off-site provision. Off-site provision may be through the delivery of additional suitable land and associated infrastructure or through a financial contribution towards enhancing the scope, quality and capacity of existing open space.

5.30 The additional needs resulting from smaller developments will often have to be met by enhancing the scope, quality and capacity of existing open space. The existing site selected:

- 1) Will be the best site available within the distance thresholds set for on-site provision in terms of quality and size or,
- 2) If there are no suitable existing sites within these thresholds the site selected will be,
  - a) In urban areas - the closest suitable, available site
  - b) In rural areas - within the parish

5.31 Off-site provision also includes open space types where investment is considered strategic, i.e. Strategic Parks, allotments and cemeteries. The benefit provided by these spaces is borough wide. The strategic contributions detailed in the SPD are still relevant, and will be more so as the borough population increases and the spaces continue to be developed.

### ***Levels of Investment in New Public Open Space Provision***

5.32 The developer will be expected to make sufficient investment to provide new open space. The investment will provide:

- 1) Land - found from within the development site or the developer will fully fund the purchase of sufficient suitable additional land at market value including legal and administrative costs;
- 2) All necessary infrastructure including play and sports equipment and associated facilities.
- 3) Maintenance of all new open space provision (period to be defined within an updated SPD).

## **The Governance of Future Public Open Space**

- 5.33 The Council is reviewing the current SPD, and will set proposals and arrangements for the future management of open space in perpetuity. Currently the SPD states that a developer is not obliged to give the open space to the Council and is at liberty to make such other arrangements as will satisfy the Council's requirement for the character, quality and accessibility of the land to be maintained. The submission of management and business plans is seen as a good approach to demonstrate that future arrangements are effective, sustainable and affordable for residents.
- 5.34 Whilst there are few examples where such plans are not adhered to, the SPD must give due consideration to enforcement and penalty, for lack of action.
- 5.35 Neither the Council nor Parish Councils are obliged to adopt new public open space. Local management and ownership of open space however has been encouraged. Parish and Town Councils are therefore to be consulted on local open space proposals at all stages whether or not Neighbourhood Plans have been produced, and the Rural Area Quality Audit will help define current open space issues to support their own needs for open space and associated facilities.
- 5.36 Where the Council or community organisation is to adopt public open space the developer must meet the maintenance cost for a set period. The cost of this maintenance will be calculated by the Council according to current standard rates. In the past payment for the maintenance has been made by the developer as a commuted sum to the Council prior to adoption. The Council has then been responsible for transferring this sum in its entirety to the adopting organisation.
- 5.37 The review of the SPD will provide further guidance on the above and particularly consider under what criteria the Council may offer to adopt public open space.

## **A Spatial Approach to Open Space Provision – Open Space Hubs**

- 5.38 It is important that public open space of all types is sustainable in the long term and that the provision of new open space and the cost of maintaining it is justified by the economic, social and environmental value derived. It is recommended that a spatial approach to open space provision is considered, balanced with the boroughs established network of open space and planned strategic parks.

- 5.39 The draft Local Plan highlights this approach by seeking to deliver a community hub model; the potential Open Space Hubs align with the proposed Sport and Recreation Hubs indicated in the Playing Pitch Strategy.

### Testing Spatial Models

- 5.40 The effectiveness of three models of open space distribution was considered; refer to the Spatial Models Comparison at Appendix 10. The models illustrated in the appendix analysed different arrangements of open space particularly with regard to its size, connectivity and dispersal:

- a. A hub based model containing most of the open space and associated formal facilities within a network of green corridors giving off-road green routes to the hub from up to 1km away.
- b. A hierarchical distribution of primary, secondary and tertiary spaces allowing shorter routes to formal play areas but with fewer green corridors.
- c. A dispersed model of open space bringing modest amenity spaces and formal play areas close to home but without connecting green corridors.

- 5.41 When testing the spatial models, this strategies quality and value criteria has been used.

- 5.42 The hub approach is specifically preferred for Ashford's Open Spaces because:

- It utilises existing areas of land suitable to accommodate large areas of multifunctional open space next to facilities, car parking and indoor sports provision;
- It uses and gives greater emphasis to the existing and potential Green Corridor designation as an important green connection to and from the hubs;
- It secures large areas of open space to the north and south of Ashford Urban Area where most of the growth is proposed;
- It enables Hubs to become destinations within Ashford that attract use from a local and a wider catchment;
- Hubs for open space will be complemented with local and neighbourhood open space in between the Hubs to form a network of provision across the Urban Area; and
- It provides a framework to integrate new and existing communities.

- 5.43 Based on the evidence in this strategy, the majority of the proposed open space hubs are to be located within the urban area.

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

- 5.44 All proposed open space hubs offer an immediate local provision across the urban area and within Tenterden. In addition these hubs potentially have a wider catchment attracting people from outside of the Ashford urban area and Tenterden by means of cycleways and public or private transport.
- 5.45 Investment in these open space hubs is therefore potentially beneficial to the whole of Ashford.

## Section 6: Spatial Plan for Open Space

*This section explains the importance of a spatial plan for protecting, enhancing and providing further open space provision across the Ashford urban area. It explores the key sites and suggests an approach that a more detailed spatial plan should adopt.*

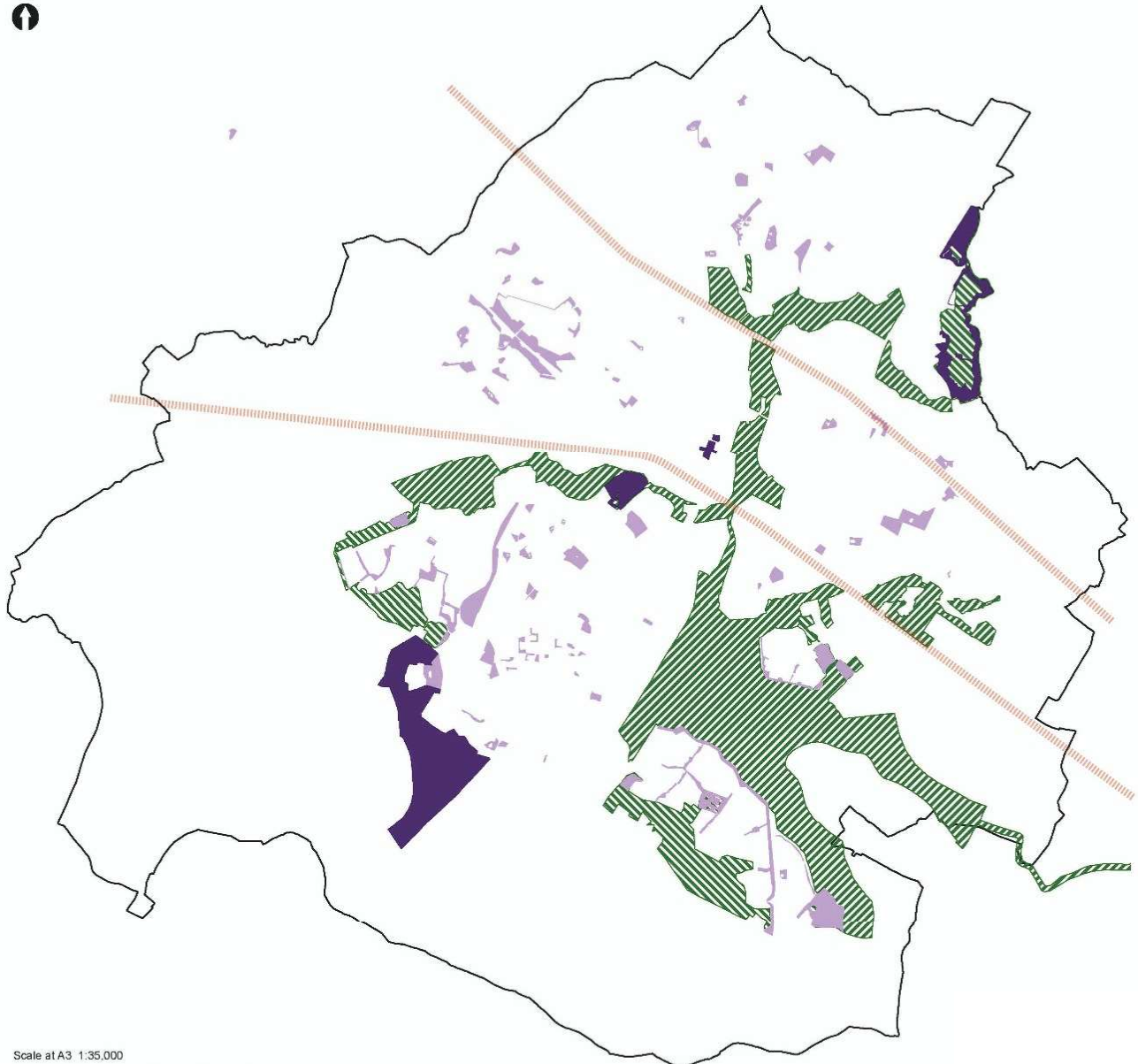
- 6.1 This has been informed by overlaying the various layers of information, analysing it and preparing a diagram that picks out the key outcomes or potential ways forward for the spatial strategy.
- 6.2 The draft Ashford Local Plan 2016 introduces a spatial strategy to open space planning. A spatial approach to open space provision will consider the wider strategic functions of open space and ensure that new and existing provision is balanced and co-ordinated. One aim will be to iron out the problems experienced with applying quantitative standards on a site by site basis.
- 6.3 For example a previous approach to planning play areas according to the size of development has delivered small play areas and too few large spaces suitable for teenagers and informal ball games.
- 6.4 The lack of spatial planning has also resulted in poorly connected and integrated open spaces without adequate levels of informal supervision and a lack of green off-road routes into the neighbourhoods they serve. The Green Corridor Plan goes some way to correct this.
- 6.5 The process of analysis included understanding the potential future connectivity and movement corridors following development implementation and how these movement corridors can be linked to the hubs. The General Amenity open spaces in-between serve as local and neighbourhood provisions and sometimes as stepping stones across the network. Figure 9 illustrates these open spaces.
- 6.6 The benefit of articulating the intent of the emerging spatial plan for open space, helps show (visually) how investment could be applied across the Urban Area and how this relates to the growth in Ashford's urban area.
- 6.7 This illustration does not provide all the detail, but does help set the scene for Section 7 of this Open Space Strategy, and provides recommendations that support a spatial plan approach. More information is provided in Appendix 10.
- 6.8 Figure 10 labels the key sites and what action should be taken to give effect to the proposed spatial recommendations of this Open Space Strategy. The figure includes the following emerging principles:

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- Protect and provide Discovery Park as an open space hub
- Protect, enhance and extend the Green Corridor
- Protect, enhance and provide Sandyhurst Lane open space hub
- Protect and enhance town centre hub and connections
- Protect, enhance and provide Conningbrook Lakes Country Park
- Protect and enhance Victoria Park and Watercress Fields open space hub

6.9 Appendix 11 provides an example of how the spatial plan will be applied in a particular area of the borough, given existing provision and future development.

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



Scale at A3 1:35,000  
0 0.2 0.4 0.8 1.2 1.6 2 Kilometres

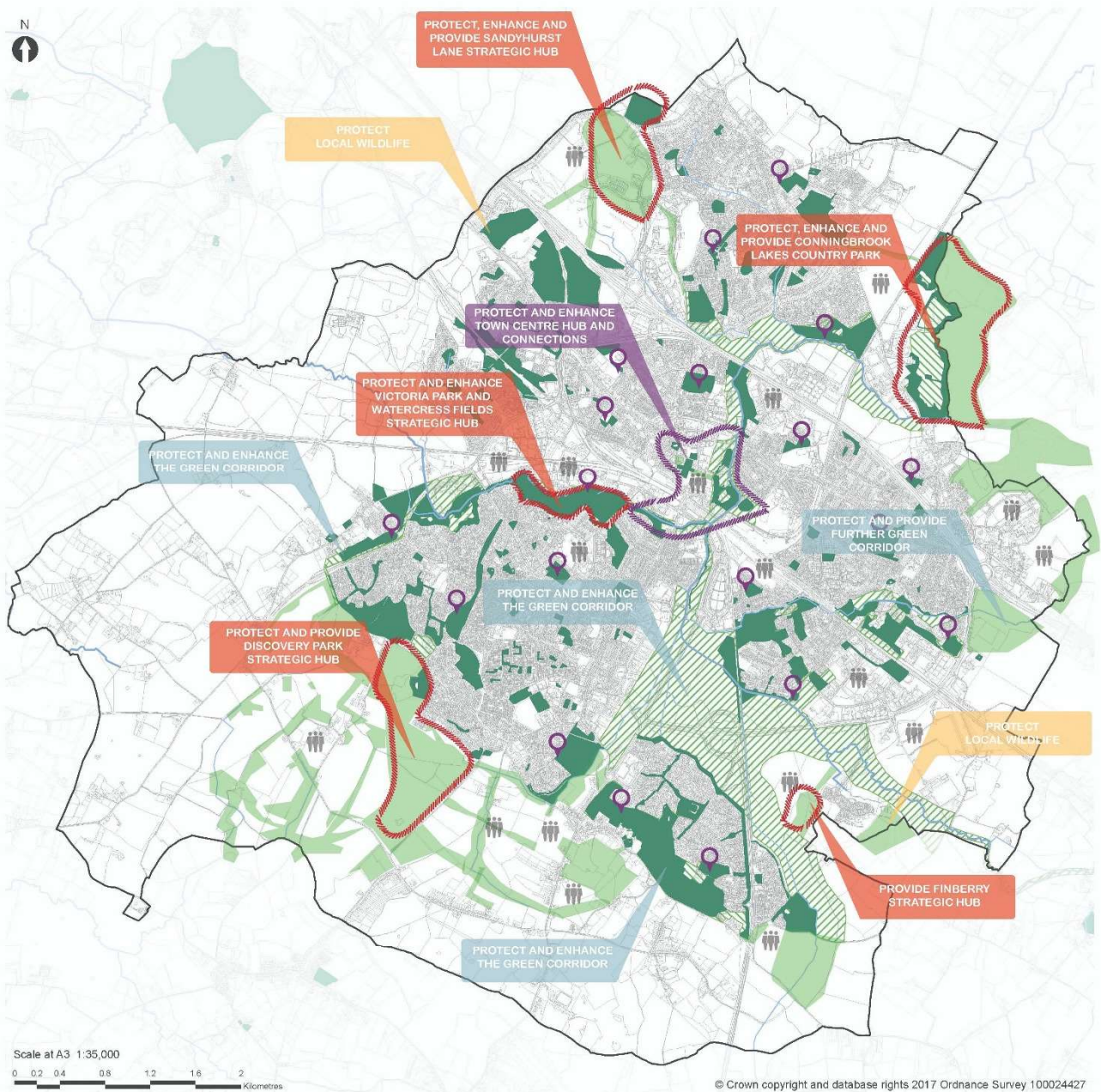
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Open Space Strategy  
Spatial Analysis - connections and destinations  
Ashford Urban Area



**Figure 9 - Spatial provision of Green Corridor, Strategic Parks and General Amenity across the Urban Area.**

# The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy



Open Space Strategy  
Spatial Diagram  
Ashford Urban Area



- Existing Open Space provision
- Potential new public accessible Open Space (indicative only)
- Green Corridor - Existing
- Green Corridor - Proposed Changes
- ☺☺☺ More people living, working and / or visiting
- Proposed Strategic Hub of Open Space
- Proposed Town Centre Hub of Open Space
- Potential local provision upgrade

Figure 10 – Spatial Diagram – Urban Area

## Section 7: Strategic Recommendations

- 7.1 Based on the emerging evidence gathered and considered through this Open Space Strategy process, this section provides detail on the strategic recommendations and expands on the spatial diagram in Section 6.
- 7.2 Many of the strategic recommendations are interrelated and should also be considered in the context of other initiatives that fall outside of this Open Space Strategy, such as tourism, heritage and green infrastructure.
- 7.3 Some of the recommendations relate to all Open Space provision across the Borough. Others relate specifically to the Urban Area and some to the Rural Areas provision.
- 7.4 Recommendations are strategic and will require further action towards adoption or implementation. A detailed Action Plan will be developed to list the actions and resources needed to implement the recommendations. Other more detailed action plans may also be required. It is proposed this is a three year plan reviewed each year.
- 7.5 The recommendations are listed below and detailed in the following pages.

### Borough Wide Strategic Recommendations

- 7.6 Strategic recommendations for open space provision across the borough:
- SRO 1 – Establish an Ashford Open Space Forum (OSF)
  - SRO 2 – Promote the benefits that Open Space brings to the local community and its visitors
  - SRO 3 – Secure external funding / match funding to further enhance, protect and sustain the quality
  - SRO 4 – Consider new models of sustainable management and partnerships
  - SRO 5 – Review and update the SPD
  - SRO 6 – Utilise and make better use of the waterways and adjoining open space to it
  - SRO 7 – Plan, define and create strategically located multifunctional ‘Hubs’ of open space provision
  - SRO 8 – Update and collate a GIS database of Open Space on a regular basis
  - SRO 9 – Review / update the audit and strategy.
- 7.7 The borough wide strategic recommendations listed above are detailed fully in the next section.

- 7.8 There are a number of emerging strategic recommendations for both open space provision in the Urban Area and the Rural Area. These are listed here and should be taken forward in project actions plans as appropriate.

### Urban Area Strategic Recommendations

- 7.9 Strategic recommendations for open space provision in the Urban Area:
- SRU 1 – Redesign and implement enhancements to specific urban open spaces that provide high value to the community and open space network
  - SRU 2 – Implementation of and adding to the current designation of Green Corridor
  - SRU 3 – Redefining, redesigning and enhancing play in the urban area
  - SRU 4 – Research the benefits of and achieve Green Flag Status on appropriate sites
  - SRU 5 – Securing land ahead of development for future open space
  - SRU 6 – Preparing and implementing Management and Maintenance Plans (MMP) for all Strategic / Prestige Parks, cemeteries and a general MMP suitable for amenity spaces in the Urban Area.
  - SRU 7 – Review allotment provision
  - SRU 8 – Secure land for cemeteries (subject to the new study recommendations)
  - SRU 9 – Using Open Space to create safe off road routes across the urban area and connecting to the rural area.
  - SRU 10 – Create a destination park for borough wide use, within the urban area.
  - SRU 11 – Research possibilities for public open space within Ashford town centre

### Rural Area Strategic Recommendations

- 7.10 Emerging strategic recommendations for open space provision in the Rural Area:
- SRR 1 – Harness and grow existing partnerships between parish / towns, the Borough Council and other agencies.
  - SRR 2 – Create Tenterden Strategic Hub
  - SRR 3 – Using open space to help with Ecotourism
  - SRR 4 – Improve access to, from and between open spaces
  - SRR 5 – Investigate green buffer zones around villages
  - SRR 6 – Planning of new open space through new development
  - SRR 7 – Planning of improvements to existing open space provision

***SRO - Overarching strategic recommendation for Open Space across the Borough that could benefit the whole community:***

***SRO 1 – Create an Ashford Open Space Forum***

- 7.11 As open space often straddles multiple land owners and management organisations, an open space forum will help with information sharing and coordination between these organisations. The Forum can play an important role focussing on securing funding across the Borough for open space and could also lead on assisting the meeting shared objectives for active and healthy communities.
- 7.12 The new Forum could consist of (but not limited to):
- Ashford Borough Council
  - Kent County Council
  - Elected Members
  - Conservation Groups
  - Appropriate local voluntary sector groups
  - Health Commissioning Groups
  - Representatives from Parish and Town Councils
- 7.13 The Forum could also focus on leading the delivery of the Actions that will fall out of this Open Space Strategy.

**SRO 1 - What will success look like?**

*A well informed coordinated forum of organisations and people helping to protect, enhance and provide the open space network across the Borough.*

***SRO 2 – Promote the benefits that Open Space brings to the local community and its visitors***

- 7.14 As indicated in the NPPF, 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. Through implementing this strategy, there is an opportunity to promote these benefits and provide education / information about Ashford’s open space to its community.
- 7.15 Open space, whether or not there is public access to it, is important for its contribution to the quality of urban life by providing important green lungs, visual breaks and wildlife habitats in built-up areas. Open space enhances the character of residential areas, civic buildings, conservation areas, listed

## The Ashford Borough Open Space Strategy

buildings and archaeological sites. It can also help to attract business and tourism and can contribute to the process of Urban and Rural regeneration.

- 7.16 It is therefore recommended there be an appropriate programme to promote Ashford's Open Spaces.
- 7.17 At a macro level, this may be to explore and coordinate a 'branding' of promotional and educational material for the Borough, and an informative website of places to enjoy.
- 7.18 At a micro level, this may be for local school groups to consider making better use of their local or neighbourhood park or sharing facilities at the nearest hub.

### **SRO 2 - What will success look like?**

*A well informed and educated local community making best use of the open space network across the Borough.*

### ***SRO 3 – Secure external funding / match funding to further enhance, protect and sustain the quality***

- 7.19 Additional funding will most likely be required to help protect, enhance and sustain the level of high quality open space standards needed to deliver the vision in this strategy. Being strategic, and often innovative, in securing external funding will play a crucial role in delivering the actions. This requires knowledge, resource and coordination.
- 7.20 It is recommended that the Council leads on actively seeking and securing external funding, in partnership with others, for key strategic projects and open spaces that fall out of this strategy. This could include external sponsorship and a review of outdoor charges and licence fees.
- 7.21 The recently successful Round 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the development of Victoria Park and Watercress Fields is a good example of how this strategic recommendation is already being implemented.

### **SRO 3 - What will success look like?**

*A higher quality of open space provision across the network and further opportunities to involve the local community in activities and management of them.*

***SRO 4 – Consider new models of sustainable management and partnerships***

- 7.22 The issue of long-term sustainability of open space has been a growing concern for local authorities and other open space providers. Different local authorities have made the management of public open space a greater or lesser priority according to local need and political focus. Whatever the governance the basic issue of sustainability remains.
- 7.23 The concept of sustainable management is to ensure that open space management meets the community's needs in the long term. Experience has demonstrated that where management is exclusively provided by the council it is not necessarily fit for purpose – Parish Councils, environmental organisations and community groups can be better placed to provide management, with the additional benefits of third party funding, opportunities for volunteers, relevant qualifications and experience, and a steer on the long term management, driven by local aspirations.
- 7.24 The evidence prepared in this Open Space Strategy suggests that current provision is generally managed and maintained to a satisfactory standard across the urban area. It also suggests that current models of management working with Parish and Town Councils in the Rural Area are broadly successful.
- 7.25 Considering that the Quality Audit is a snapshot in time, it is recommended that the current models be reviewed on a regular basis. This should be aiming at achieving Good condition as a minimum standard for all open spaces and Very Good for those open spaces identified as a Strategic Park and/or hub.
- 7.26 New models for securing further income or extra resource to help sustain these standards may include:
- The transfer of open space assets to community groups and/or trusts where an appropriate business case has been made;
  - Partnerships with community groups such as Friends Groups;
  - Investigating commercial opportunities within open space to help fund the ongoing management and maintenance; and/or
  - Reviewing current outdoor charges/license fees.
- 7.27 Working in partnership with the local community and its partners is key, particularly to provide a safer environment. Friends Groups and the provision of Rangers have been successful in other areas. They can regularly check on open space, report crime, and be a visible presence helping to make people feel safer.

- 7.28 Ashford Borough Council already provides a similar service within the Town Centre. The recently formed dedicated area teams as part of the ASPIRE service are also starting to demonstrate the value of committed and resourced management. The Town Centre Action Team (T-CAT) particularly are tasked with keeping the town centre looking at its best, and can rapidly respond to any problems by residents, visitors or local businesses.
- 7.29 It is recommended that different models of management particularly those in partnership with the community be explored, with consideration of wider landscape management, and how it will be monitored to ensure successful long-term management.

**SRO 4 - What will success look like?**

*A high level of quality maintained and safer open spaces across the network.*

***SRO 5 – Review and update the current Public Green Space and Water Environment SPD***

- 7.30 The current PGS & WE SPD is being updated and it is recommended it reflects on the evidence, recommendations and actions indicated in this Open Space Strategy.
- 7.31 This update would include reviewing the Developer Contribution Standard, adoption of open space and policies on new provision given the recommended spatial strategy approach proposed.

**SRO 5 - What will success look like?**

*Up to date open space policies and adopted SPD.*

***SRO 6 – Utilise and make better use of the waterways and adjoining open space to it***

- 7.32 The rivers, lakes and wetlands throughout the Borough play an important role within the Open Space network and provision.
- 7.33 In support of proposals shown in the 2008 Green and Blue Grid Strategy and the Green Corridor Plan, it is recommended that these ecological corridors are protected and enhanced wherever possible to help provide better access, recreation and importantly biodiversity / wildlife.
- 7.34 These corridors often help connect up destinations and provide crucial 'off road' corridors for people and wildlife to move along.

- 7.35 Educating people about the importance of waterbodies / watercourses can also be implemented.

**SRO 6 - What will success look like?**

*Protected and enhanced green and blue infrastructure.  
Community more aware of water quality issues, natural assets etc.  
People using the river corridors as off road walk / cycle routes  
Wildlife habits and natural assets protected, enhanced and managed.*

**SRO 7 - Create strategically located multifunctional 'Hubs' of open space provision**

- 7.36 The Hub model will provide the community (current and future) with large areas of multifunctional open space with supporting facilities such as toilets, refreshments and parking.
- 7.37 These Hubs will also be well connected and accessible to the wider open space network, off-road transport routes and the Green Corridor network. The Open Space Hubs will align with the proposed sport and recreation Hubs indicated in the draft Local Plan and the Playing Pitch Strategy.

**SRO 7 - What will success look like?**

*Well used and well managed large areas of multifunctional open space across the Borough.*

**SRO 8 – Update and collate a GIS database of Open Space on a regular basis**

- 7.38 Data that has informed the evidence to the Open Space Strategy has been gathered from many different sources, then checked, edited and collated using GIS (Geographic Information System).
- 7.39 This is ongoing and the current baseline information is a snapshot in time that will change and be updated as things change throughout the Borough. To help with data collection and to track the implementation of this strategy, it is recommended that the Open Space GIS database be checked and updated on a regular basis.
- 7.40 This would include updating the data as and when development proposals are given approval.
- 7.41 It is recommended that the GIS database for open space be a single source of data used and accessed by multiple organisations who have a

responsibility in planning, management and maintaining open space across the Borough.

**SRO 8 - What will success look like?**

*A comprehensive database that's easy to review and update.*

***SRO 9 – Review / update the audit and strategy***

- 7.42 This Open Space Strategy should be updated every five years to ensure it is relevant.
- 7.43 It is recommended that the Quality Audit is reviewed every two years. The criteria should also be used to assess current open space provision applicable to all up and coming development proposals; therefore from time to time the audit may require updating.
- 7.44 It is also recommended that the Value Audit be used to help understand and identify the potential for any new open space provision, particularly as part of the SPD.
- 7.45 Any updated audit should be included in the GIS mapping to ensure it is captured and up to date.

**SRO 9 - What will success look like?**

*A robust, useful audit and evidence based Open Space Strategy*

***End***