

# **OPEN SPACE STUDY FOR ASHFORD BOROUGH**

**Final report**

**December 2008**

**Part 1**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Context of the Study

Ashford Borough Council has commissioned this study of open space. Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (PPG17) supports the principle of local authorities undertaking such assessments. The report has been prepared by Inspace Planning Ltd., and must be seen within the context of the development of a 'Green and Blue Grid' Strategy for Ashford Borough, which this study has helped to inform. PPG17 covers a full range of open space and built facilities used for sport and recreation. The Borough Council has already undertaken work in relation to built facilities, and this theme is not therefore covered in this report.

### 1.2 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the study was to undertake, research, analyse and present conclusions meeting the requirements of PPG17. Specific aspirations include:

- Helping to provide local people with networks of accessible, high quality open spaces which meet the needs of residents and visitors, are fit for purpose, and are in sustainable locations.
- Providing part of the evidence base for the development of appropriate policies in the Local Development Framework, and the Green and Blue Grid Strategy.
- Providing an effective evidence base for the Borough Council in its planning and management of open spaces.

### 1.3 The Benefits of Open Space

The benefits of good quality open space, parks and sport and recreation provision are well known.

#### *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:*

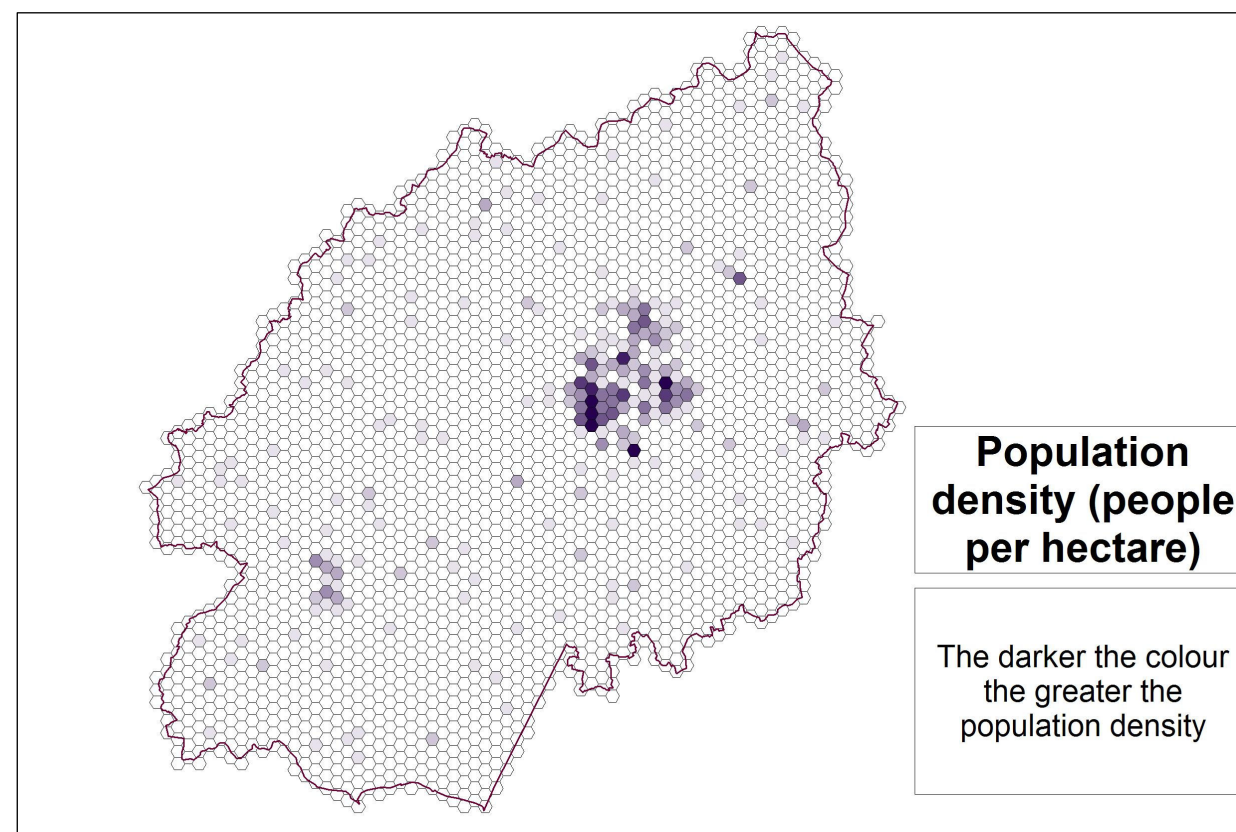
- Encourage biodiversity.
- Provide wildlife habitat.
- Promote education.
- Contributes to sustainable environmental resource management.
- Create a natural amenity.
- Give safe, sustainable transport routes.
- Alleviate flood risks.
- Regulate the local microclimate.
- Can instil unique character to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

#### *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.



### 1.3 Overview of the Study Area

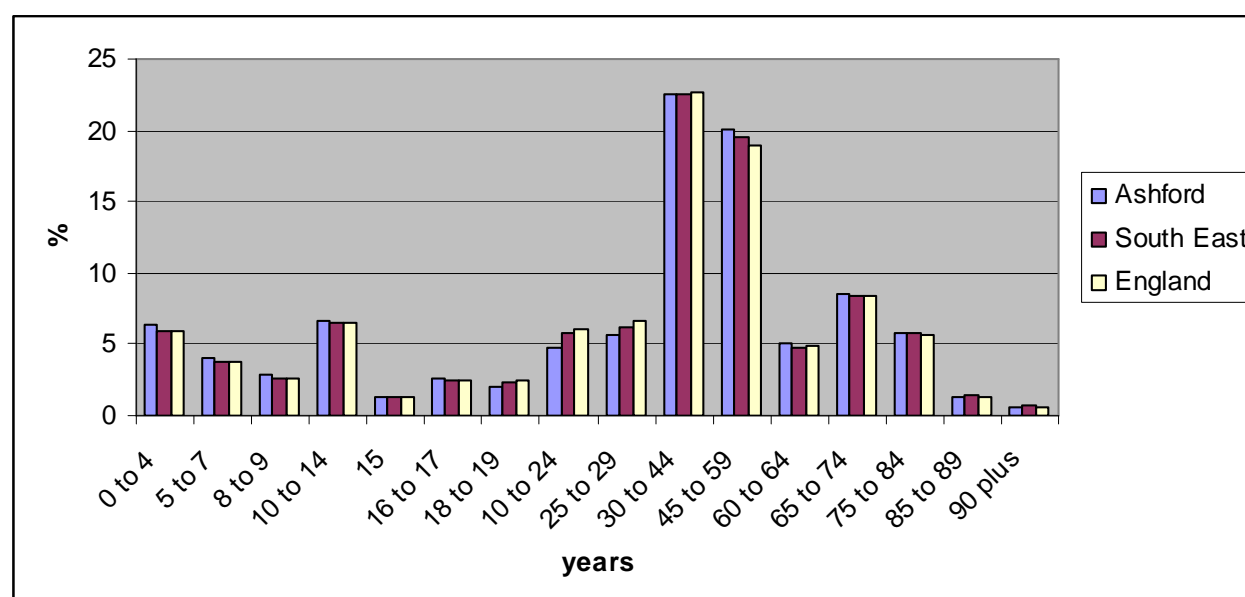
#### *Character*

The study area is the Borough of Ashford itself, which is in turn split between the urban area of Ashford Town, and the rural area. (This is further explained in Section 2).

At the time of the 2001 Census, the area had a population of 102,661. The mid-year population estimates for 2007 suggest a figure of around 112,500. The Borough covers an area of 58,062 ha. This Census figure provides an overall population density of 1.77 persons per hectare (compared with the average for England as a whole (3.45 persons per hectare)).

The map on the left shows how population is generally distributed through the Borough, expressed as 'persons per hectare', and it demonstrates very clearly the focus of the population on Ashford Town urban area.

The urban area of Ashford Town itself has grown in size rapidly over recent years, and this is set to continue with massive planned growth, almost doubling of population over the next two decades. Investment in transport infrastructure, including the M20 and the London-Paris rail link, have had a marked effect on the character of both town and country. But, the Borough as a whole remains largely rural in nature; set within landscapes of high quality, containing picturesque villages and wonderful heritage.

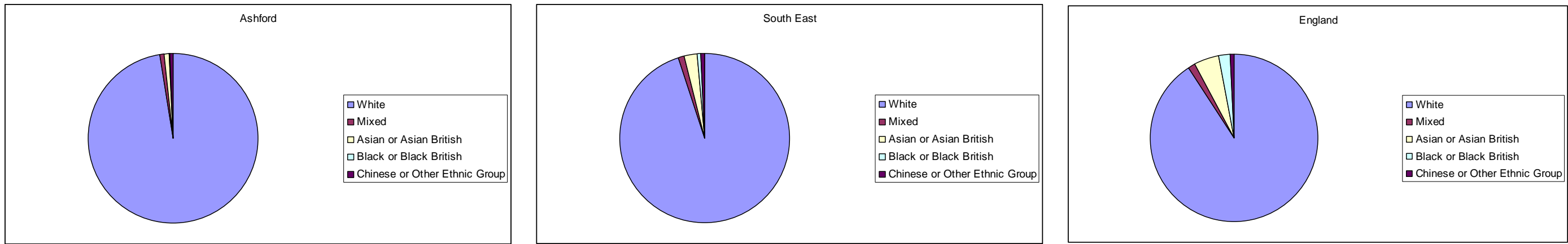


#### *Demographics*

As the figure on the left shows, the age structure of the population is not greatly different from the South East region or England, as a whole, with the 30 to 59 age range dominating.

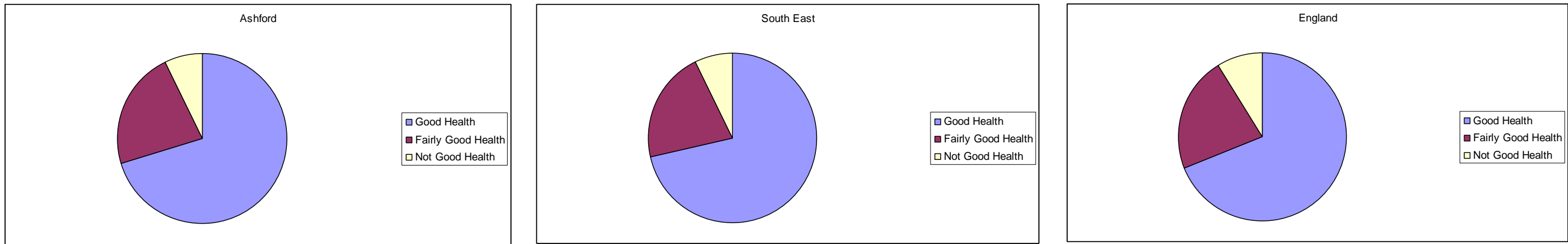
**Ethnicity**

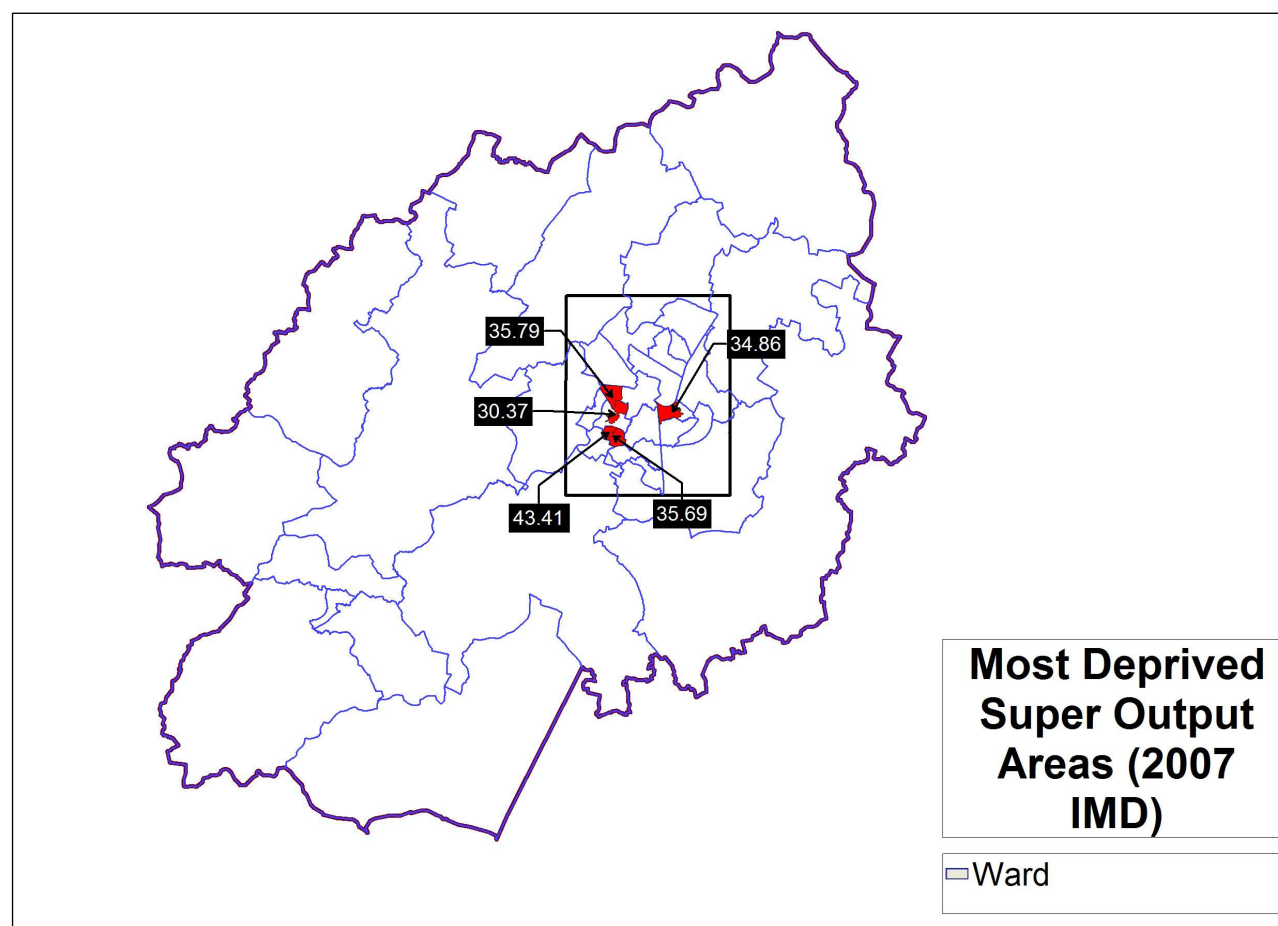
As shown below, there is a smaller percentage of the population comprised of minority ethnic groups compared with the South East or England as a whole.



**Health**

There is little difference between residents of Ashford Borough and the South East and England in terms of their general levels of health.





## Affluence and welfare

The residents of Ashford are comparatively affluent, being ranked at 233 (out of 354) English local authorities, with 1 being the most deprived according to the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004). The same Government statistics indicate there are several 'Super Output Areas' (SOAs) in the Borough with a relatively high score. (The higher the score the more deprived in terms of the Government's Index). The Borough's five most deprived SOAs are in the Ashford urban area. The highest scoring SOA is one of the top 15% most deprived SOAs in England. (There are 32,482 SOAs in total).

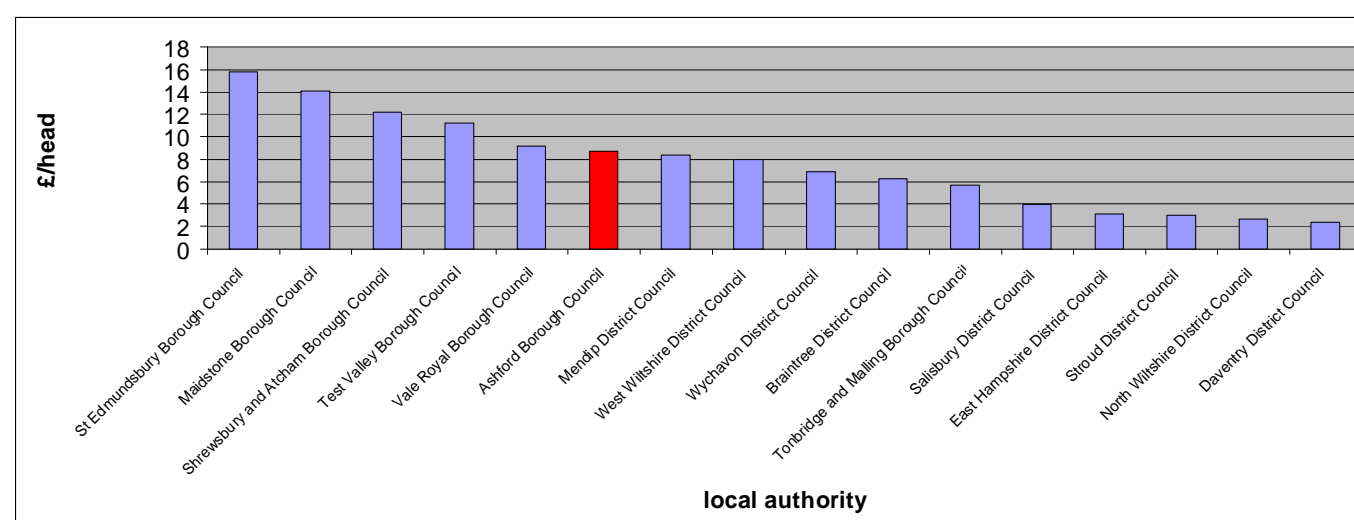
## 1.4 The 'official view' of open space within the Borough

Prior to this study there had been no extensive and dedicated examination of open space in the Borough, although there are national sources of information that are of some use in this respect. The Audit Commission scrutinizes local authority 'performance' through the range of functions for which it has both mandatory and discretionary powers. The information collected through this process allows for a level of comparison with local authorities deemed similar in character to Ashford Borough. One of the 'shared' characteristics in this case will be the existence in each local authority of parish and town councils that also have very significant responsibilities for the provision and management of recreation opportunities.

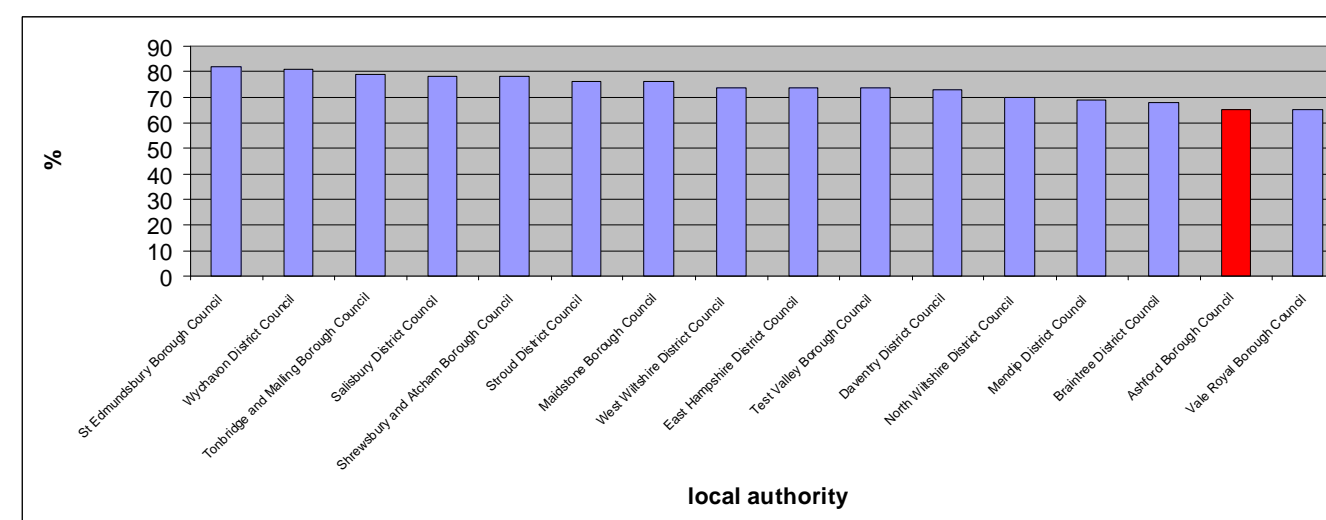
Of particular note is comparative information collected in respect of 'spend per head' and perceived 'satisfaction' with respect to 'Parks and Open Space' and 'Sport'. As part of the Best Value/Comprehensive Performance Appraisal process, sample household questionnaire surveys explored these issues (amongst others), and identified the following points.

Relative to other similar local authorities, the Borough Council is a 'high average' spender on Parks and Open Spaces, but with a low relative satisfaction level.

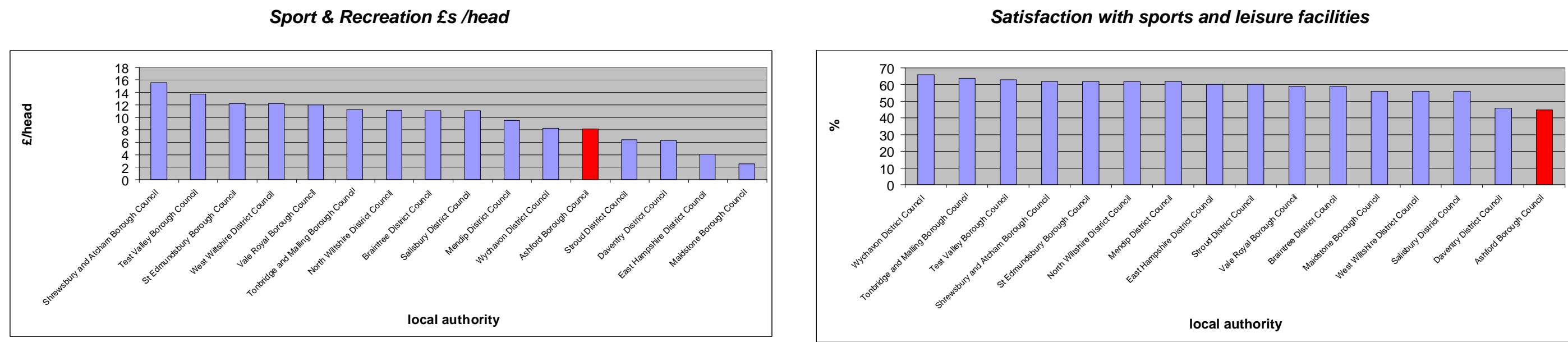
**Parks & Open Spaces £s /head**



**User satisfaction with parks and open spaces**



The Borough Council's spend per head on Sport and Recreation is average to low relative to other similar local authorities, and with a very low relative satisfaction level.



1.5 Challenges for the Report

The Borough therefore has some important characteristics that need to be considered by this report:

- Its mixed urban and rural character. Ashford Urban Area is the focal point, but the local authority covers very extensive rural tracts, and includes 42 town and parish councils.
- Pressures of expansion in respect of Ashford Urban Area’s strategic growth allocations.
- The often contrasting issues and problems affecting rural and urban communities in relation to the provision of and access to various open space, sports and recreational opportunities.

Recognition of these facts raises the following questions:

- How can open space best be planned to provide equal access to all the community in both urban and rural areas?
- In areas of population growth, how can opportunities best be provided to meet the needs of new residents?
- How can the planning process best address these issues?

1.6 Definitions of Open Space Sport and Recreation used in this report

The scope of this study in terms of the kinds of open space being covered is largely determined by guidance contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open, Space Sport and Recreation, together with its Companion Guide.

In essence the following opportunities for the community are being considered:

- Parks, Sports and Recreation Grounds.

- Equipped Children and Young People's Space.
- Informal/Amenity Green Space.
- (Accessible) Natural Green Space.
- Allotments.
- Churchyards and Cemeteries.
- Routeways and Corridors.

The study is largely restricted to those spaces that are physically accessible by the community; either informally or on some sort of managed basis. The study does not therefore cover open space that is generally inaccessible to the community.

Some sites currently not open to public access may, in fact, offer potential for overcoming identified shortfalls of provision. An example might be in the case of some school sites that could be opened to wider community use through appropriate agreements.

## 1.7 A Practical Definition of Open Space

The existing or potential recreation use of a site results from its:

- Size.
- Location.
- Shape, topography and internal site features.

Even very small sites are potentially large enough to accommodate meaningful recreation activity. For example, a site of 0.1 ha is still sufficiently large to accommodate an equipped play area, tennis court, or 'pocket park' to name but some possible uses.

The location of a space will have a profound impact on its use for recreation for reasons of safety, accessibility, security, and nuisance (for example.) An unenclosed space immediately adjacent to a very busy road might not be considered to have any practical recreation use for safety reasons. Similarly, a space adjacent to open plan private gardens (as often occurs in many modern housing estates) might generate concerns from residents and effectively stop it being used actively for this purpose.

A site may in theory be open to use by the public, but in practice might be too heavily vegetated, or sloping, hilly, marshy etc to be used for any recreation purpose. A large site may be of such an awkward shape as to exclude any meaningful recreation use; and, apart from safety issues, much highway land cannot be considered to be open space for such reasons.

In short there can be no hard and fast rules for determining the recreation utility of a site for the community. This has meant that judgements have been made on a site by site basis as to what should be included and excluded for these purposes. This has been easy to achieve in a consistent way for the very large majority of sites.

## 1.8 Format of Report

The report is presented in two parts, which are interlinked and should be read together. Part 1 of the report provides the main findings of the study, whilst part 2 applies and interprets these findings at a local level.

The contents of each section are outlined below:

Part 1 of this report includes:

- Outline of the methodology used in the study. (Section 2).
- Summary of key local policy of relevance to this assessment, and some of the implications. (Section 3).
- Review of the results of relevant surveys and consultation into local needs. (Section 4).



- Presentation of an overview of the different types of open space, sport and recreation facilities across the area. (Section 5).
- Suggestions for minimum standards of provision for various types of open space. (Section 6).
- Consideration of some general options and recommendations (Section 7).

## Part 2

This examines provision on a local (sub area) level. It applies the suggested standards, explained in Section 6, and draws conclusions about the local provision specifically in relation to the quality, quantity and access to facilities.

The separation of the two parts of the report is not a requirement of PPG17, but it will help readers interested in their local area as well as those interested in the key findings of the report.

## 2.0 SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

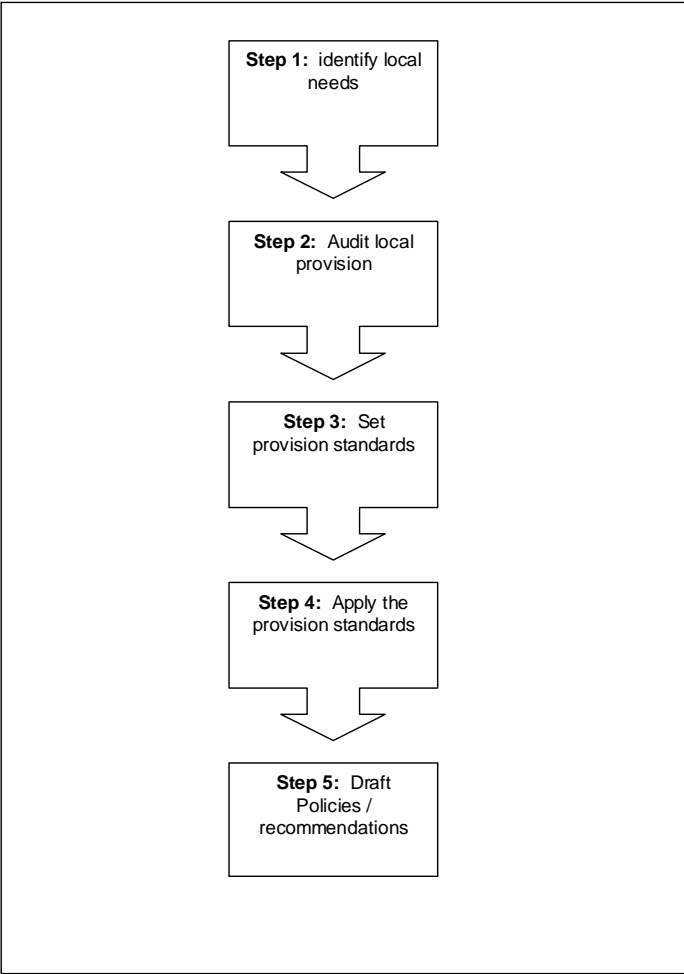
### 2.1 General

The starting point for this study has been the government’s Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 ‘Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation’ (PPG17), and its Companion Guide "Assessing Needs and Opportunities". PPG17 places a requirement on local authorities to undertake assessments and audits of open space, sports and recreational facilities in order to:

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

The Companion Guide to PPG17 recommends an overall approach to this kind of study as summarised below.

### 2.2 PPG17 study process



Within this overall approach the Companion Guide suggests a range of methods and techniques that might be adopted in helping the assessment process and these have been used as appropriate. These methods and techniques, where they have been used, are summarised in the following paragraphs.

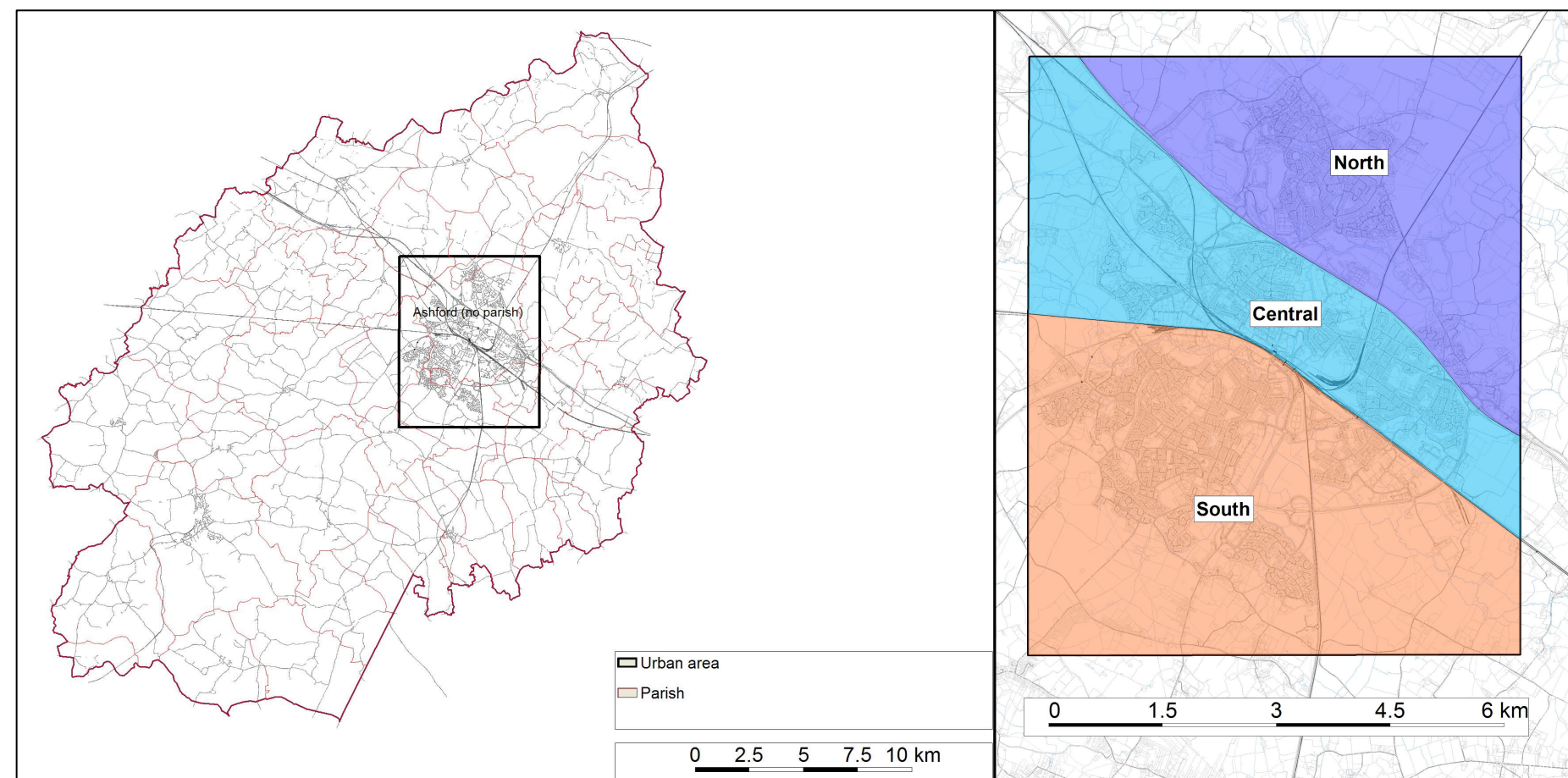
## 2.3 Identifying Local Need (Step 1)

### Sub areas

Many of the open space, sport and recreation opportunities that are covered by this report will serve *local needs* and therefore have *local catchments*. Play areas and nearby parks are obvious examples of such opportunities.

For the study to embrace varying needs and opportunities it has to consider provision and need over differing sized geographical areas. Surveys and analyses of provision have been based on the following, as appropriate:

- The urban area of Ashford.
- The above area broken down into three sub areas
- Individual parishes.



The Maps to the left indicate the boundaries of the 43 parishes located in the Borough, and the urban area of Ashford used for this study which has been defined to include both existing and proposed development areas. Most of the parishes are essentially rural in character, although there some which include significant rural settlements (such as Tenterden), or fall partly within the Ashford urban area.

The urban area has itself been broken down into three sub areas (North, Central, and South) to reflect the major physical barriers influencing easy access to different types of open space. The sub areas follow the boundaries of the motorway and the Folkestone - London rail line.

## Consultation

The extent of the consultation reflects the breadth and diversity of the study and a consequent need to engage with as wide a cross section of the community as possible. Four questionnaire surveys were undertaken:

- A household survey questionnaire
- Town and Parish Councils questionnaire
- A community organisations questionnaire
- A non-pitch sports questionnaire.

The Borough Council had undertaken work in relation to the provision of pitch sports facilities, and children and young people's facilities. Rather than duplicate effort, use of this previous work has been made where it has examined local needs through consultation. This work is therefore also reviewed in this section.

## 2.4 Site Audits and Assessment (Step 2)

A site audit has been conducted together with an assessment of relevant sites and facilities. Information has been collected on open spaces from a variety of sources:

- Site visits.
- Existing databases and records of the Council and other organisations.
- Internet searches and websites.
- Information provided by parish and town councils, and other groups and organisations through their responses to the questionnaire surveys.

All these spaces have been 'mapped' using a Geographical Information System (GIS). The detailed method involved:

- A site visit to spaces, and a scoring of 'quality' in relation to a wide range of criteria, covering (as appropriate):
  - Access.
  - Management and maintenance.
  - Conservation and heritage.
  - Design.
  - Safety.
  - Community involvement.
  - Marketing.
  - Sustainability.
  - Value.
- A scoring of each site's 'potential' to improve with regard to the various criteria, resulting in a 'Gap' score (i.e the difference between the overall 'Quality' and 'Potential' Scores.)

## 2.5 Set and Apply Standards of Provision (Steps 3 and 4)

Central Government planning guidance states that local planning authorities should set justified local standards, with three components, embracing:

- Quantity.
- Quality.
- Accessibility.

**Section 6** sets out and justifies the recommended new local standards. The section explains existing local and national standards and relevant guidance, prior to justifying new and/or revised local standards. The new local standards are then applied to local areas (Part 2).

## 3.0 POLICY AND STAKEHOLDER CONTEXT

### 3.1 Introduction

This section is in two parts, the first provides a review of relevant policies, then second considers the role and input of 'key stakeholders'.

### 3.2 Policy review

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

### 3.3 Stakeholder analysis

As part of this study, a review of the various agencies, organisations and interests involved in Open Space, Sport and Recreation in Ashford Borough has been undertaken. The input and role of key stakeholders is outlined in this Section, whilst information gathered through the wider consultation is outlined in Chapter 4.

### 3.4 Policy review

#### Links to the Ashford Borough Community Strategy

The lead statutory Strategy document for Ashford Borough is the Community Strategy.

The Community Strategy sets out a vision for the Ashford Borough community. It is produced by a partnership of key local agencies – including the police, Primary Care Trust, the Borough Council and the voluntary sector. It covers the period from 2004 to 2014. The Partnership's vision for the Borough is:

"Set in the heart of the Garden of England, Ashford borough provides a safe, healthy and thriving environment that offers an excellent quality of life to all who live, work and visit the area."

The Community Strategy relevant aims are to:

- Provide good social and community facilities for both existing communities and in line with future growth
- Make improvements to the transport network serving the Borough
- Protect the villages and surrounding countryside from any adverse impact of growth
- Achieve a better range of facilities in Ashford town centre, including shopping, jobs and leisure activities and a greatly improved urban environment
- Protect the flood plains and make sure future growth does not increase flood risks
- Make sure we strengthen the sense of identity and place in the Borough as we grow."

*Well planned and high quality open space can help to achieve all the above.*

#### Links to the Development Plan

##### ***Local Development Framework***

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is replacing the current planning system and was introduced as a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The [Ashford Local Plan](#) will be superseded with a portfolio of local development documents, which will collectively deliver the spatial planning strategy for the Borough. The local development documents will include Development Plan Documents (DPDs) that are geographical or issue specific, and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that detail core policy issues included in the DPDs, so they can be interpreted and implemented.

### **Ashford Borough Local Plan**

The Ashford Borough Local Plan was formally adopted by the Borough Council in June 2000. The Local Plan sets out a framework of plans and policies to guide the development and use of land in the Borough. This includes issues such as the location of housing development, measures to protect the countryside, and retail and employment policies. Many of these policies have been 'saved' pending adoption of replacement policies in DPDs.

The saved policies of relevance to this study include:

- EN6 to EN32: dealing with general protection of environmental features and quality
- TP5: dealing with cycle access to Ashford Town Centre
- LE5: dealing with the provision of Equipped Public Open Space
- LE6: dealing with the offsite provision of Public Open Space
- LE7: dealing with the provision of play facilities in developments of different sizes
- LE8: dealing with the provision leisure facilities in developments of different sizes
- LE9: dealing with the maintenance of open space
- LE10: dealing with the protection of leisure facilities
- LE12: dealing with the protection and loss of Public Open Space
- LE16: dealing with the protection and loss of allotments

### **Comment**

*A review of these policies suggests the following:*

- *The policies guiding the provision of new open space are focussed on a narrow range of open space types, primarily outdoor sport, equipped play, and informal space for play. There is a lack of reference to other forms of provision such as natural greenspace, parks, green links.*
- *The policies guiding the provision of new open space have minimum thresholds in terms of development size, which excludes smaller developments.*

### **Ashford Core Strategy**

The Core Strategy sets out the overall vision and objectives for the delivery of Ashford's Local Development Framework. The Core Strategy is the principle development plan document (DPD) for the Borough and all other documents within the LDF must conform to it.

In 2003, Ashford was identified as one of the Growth Areas in the government's Sustainable Communities Plan. This role sets the context for this Core Strategy and for the levels of new housing and employment provision required for the Greater Ashford Urban Area over the Core Strategy period.

The scale of growth being planned for is based on a 2002 capacity study completed for the Council and its Ashford's Future partners. The growth figure is set well above the amount indicated by existing population trends in the Borough, providing for an accelerating rate of net inward migration and local population growth. This capacity study evaluated several growth scenarios for Ashford to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Communities Plan. Following an assessment of social, economic and environmental factors, it concluded that Ashford town has the capacity to provide an additional 31,000 homes and 28,000 jobs over the period 2001 to 2031. This is based on Ashford receiving priority, due to its strategic growth status, in economic development, planning and transport strategies by all relevant stakeholders, at all levels of governance, together with associated capital investment in infrastructure, and a concerted effort to promote the town and its development opportunities.

The growth area agenda applies only to Ashford town and its immediate surrounding area; development needed to meet the growth area requirement will not be spread across the Borough. As a result, the Core Strategy establishes widely differing development profiles for the town, where rapid change and housing, employment and infrastructure is proposed; and the extensive rural area of the Borough, where the emphasis is on continued small scale change designed to protect the quality of the Borough's environment and heritage, balanced with the need to help foster strong local communities with limited growth in the most suitable locations.

The Core Strategy has the following Vision

*A sustainable safe, healthy and thriving environment that offers an excellent quality of life to all who live, work and visit the Borough. This will be achieved by striving for high quality, sustainable growth and change and careful management of all that is best about the Borough.*

Supporting this Vision is the ‘mend before extend’ principle, which accepts that there is plenty which is dysfunctional in the urban area’s existing infrastructure (which will include open space), and that these shortcomings should be remedied to avoid compounding problem upon problem. This principle has important implications in terms of the provision of new and improved open space.

The Core Strategy suggests that Culture, Recreation, Sport and Play will have a critical role in making communities sustainable. Well-designed environments that incorporate accessible green space and a distinctive public realm. As Ashford grows and the demand for new or enhanced cultural and community facilities increases, the Council will require that new developments provide an increased level of sporting, recreation, cultural and community facilities which satisfy this demand. Some facilities may be locally based and aimed at meeting the needs of the local residents in that particular area, whilst others may be more strategic and will need to be delivered in larger facilities, which serve the wider town or Borough. Residential developers will be expected to make site specific provision for local facilities and where applicable, financial contributions through the proposed strategic tariff to the provision, management and maintenance of new strategic facilities. The Borough has many assets providing recreational and leisure.

The community’s need may require developers to contribute to the cost of refurbishing, extending and adapting existing community assets. High quality strategic public open spaces are proposed across the Ashford Growth Area, that should incorporate a wide range of sport and recreation activities and opportunities, which meet the needs of the wider community. In addition to these strategic areas, new housing developments should provide open space and leisure facilities to meet the local needs they generate. Such facilities should normally be provided on the development site itself in order to address the local need and reduce the need for people to travel. Exceptionally, where it is not practical to provide facilities within the boundaries of a new development, funding should be provided so that the necessary facilities can be provided nearby and / or existing facilities upgraded. In settlements outside Ashford, the surrounding countryside will often provide a suitable recreation and open space resource, although in Tenterden and the larger villages where new residential allocations are made (or windfall sites come forward), there may still be a need to provide new or improved public open spaces that cater to local demand. The Following Core Strategy Policy reflects these requirements

**POLICY CS18 - MEETING THE COMMUNITY’S NEEDS: “Public open space, recreation, sports, children’s play, leisure, cultural, school and adult education, youth, health, public service and community facilities should be provided to meet the needs generated by new development. Infrastructure or facilities designed to meet localised needs should normally be provided on-site.**

**The loss of an existing facility will normally be resisted, unless it is no longer required or is obsolete.**

**A financial contribution to the management and maintenance of cultural and community facilities will be required...The Council’s strategy is that part of the town-wide community development fund will be used by the Council to develop local community capacity by creating, supporting and maintaining new or existing representative organisations (such as Parish Councils and community Trusts) to both initiate and look after public facilities in the interests and on behalf of those local people they represent.**

**The Council will also seek the provision of a financial contribution... to help fund community development and voluntary sector activity during the crucial early years as new developments and communities become established. The nature of provision and timing of delivery will be established in other DPDs and SPD to reflect strategic and specific on-site needs.**

**Strategic recreational open spaces will be proposed in the relevant site allocation DPDs at Conningbrook, Discovery Park, South Willesborough Dykes and Cheeseman’s Green and the Council will seek to protect and enhance Victoria Park and the existing ‘green corridors’ through Ashford...”**

The Core Strategy proposes a Strategic Tariff to help fund larger strategic facilities (which might include major open spaces) The tariff will inevitably only collect a portion of the total costs of infrastructure needed to support the sustainable growth of Ashford. The precise level of the tariff and the details of its operation will be set in a SPD which can be easily reviewed and kept up to date. All residential development in the Ashford Growth Area – general demand and affordable - will be required to pay the tariff.

### **3.5 Comment**

*The development of new local standards for open space will help to inform both the development and working of the proposed Strategic Tariff, as well as the specific local needs arising from new developments of any size.*

*The 'mend before extend' principle, suggests a need to improve existing open spaces as an integrated part of the future planned development.*



3.5 Stakeholder Analysis

<b>‘Users’</b>	Individuals, groups and clubs
<b>‘Providers’</b>	Ashford Borough Council (various departments) Schools Kent County Council youth and play organisations local clubs and organisations landowners commercial providers Forestry Commission
<b>‘Funders’</b>	Central Government Ashford Borough Council Sport England The Lottery Governing bodies of sport Charitable trusts and foundations Environmental trusts Natural England housebuilders business Private Finance Initiatives/Private Public Partnerships voluntary fundraising other grant sources
<b>‘Enablers’</b>	Ashford Borough Council (various departments) Ashford’s Future Regional Kent Sports Board Kent Active Sports Partnership National Governing Bodies of Sport Regional Assembly South East Economic Development Agency Government Office for the Region Government Departments Natural England Environment Agency Community and Voluntary Forum for the Region Local Strategic Partnership

The Stakeholders

There are a wide range of agencies and organisations that have a stake in open space, sport and recreation within the Borough. The figure of the left identifies the public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders who generally have some direct or indirect interest in open space, sport and recreation opportunities. It cannot be guaranteed that everyone or everything has been identified, but the figure does illustrate the complexity of potential arrangements between all parties.

It is almost impossible to plot the precise relationship of each stakeholder to others in the figure. However, a few observations can be made.

The stakeholders can generally be broken down into 'Users', 'Providers', 'Funders', and 'Enablers' of open space, sport and recreation opportunities, where:

- 'Users' are the participants in open space, sport and recreation, (individuals or groups).
- 'Providers' can be agencies, organisations and (sometimes) individuals in the public, voluntary and private/commercial sectors largely responsible for establishing and maintaining open space, sport and recreation opportunities.
- 'Funders' are those that provide *financial* support to either create or maintain opportunities, including through grant aid.
- 'Enablers' help in creating and maintaining opportunities either through policy, or general nurture and support including advice on technical issues and sources of funding etc.

Clearly, some of the stakeholders will fall into more than one category. For example, a club will be a 'User', but potentially also a 'Provider'. The local authority may well be 'Providers' in terms of their own facilities, but also 'Funders', and 'Enablers'. The variety of stakeholders ranges from national/central government level, through regional and sub regional interests, down to local interests

### 3.6 The role and input of key stakeholders

Other than the Borough Council, the following key stakeholders are considered to have especially significant roles in the provision and management of open space in the Borough in the future:

- Parish Councils
- Schools and other education establishments
- Forestry Commission and woodland owners

#### Town and Parish Councils

Town and Parish Councils have a major role in the provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities. Many of these Council's have direct or indirect management responsibility for such facilities, which includes maintenance, improvement and development. Whilst this has many benefits in terms of local accountability and decision making, it also has its problems. This includes a lack of financial and staff resources to effectively provide manage facilities in some cases, and a lack of consistency in management within Parishes and across the Borough.

These problems will not be remedied by the local council's working in isolation, and therefore, the Borough Council should develop a role in supporting them, helping them to build on their strengths and minimise weaknesses and problems. Largely this can be achieved through financial, technical and administrative support. There is also a role for the Borough Council to provide a forum for Town and Parish Councils to network, and facilitate information and knowledge sharing, good practice, and cross boundary working. Where these fora have already been established, they have proved useful and should be continued and developed.

Part 2 of the report identifies a number of issues and opportunities at a Parish level which point to the need to improve the consistency of maintenance within Parishes and across the Borough.

#### Schools and other education establishments

School based open space and recreation provision exists primarily to meet educational needs. It also has the potential to be used by the wider community where there is a policy or practice promoting such dual use. School based provision offers scope for helping to meet local needs for playing pitches and built facilities in particular, where there might otherwise be local shortages. It can also help to improve access to opportunities in rural areas remote from venues in the larger settlements.

Community access to school facilities tends to be most widely available at the larger secondary schools and colleges.

However, there are many schools that do not appear to offer much (if any) community use. Even where opportunities do exist they may well be restricted by the physical characteristics of the campus/buildings (which may not have been designed with wider community use in mind). There are also issues concerning security, insurance and liability, extra wear and tear, additional management and staffing requirements etc. These are all well documented problems, and lead to a situation where the pattern of such opportunities across the Borough is piecemeal and fragmented.

Arguably, community use where it exists has evolved most in respect of built facilities, although the Borough Council's own studies identify that there are instances where school playing pitches genuinely contribute towards the supply for community use.

There appear to be very few of the smaller schools offering any form of community use. This is unfortunate as they would be well placed to make an important contribution in rural areas, from where access to facilities in the larger settlements may often be difficult.

In the urban area existing and future new schools have the potential to be used as genuine community facilities, to a far greater extent than is currently the case. The need for additional sports facilities arising from population growth surely emphasises the need to work with the Education sector to achieve genuine shared use of this resource, as a very cost effective way of providing both education and community provision.

#### Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is a government department with a long track record of working in the Kent landscape with various partners. It works within the forestry sector as a partner to deliver the Regional Forestry Framework, a strategic document informing the draft South East Plan and directing local delivery and sustainable development.

The Forestry Commission has several holdings affecting the Borough. These may provide woodlands strategically well placed for existing and future delivery of community needs for certain kinds of recreation space.

One of the Forestry Commission's key roles is being an exemplar land manager, able to balance the multi-purpose use of its estate to meet local, regional and national needs in conventional and innovative ways. One of these balances is it to increase day visitor numbers to the countryside, it provides locations for a number of benefits to society and the economy, whilst also protecting the environment.

### **3.7 Comment**

*Apart from the Borough Council's own open space, bodies such as local councils, the education sector, and the Forestry Commission are either directly or indirectly responsible for major open spaces the role of which should be explored in the context of the 'mend before extend' principle.*

## 4.0 LOCAL NEEDS

### 4.1 Introduction

This section examines identified local need for various types of open space opportunity. It details the community consultation exercises that have been undertaken as part of the study. The extent of the consultation reflects the breadth and diversity of the study and a consequent need to engage with as wide a cross section of the community as possible.

### 4.2 Questionnaire surveys

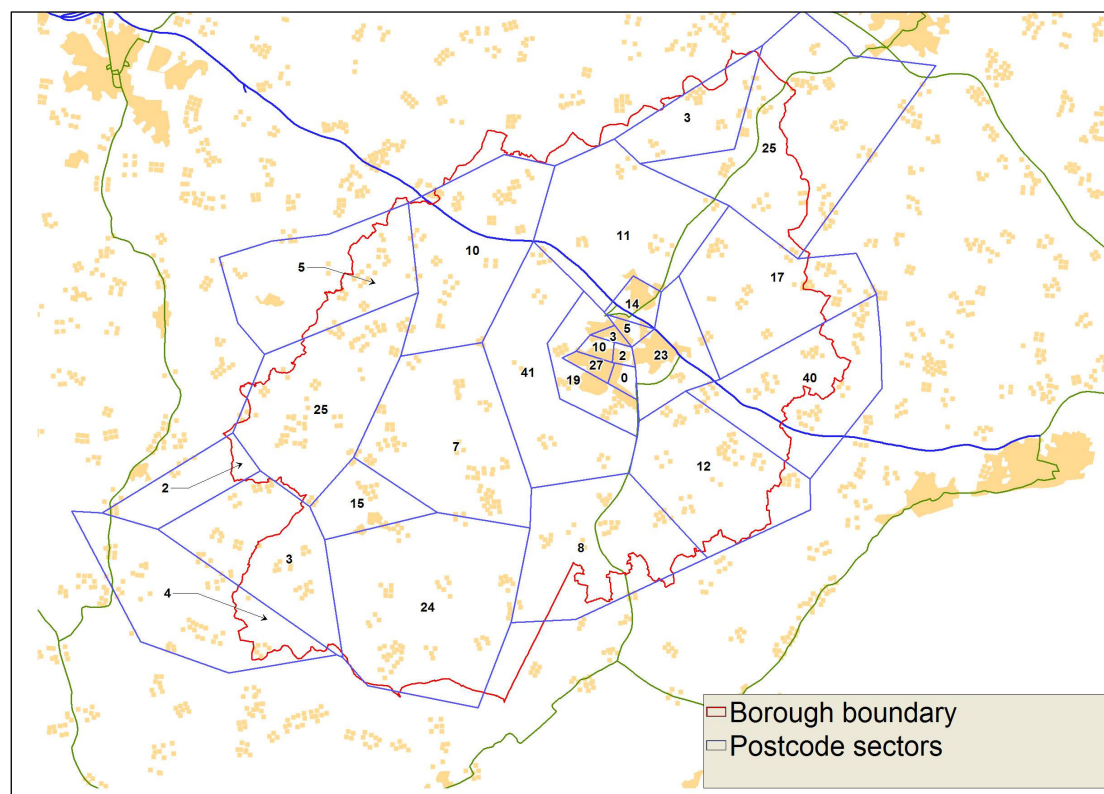
Four questionnaire surveys were undertaken:

- A household survey questionnaire
- Town and Parish Councils questionnaire
- A community organisations questionnaire
- A non-pitch sports questionnaire.

The Borough Council had undertaken work in relation to the provision of pitch sports facilities, and children and young people's facilities. Rather than duplicate effort, use of this previous work has been made where it has examined local needs through consultation. This work is therefore also reviewed in this section.

### 4.3 Relationship between consultations and the development of standards

The result of this consultation and other analyses helps to inform the content of the recommended local standards. It has also helped the study to understand local people's appreciation of open space, and the values attached by the community to this resource. This appreciation should have implications for the way in which open spaces are treated and designated in the revised development plan.

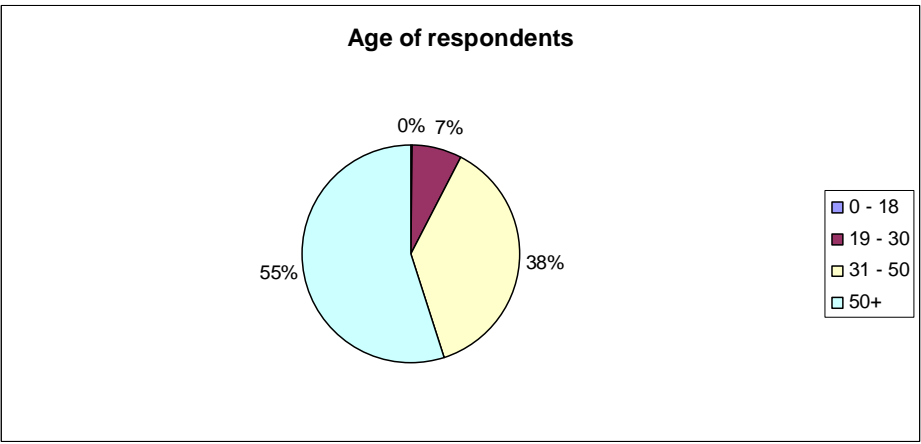


### 4.4 General Community Consultation

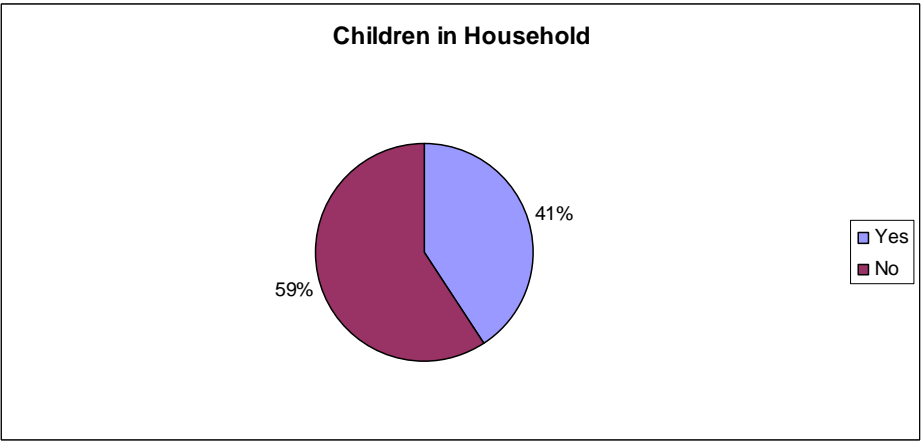
A questionnaire was sent out to sample of 3000 households within the Borough. Care was taken to ensure that selected households were spread cross the Borough to allow the response to be representative of the Borough's contrasting urban and rural character.

Of the total number of questionnaires sent out 352 completed questionnaires were returned (an 11.7% response rate). The map on left shows the geographical distribution of the responses. The blue boundaries denote general postcode sectors. Post areas of this kind do not follow local government boundaries. Those sectors overlapping the Borough Council's boundaries are shown only when they cover parts of the Borough from which at least one response has been obtained.

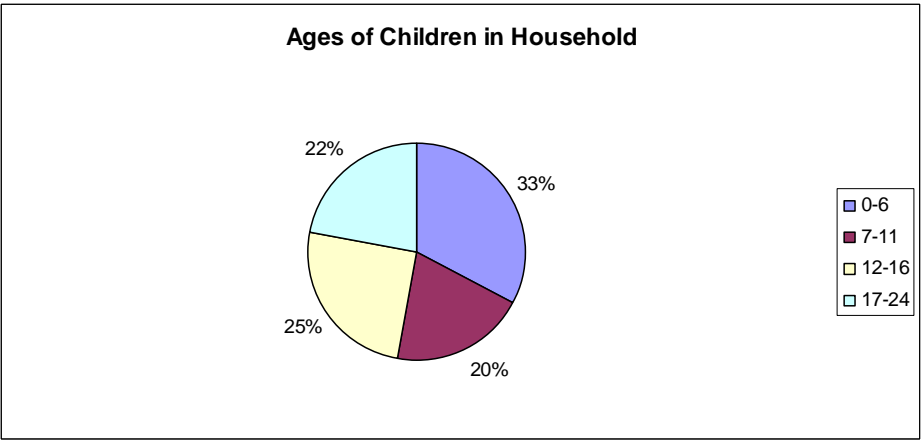
As can be seen, there was a good geographical spread of responses with probably a better overall response being received from some of the rural parts of the Borough.



Of those who completed and returned the questionnaire, the percentage breakdown in terms of age is shown on the left.



Of those households responding the percentage breakdown of those containing children or otherwise, is shown on the left.



Of those responding households with children the following chart on the left shows the overall percentage breakdown of age for those children.

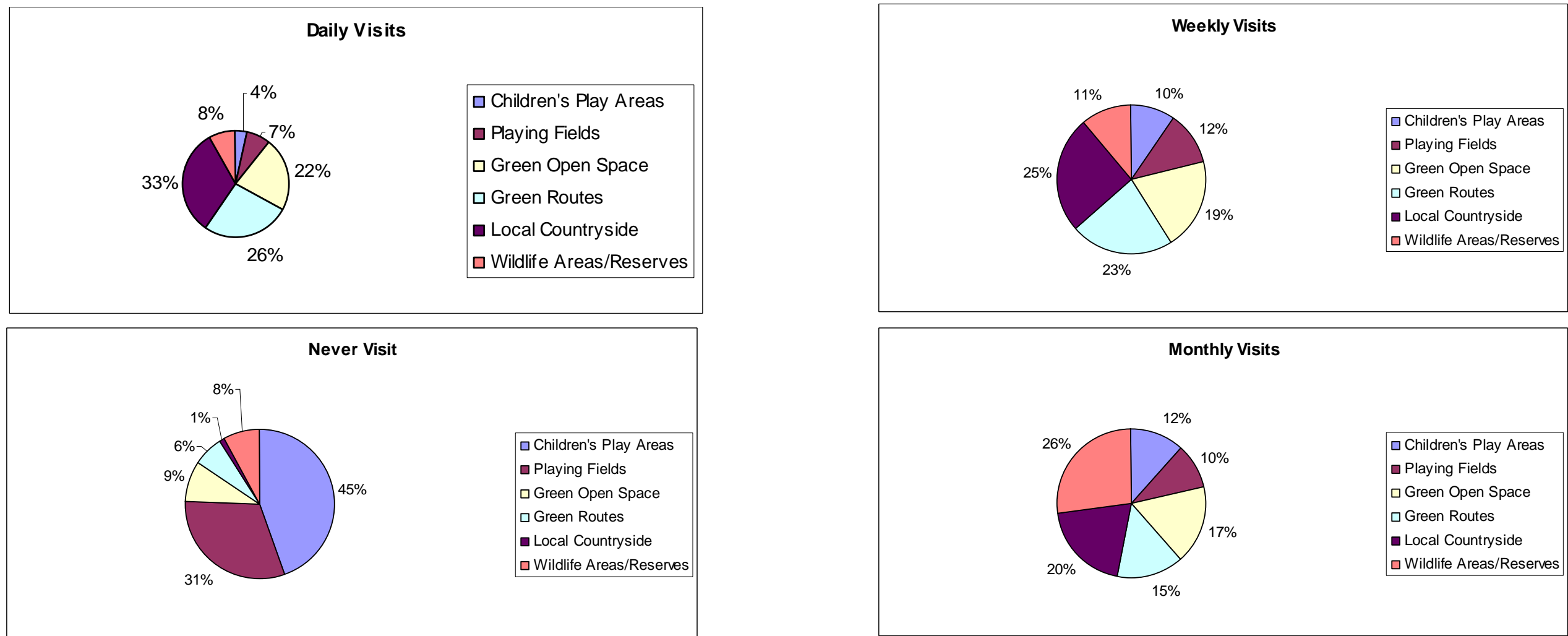
**Comments on the characteristics of the respondents.**

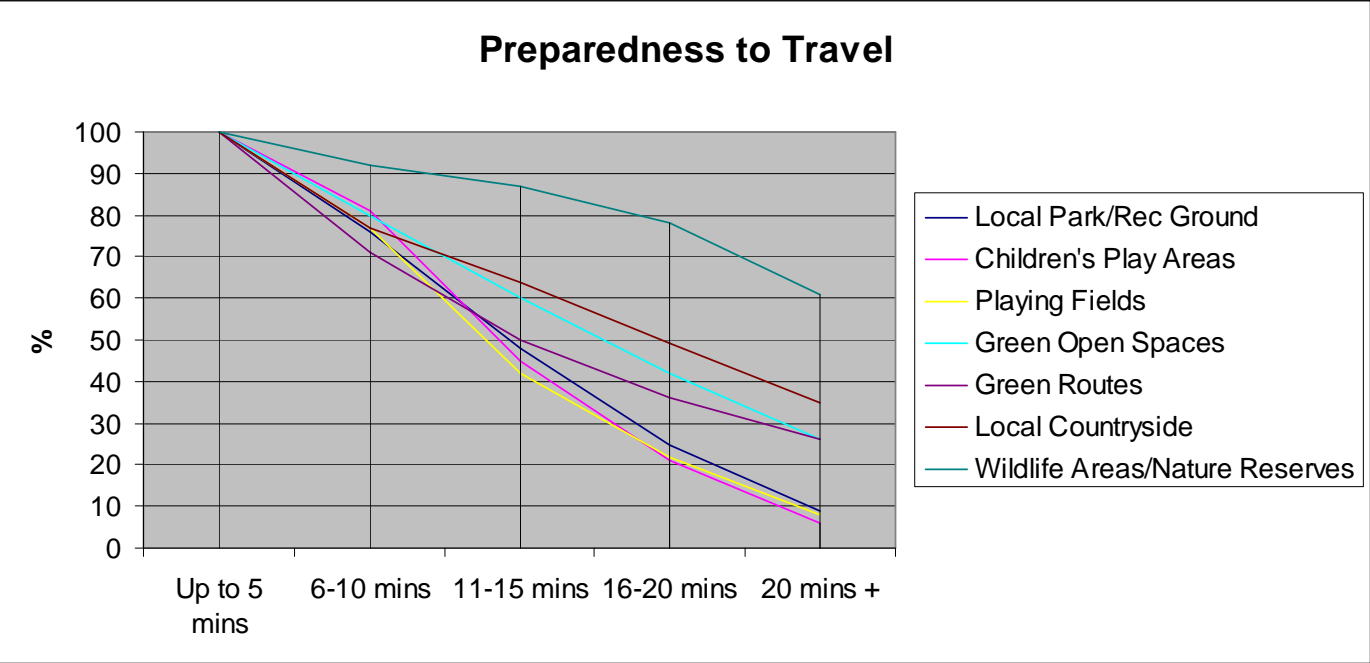
The household survey represents a core component of the consultation, and the information derived helps to inform many aspects of the study and, ultimately, recommendations for the development of local standards of provision. However, such surveys tend to provoke a higher response from householders of a particular demographic and social background. The findings must be considered with those of other community investigations to achieve a rounded view.

Frequency, regularity and times of use

Respondents were asked to state how often they visited or used each of various types of open space within the Borough, and the below charts summarise the results.

The charts do make clear the importance of informal and natural space to respondents in terms of their regular visits. It is recognised some of the responses may tend to skew findings against some types of open space that might be regularly used by other members of the community who are not 'householders'.





**Mode of transport**

An accompanying question asked what mode of transport respondents were likely to use to get to the various types of open space, with the results summarised by the chart on the left.

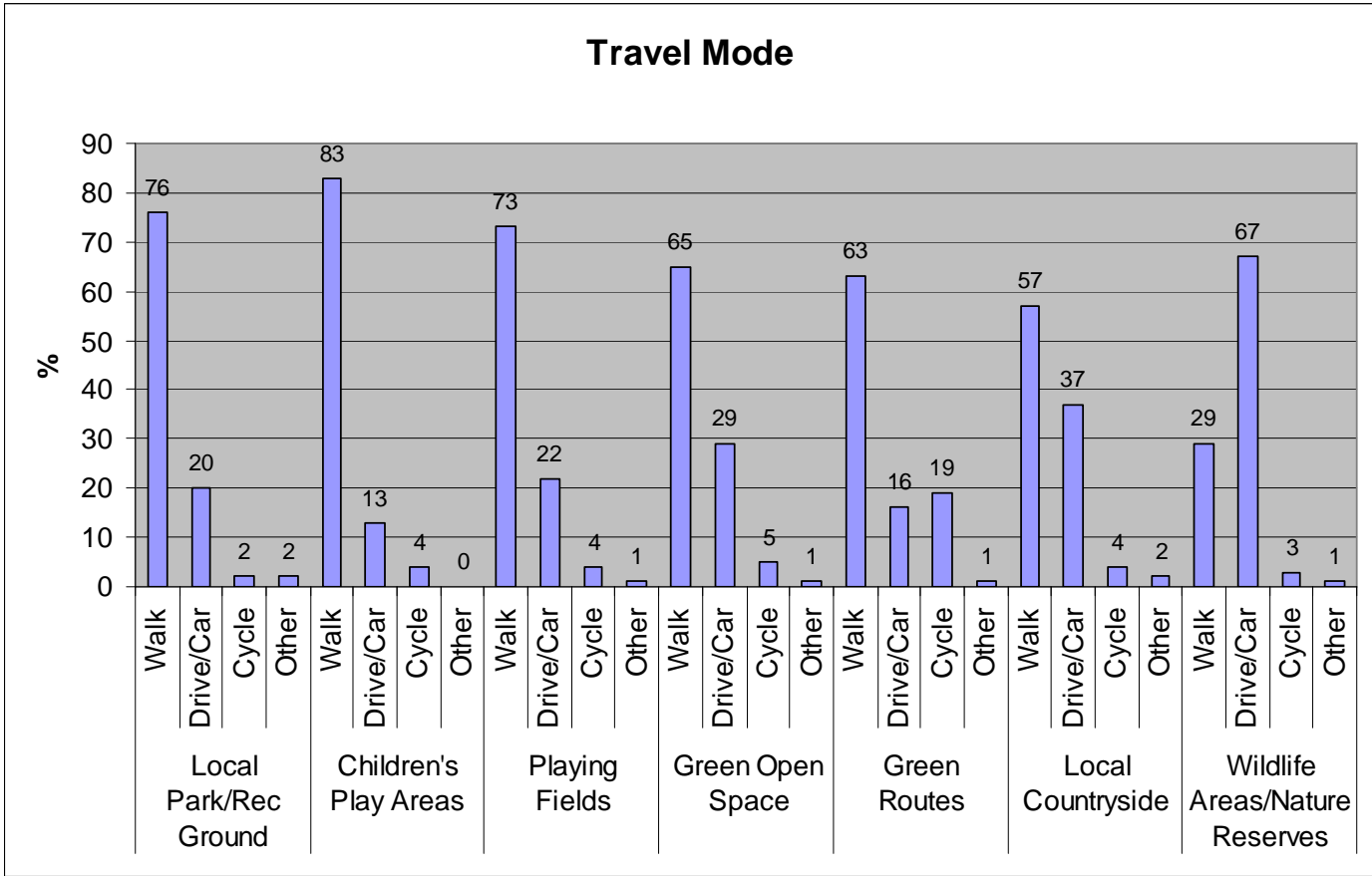
*It is not surprising that in broad terms walking is the predominant mode of travel to most types of space. The results do suggest greater preparedness to use a car to get to 'local countryside' and 'wildlife areas/nature reserves'. In terms of the latter car borne trips are in the majority, which again suggests a perception that such areas tend to be in remote locations.*

**Location of facilities relative to place of residence and 'preparedness to travel'**

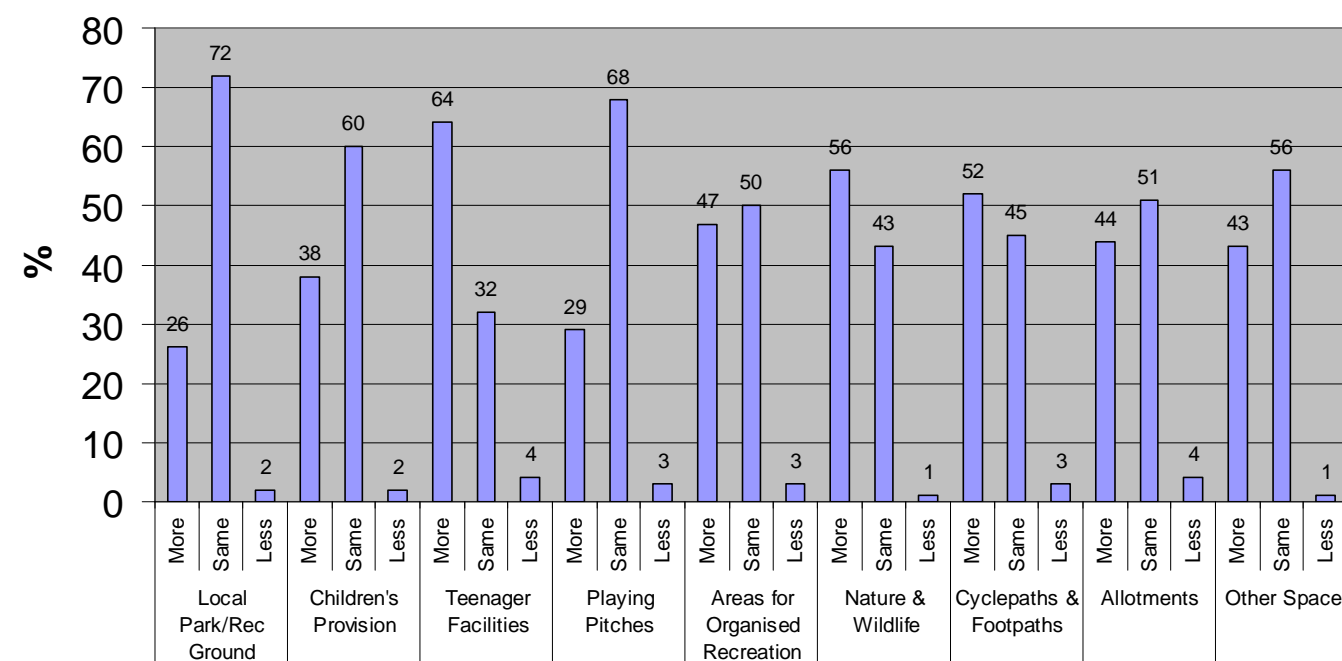
An important function of this study is to develop and recommend a series of local standards of provision for different types of open space, of which 'Accessibility' will be a core component.

The chart on the left summarises respondents' preparedness to travel to different types of space (if they use them).

*It is clear from the chart that for most types of space the large majority of respondents are prepared to travel between 6-10 minute. The exception to this is for wildlife and nature reserves where the toleration of travel is higher, perhaps because respondents perceive that such features tend to be found in relatively remote and isolated locations.*



## More/Less/Same Space



## 'More, less or the same'

Respondents expressed their views as to what types of open space they would broadly like to see 'more, less, or the same of' with the results shown to the left.

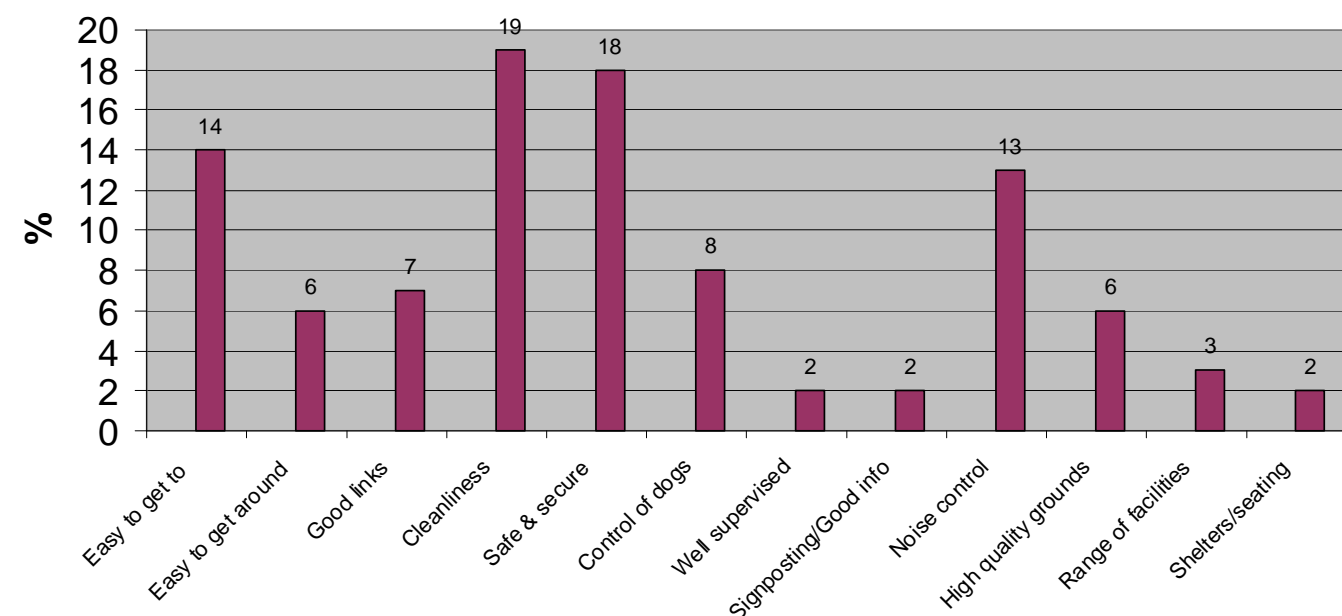
*In terms of wanting to see 'more space' the following were the highest scorers (in descending order):*

- *Teenage facilities*
- *Nature and wildlife sites*
- *Cyclepaths and footpaths.*

*'Areas for organised recreation' and 'allotments' also had a strong showing.*

Judging from the results few people felt there to be too much open space of any kind. The highest scores of any kind tended to be in the categories where people felt there should be the same amount of open space.

## Most Important Considerations in relation to Open Space



## Most important considerations

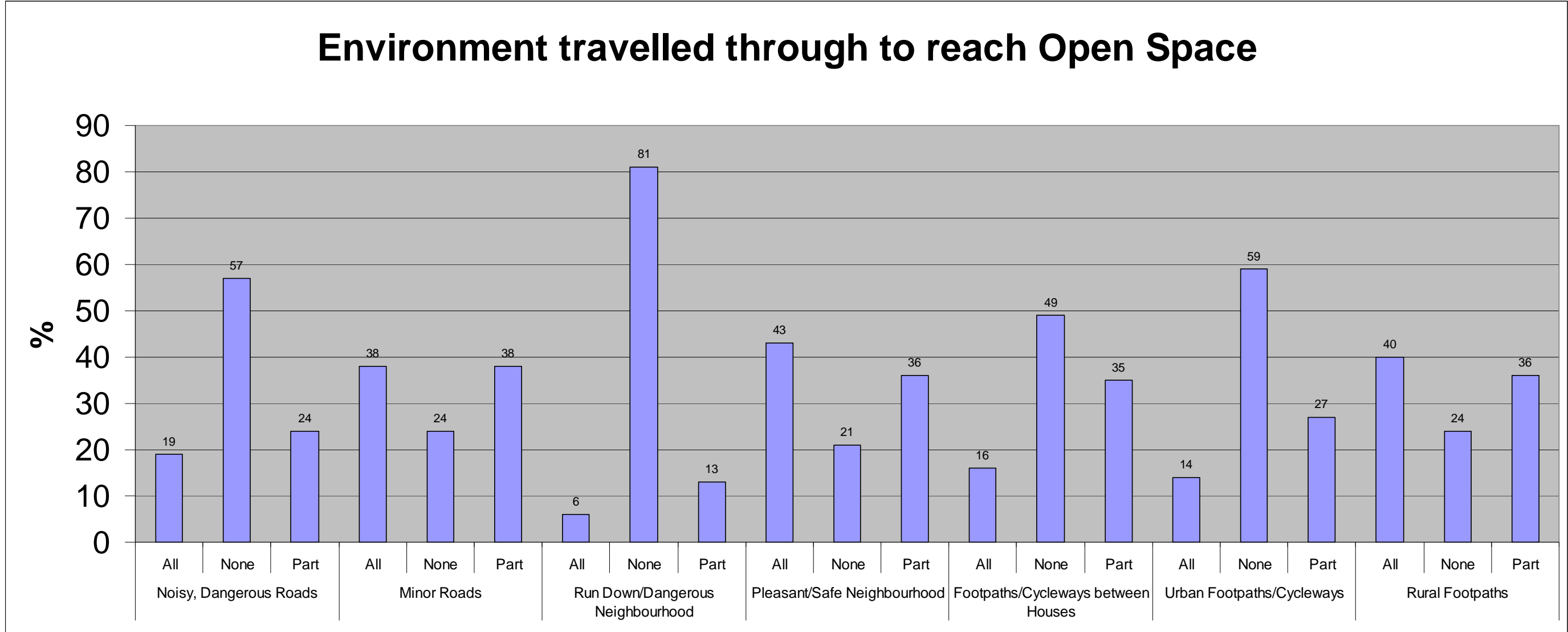
Respondents were asked to identify the most important considerations in relation to areas of open space.

*The chart on the left indicates that the most important issues for residents are to ensure that sites are clean; safe and secure; and easy to get to. Control of noise and anti-social behaviour was also prominent. It is likely that some respondents will have conflated various categories in terms of their responses, but the key message appears to be 'clean, safe, and easy to get to'.*



Travel environment

Clearly, there is no value in having good quality open space if it is difficult and/or unpleasant to reach. Earlier in this section the views of respondents were summarised in term of their preparedness to travel. However, there are other factors governing ease of access. Respondents were asked to categorise the environment they travelled through to reach their most used open spaces. The following chart summarises the responses.



Large percentages of the respondents therefore considered they had to travel through dangerous and unpleasant environments to reach open space. These views stress the importance of not planning and providing open space in isolation from considering the permeability of the surrounding environment in the widest sense.

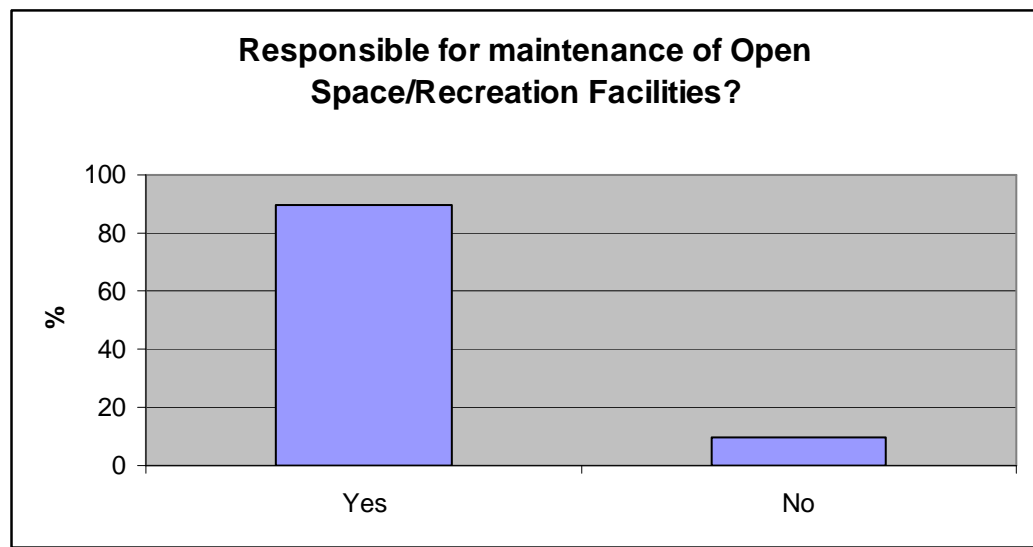
## 4.5 Town and Parish Councils' Questionnaire Survey

There are 42 town and parish councils within Ashford Borough and a questionnaire was sent to each. An Ordnance Survey map of the local council area was also provided. The town and parish councils were asked to annotate the map with any open space used by the community of which they were aware. Where these maps were returned they complemented independent survey work. The following table summarises the level of response obtained.

Estimated Population	Name	Questionnaire Returned	Map returned	Estimated Population	Name	Questionnaire Returned	Map returned
7613	Tenterden CP	•	•	981	Aldington CP	•	•
6709	Kingsnorth CP	•	•	880	Hothfield CP	•	•
4206	Great Chart with Singleton CP			846	Smeeth CP	•	•
3833	Stanhope CP			843	Challock CP		
2694	Charing CP	•	•	754	Appledore CP		•
2434	Biddenden CP	•	•	740	Westwell CP	•	•
2405	Wye with Hinxhill CP	•	•	727	Ruckinge CP		
1824	Woodchurch CP	•	•	392	Stone-cum-Ebony CP	•	•
1595	Chilham CP	•	•	374	Warehorne CP		
1495	Rolvenden CP	•	•	366	Godmersham CP		
1463	High Halden CP			318	Sevington CP	•	•
1443	Bethersden CP	•		307	Brook CP		
1442	Brabourne CP	•	•	274	Bilsington CP	•	•
1281	Orlestone CP			249	Molash CP	•	•
1222	Smarden CP	•	•	239	Little Chart CP	•	•
1143	Wittersham CP	•	•	226	Hastingleigh CP		
1135	Shadoxhurst CP	•	•	210	Kenardington CP		
1104	Egerton CP			193	Newenden CP	•	
1099	Boughton Aluph CP			168	Crundale CP		
1058	Mersham CP	•	•	119	Eastwell CP		
1050	Pluckley CP	•	•	109	Bonnington CP	•	•

Overall 27 local councils responded to this approach in some way, of which most returned both the map and questionnaire. A couple of councils either returned only the map or the questionnaire. The table orders the list of local councils by population size. With a few notable exceptions, there was a good response rate from the more populated local council areas (1000 people or more). Many of the smallest parishes do not in fact have any responsibilities for open space.

The findings of this meeting are provided below.



*As shown on the left the large majority of the responding councils have responsibilities for the maintenance of at least some open space/recreation facilities in their area; either directly, or else through a related trust or association.*

The councils were asked to comment about the quantity and quality of a range of facilities and the following table highlights the issues of concern (marked with an ●) for the different councils (no ● entered indicates no perceived problem for the parish).

*Where needs were identified, the balance of comments were in respect of insufficient and/or poor quality pitches, play and youth provision. Inadequate provision for teenagers was the most frequently identified. Of the most populated parishes both Wye with Hinxhill, and Tenterden identified major deficiencies in open space provision of all kinds which is likely to be further impacted by increased population.*

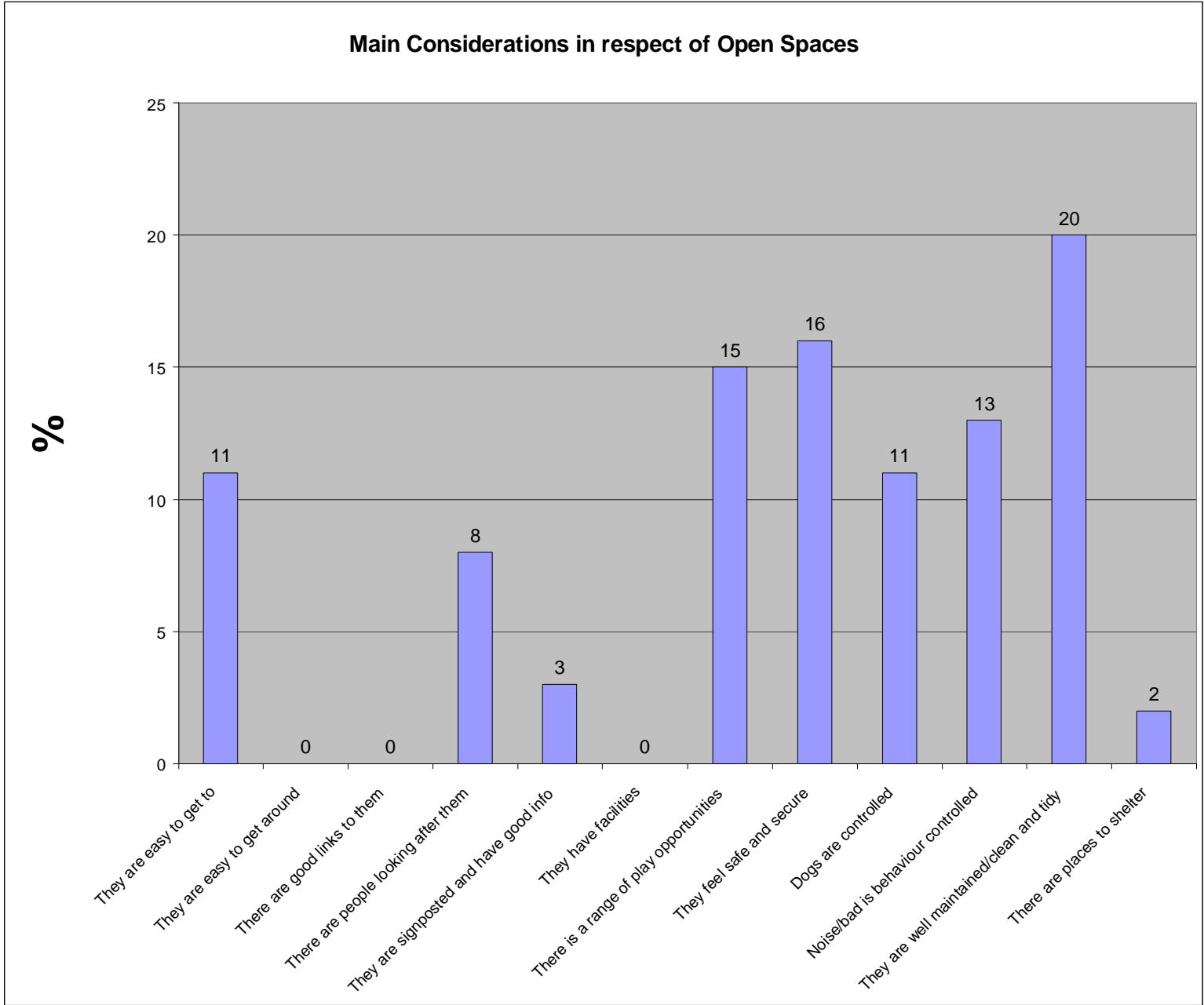
Parish council questionnaire survey- quality and quantity issues

Town/Parish Council	Population	Football Pitches (not enough)	Cricket Pitches (not enough)	Rugby Pitches (not enough)	Poor Quality Pitches	Insufficient/poor quality MUGAs	Poor changing facilities	Insufficient/poor quality bowls	Insufficient informal open space	Insufficient Play areas	Poor quality play areas	Insufficient for teenagers	Shortage of Halls	Shortage of footpaths/other Routes	Shortage of wildlife areas
Aldington	981											•			
Appledore	754	No Questionnaire returned													
Bethersden	1443														
Biddenden	2434											•			
Bilsington	274												•	•	
Bonnington	109											•			
Boughton Aluph	1099	No Questionnaire returned													
Brabourne	1442	•				•						•			
Brook	307	No Questionnaire returned													
Challock	843	No Questionnaire returned													
Charing	2694					•	•					•	•	•	
Chilham	1595					•						•			
Crundale	168	No Questionnaire returned													
Eastwell	119	No Questionnaire returned													
Egerton	1104	No Questionnaire returned													
Godmersham	366	No Questionnaire returned													
Great Chart with Singleton	4206	No Questionnaire returned													
Hastingleigh	226	No Questionnaire returned													
High Halden	1463	No Questionnaire returned													
Hothfield	880	•									•				
Kenardington	210	No Questionnaire returned													
Kingsnorth	6709					•		•			•	•	•		•
Little Chart	239					•				•		•			
Mersham	1058	•				•					•	•		•	•
Molash	249														
Newenden	193														
		No Questionnaire returned													
Orlestone	1281	No Questionnaire returned													
Pluckley	1050	•	•			•		•			•	•			•
Rolvenden	1495				•		•				•	•			
Ruckinge	727	No Questionnaire returned													
Sevington	318	•				•					•	•		•	•
Shadoxhurst	1135				•		•			•	•	•			
Smarden	1222												•		
Smeeth	846					•						•			
Stanhope	3833	No Questionnaire returned													
Stone-cum-Ebony	392										•				
Tenterden	7613	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Warehorne	374	No Questionnaire returned													
Westwell	740										•	•			•
Wittersham	1143					•						•			
Woodchurch	1824											•			
Wye with Hinxhill	2405	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

When asked specifically about new or improved recreation opportunities that would benefit the community, the following were identified.

**Parish council questionnaire survey- specific provision required**

Parish	New or improved facilities that would benefit the parish	Parish	New or improved facilities that would benefit the parish
Aldington and Bonnington	"Facilities for Teenagers"	Rolvenden	"New football pitch with changing facilities. Update for equipment in children's play area"
Biddenden	"Teenage Facilities"	Tenterden	Representation by letter about shortages in recreation facilities in terms of existing and future populations
Bilsington	"Use of Village Hall for indoor recreation"	Shadoxhurst	"A club that teenagers could attend"
Brabourne	"Teenagers look for skateboard/rollerskate facilities- but siting is a big problem"	Kingsnorth	"Village hall/meeting room on Brisley Farm. Kickaround/goalend at Westhawk Play Area. Teenage Meeting Place. Bowling facilities"
Charing	"Sports hall to replace pavilion"	Smarden	"New sports pavilion. New youth club building"
Chilham	"Teenagers are poorly served....a specific area is required <u>possibly</u> including a MUGA involving basketball"	Stone cum Ebony	"Better play area for toddlers & older children"
Hothfield	"Child play area –refurb"	Smeeth	"Area for skate boarding and kickabout"
Kingsnorth	Village Hallmeeting room on Brisley Farm. Kickaround/goalend at Westhawk Play Area. Teenage meeting places. Bowling facilities.	Westwell	"Playing area for children and young people needs improvement/refurbishment"
Little Chart	"Revamping tennis court & creating safe area for ball sports"	Wittersham	"MUGA"
Mersham & Sevington	"Teenage facilities; toddler facilities:family picnic areas"	Woodchurch	"Youth shelter/hangout area"
Molash	"None needed"	Wye with Hinxhill	Representation by letter about shortages in recreation facilities in terms of existing and future populations
Pluckley	"Football field for juniors and adults....parking for parents taking children to Rec ground, play area for children that is not in danger of being hit by cricket balls (or a separate crcket ground) storage for equipment used by PC, CC, Junior FC. PARKING for visitors (500+ at Halloween!"		

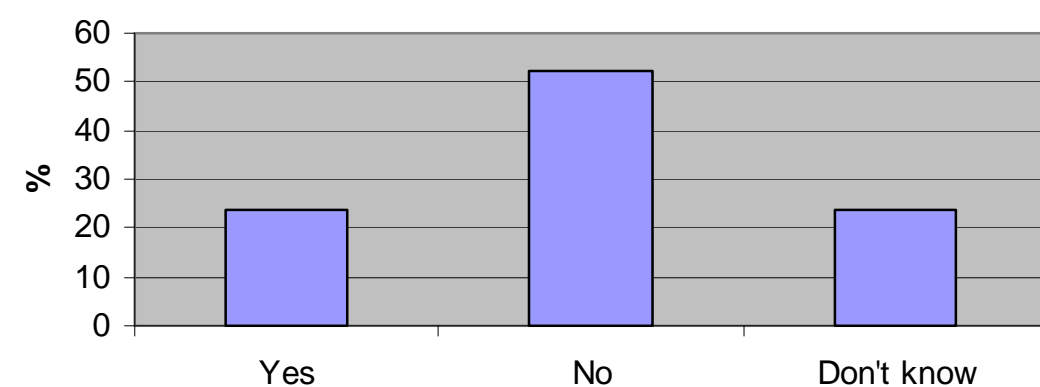


**Main considerations in respect of open space.**

Councils were asked to indicate the main considerations in relation to open space, with the results shown in this chart.

*The highest scoring considerations (maintenance/cleanliness and safety/security) are the same as the highest scores in the community survey. The importance of 'ease of access' and 'noise control' is also consistent with the results of the community survey.*

### Scope for more Community Use of Local School

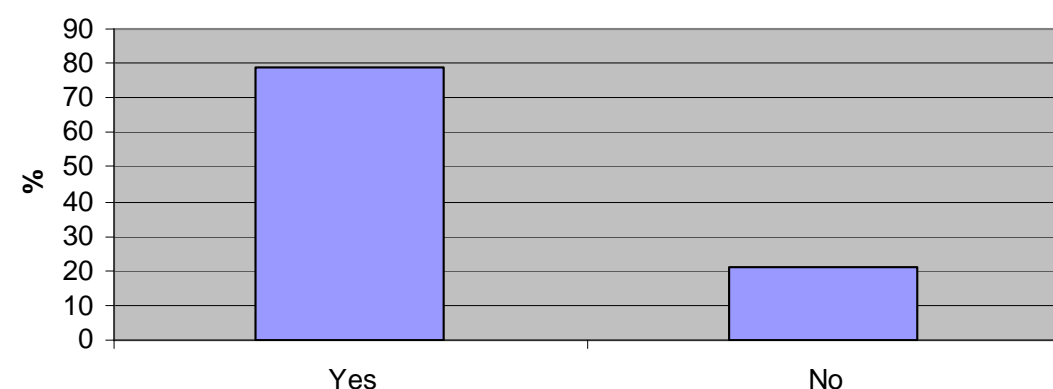


### Scope for more community use of schools

The local councils were asked whether they felt there to be scope for jointly providing facilities at local schools, or further developing community use, with the following results.

At first glance the above results appear to represent an emphatic “no”. However, several of the parishes do not have local schools. Some other responses suggested a perceived reluctance on the part of schools and/or the education authority to allow such use.

### Preparedness to own/manage new Open Space/Facilities?



### Management of new open space

Councils were asked whether they, or else a related association or trust, would be prepared to take ownership and/or manage new open space/facilities if these were provided, with the chart on the left recording the response.

The councils were asked to name what they thought to be the most used open space in their parish, with the results indicated in **Part 2**. Finally the Councils were asked if they had any other comments or issues they wished to make, and the results are summarised in **Part 2**.

## 4.6 Community organisations' survey.

A questionnaire was sent out to 28 relevant groups and organisations identified by the Borough Council with responses received from nine, with the general findings as follows.

The majority of the community organisations say there are enough of the following facilities:

- local recreation ground/parks
- children's play areas
- playing pitches
- amenity open space
- natural green space
- indoor sports provision
- gyms/fitness facilities.

Whereas they said that there are not enough of these facilities:

- teenage areas
- other outdoor sports facilities
- cycle/foot paths
- allotments.

The 3 most important things about open space were deemed to be:

- easy to get to
- opportunities for all age groups
- being safe and secure.

The following aspects of open space were said to be good:

- the range & quality of play facilities for young children
- security & feeling safe.

The aspects that were said to be satisfactory were:

- the number & quality of playing pitches
- the range & quality of outdoor and indoor sports facilities
- the number & quality of local parks
- wildlife areas, footpaths & cycleways
- country parks
- allotments
- accessibility for wheelchairs & pushchairs
- provision of special events & festivals
- car parking
- areas & bins for dog fouling and lighting.

Whereas the following aspects were rated as poor:

- the range & quality of play facilities for teenagers
- areas for sitting out or informal ball games
- cleanliness & freedom from litter & graffiti
- provision of shelters & seating
- signposting, information boards & leaflets.

The main factors that they felt would encourage greater use of open space, sport and recreation facilities were:

- better and cheaper public transport
- more suitable open spaces nearer to people's homes.



*From the above it is again worth noting the perceived poor quality in the provision of space for young people (teenagers). Safety and security and ease of access are also identified as important considerations when planning and managing open space, which is consistent with the views of other consultations.*

#### **4.7 Non-pitch sports questionnaire**

The Borough Council has already undertaken an investigation into local needs with regard to space for pitch sports like football, rugby, hockey, and cricket and these investigations are summarised elsewhere in this section. For other sports a questionnaire survey was conducted on clubs known to the Borough Council. Twenty eight clubs were sent a questionnaire, of which 8 responded.

#### **4.8 Pitch sports**

Pitch sports (primarily football and cricket, and to a lesser extent rugby and hockey) are significant users of open space within the Borough. Football is the most popular sport in terms of overall participation, but cricket has a very strong local profile, and especially outside the Ashford urban area in the villages and smaller towns.

The Borough Council has conducted research into the supply of and demand for pitches within the urban areas of Ashford.

In brief these investigations considered the need for sports pitches in the Ashford urban area through:

- Undertaking a technical assessment of supply and demand using a method recommended by Sport England.
- Consulting with the representatives of the governing bodies, local leagues and key clubs.

The overall conclusions of these investigations are as follows.

##### ***Football:***

- The technical assessment of supply relative to times of demand indicates that there is sufficient capacity to meet known demand at times of peak demand.
- The above tends to be confirmed by the views of Kent Football Association and local leagues in relation to adult football.
- Contrary to the findings of the technical assessment, junior age football leagues considered there to be a shortage of pitches at peak times, with junior and mini soccer teams reliant on the use of adult size pitches that had been previously used in the day by adult teams, leading to problems with the playing surface.
- The technical assessment of pitches suggested that most of the pitches were of at least 'average' quality, although pitches used on education sites tended to be of higher quality. To some extent these findings were at odds with the views of the Kent FA and local leagues who felt that poor drainage of many pitches was a significant issue along with inadequate or often non-existent changing facilities.

##### ***Hockey:***

- Artificial Turf Pitches (ATPs) are now required for playing competitive hockey..
- There is only one full size floodlit ATP in the Borough. This is the home ground of the only hockey club in the Borough, Ashford Hockey Club. The club uses the only other full size ATP in the borough at Towers School (Kennington), although this has no floodlighting which restricts its use. Three new full size floodlit ATPs are planned on educational sites, two of which appeared to have received funding.
- A technical assessment was undertaken of the supply of playing opportunities offered on the local ATPs compared with demand. The assessment assumed that senior teams could not play any matches on the Towers School ATP on Saturdays during daylight hours because it is not officially recognised. If this were the case then there would be a shortfall in capacity of 2 matches per week. In practice some of the adult matches are played at Towers School as well as some training sessions.
- The conclusion was that there is an immediate shortfall in ATPs and a good case can clearly be made for an additional officially full size, floodlit ATP immediately.

- Although a diverse range of ancillary facilities are available at Ball Lane hockey club, the condition of them is considered inadequate. The clubhouse is in need of total replacement. It has no female changing, poor toilets, no disabled facilities or child friendly changing areas. The club has prepared a case for a development including a new clubhouse and floodlit ATP, but has not yet identified a source of funding.

### **Rugby:**

- Ashford Rugby Club is the only club of its kind in the Borough. The club owns four full size rugby pitches, which are all at its home ground at Kinneys Lane, Bybrook. Juniors play on a full sized pitch.
- The club's membership was growing due to a variety of reasons, including its strong position in the County League and the national team's performance in recent World Cups. Despite this they do not require additional pitches for matches or training in the foreseeable future.
- Although a diverse range of ancillary facilities are available at Ashford Rugby Club, the condition of them is considered inadequate. The clubhouse is very dilapidated in need of total replacement, for which the club is currently seeking funding. The changing rooms, showers and toilets are in an unacceptably poor state and there is no disabled access. This is affecting the club's prospects. The pitches are generally in good condition.

### **Cricket:**

The Borough Council's assessment does not cover cricket. Most of the cricket within the Borough is played outside the Ashford urban area within the villages and smaller towns. Generally, cricket is played either on dedicated grounds owned or leased by clubs; or else, on village greens or recreation grounds.

*On balance the above investigations suggest a general satisfaction with the overall current supply of sports pitches, at least in the urban area; although this is not a universally held view, and especially in terms of junior size football pitches. The poor quality or none existence of ancillary accommodation for football and rugby in particular is perhaps seen as a bigger problem together with often low quality drainage.*

### **Ashford Open Spaces Site User Survey**

Ashford Borough Council commissioned a user survey in the summer of 2005 across six natural spaces:

- Ashford Community Woodland
- Cuckoo Woods
- West Hawk Park Farm
- The Warren/Hoads Wood
- Park Farm Country Park
- Hothfield Common

Analysis of the findings suggest that the majority of users are generally happy and feel the appearance of natural green spaces is of good or excellent standard. The main comments made by the public are that they would like natural greenspace to be kept as it is- natural. They do not want building or extra development which would affect the natural appearance and threaten wildlife.

Generally most users are not prevented by anything from using the natural greenspace further. If there is a reason it is because they don't feel safe, or have insufficient time.

Satisfaction levels amongst users tends to be higher at the larger sites, where respondents are willing to travel further to use them. However, despite the overall satisfaction users feel regarding open spaces there are some significant areas for improvement. In particular it was found that dog and litter bins were in general need of improvement. It was also found that site information on cultural and natural features requires improvement. Users feel that information about greenspace on site would enhance their visit. Seating and directional signage are also other areas of improvement to consider.

*Although this survey was confined to six sites and limited to current users, it does tend to confirm the importance attached to natural spaces by local people. It also indicates the value of larger spaces and people's willingness to travel to larger sites if they are attractive and interesting.*

## 4.8 Consultation with children and young people: the Ashford Play Strategy

The focus of much of the consultation in this study has inevitably meant largely 'dealing with adults'- householders, club/society secretaries, parish clerks etc. Such representatives tend to speak collectively on behalf of the community, group, or family they represent. However, for certain types of open space provision it is essential also to liaise with children and young people as the most prominent users of such space. This additional consultation can be used to confirm, refute, and/or refine comments received via other elements of the consultation.

With regard to the children and young people, a considerable amount of research has been used to inform the development of a Play Strategy for Ashford. This research and the related strategy is both current and highly relevant.

Play Strategy Steering Group meetings provided a flexible and adaptable way of establishing the perceptions of the different parties involved in play services across Ashford. Further interviews were conducted by those representatives, to include parents and children in the process. A draft strategy was circulated amongst stakeholders including a range of public play services and interested individuals including local councillors and parish councils and members of the Ashford Partnership (LSP). Comments were debated at a 'Play Workshop'.

In addition the Strategy draws on:

- A community research study (OMAI 2005) conducted a review of community infrastructure across the Borough.
- In a recent MORI poll carried out in Ashford (Summer 2006), to help inform the Corporate Plan, over 800 residents were asked about their perception of and priorities for improving the quality of life of living in the Borough.
- Information supporting the *What Matters Youth Strategy* 2006 – 2009 young people in Ashford (11 – 19 years old).

A recurrent issue raised by members of the public during OMAI consultation was the lack of local open space suitable for informal ball games.

In the MORI poll, when presented with a list of 24 items contributing to quality of life, facilities for teenagers came out as the fourth most important contributing to an area as a good place to live. Play areas, parks and open spaces were also on the list, but ranked 10th as a contributing factor for quality of life and priority for improvement.

As part of the *What Matters Youth Strategy* 2006 – 2009 young people in Ashford (11 – 19 years old) had a number of key concerns including getting to places; having things to do; having a say; safe and clean streets; and improved leisure facilities. Those surveyed said that they wanted clean and safe informal facilities in open spaces in which to 'hang out' as well as more after school activity.

Other direct public feed used in informing the Play Strategy has come in the form of unsolicited requests for football goals for informal use, and teenage meeting places.

*The research findings underpinning the Play Strategy therefore emphasise the importance attached to providing appropriate opportunities for children and young people as highlighted in the community consultation for this study; and, especially in terms of better provision for young people.*

## 4.9 Key Points

Generally the community consultation has highlighted the following points.

### ***Household survey:***

- *the importance of informal and natural space to respondents in terms of their regular visits*
- *the longest people are prepared to travel between 6-10 minutes to reach most forms of space. The exception to this is for wildlife and nature reserves where the toleration of travel is higher*
- *in broad terms walking is the predominant mode of travel to most types of space. There is greater preparedness unsurprisingly to use a car to get to 'local countryside' and 'wildlife areas/nature reserves'. In terms of the latter car borne trips are in the majority*
- *In terms of wanting to see 'more space' the following were the highest scorers (in descending order):*

- Teenage facilities
- Nature and wildlife sites
- Cyclepaths and footpaths

*'Areas for organised recreation' and 'allotments' also had a strong showing.*

- *the most important issues in relation to open space are to ensure that sites are:*
  - *clean*
  - *safe and secure*
  - *and easy to get to*

*Control of noise and anti-social behaviour was also prominent. It is likely that some respondents will have conflated various categories in terms of their responses, but the key message appears to be 'clean, safe, and easy to get to'.*

- *many people feel they have to travel through dangerous and unpleasant environments to reach open space, stressing the importance of not planning and providing open space in isolation from considering the accessibility from within the surrounding environment in the widest sense*
- *the large majority of local councils have responsibilities for the maintenance of at least some open space/recreation facilities in their area; either directly, or else through a related trust or association*
- *where local councils identified needs, the balance of comments were in respect of insufficient and/or poor quality pitches, play and youth provision. Inadequate provision for teenagers was identified as clearly the most common issue. Of the most populated parishes major deficiencies in open space provision of all kinds which is likely to be further impacted by increased population*

#### **Parish and town councils:**

- *local councils highest scoring considerations (maintenance/cleanliness and safety/security) are the same as the highest scores in the community survey. The importance of 'ease of access' and 'noise control' is also consistent with the results of the community survey*
- *local councils generally highlighted the perceived poor quality in the provision of space for young people (teenagers). Safety and security and ease of access are also identified as important considerations when planning and managing open space, which is consistent with the views of other consultations*
- *a natural greenspace user survey further confirms the importance attached to natural spaces by local people. It also indicates the value of larger spaces and people's willingness to travel to larger sites if they are attractive and interesting*
- *the research findings underpinning the Play Strategy further emphasise the importance attached to providing appropriate opportunities for children and young people as highlighted in the community consultation for this study; and, especially in terms of better provision for young people*

#### **Community organisations:**

- *the perceived poor quality in the provision of space for young people (teenagers) is identified. Safety and security and ease of access are also identified as important considerations when planning and managing open space, which is consistent with the views of other consultations*

#### **Playing pitch sports:**

- *on balance a general satisfaction with the overall current supply of sports pitches, at least in the urban area; although this is not a universally held view, and especially in terms of junior size football pitches. The poor quality or none existence of ancillary accommodation for football in particular is perhaps seen as a bigger problem for football, together with often low quality drainage*

#### **Consultation for the Ashford Play Strategy:**

- *the importance attached to providing appropriate opportunities for children and young people as highlighted in the community consultation for this study; and, especially in terms of better provision for young people*

## 5.0 AUDIT OF LOCAL PROVISION (OVERVIEW)

### 5.1 Introduction

This section describes the overall provision and distribution of open space within the Borough. It should be read in conjunction with the local area profiles in **Part 2**.

### 5.2 Typology of open space

The following section defines the various categories of open space considered by this study.

These categories generally reflect the typology of provision identified in PPG17 with some modifications to suit local circumstances. Although these categories are varied in their nature, a number of simple criteria have been set to establish whether they ‘qualify’ for inclusion in the study, these are:

- they are freely and openly accessible to the community (e.g. recreation grounds); or,
- they are accessible to the public on a managed access basis (such as with allotments and some kinds of outdoor sports facility)

A total of 864 potentially qualifying open spaces have been identified within the Borough. Other than open spaces within the Borough, there will be sites elsewhere that might be used by Borough residents on a regular basis. Such sites have not been included in quantitative analyses of provision. However, it will be important to bear these opportunities in mind, when considering general access to opportunities at the local and strategic level, as local authority boundaries are not a constraint in this regard.

### 5.3 Parks and Recreation Grounds

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

- Informal recreation and outdoor sport.
- Play space of many kinds (including for sport and children's play).
- Providing attractive walks to work.
- Offering landscape and amenity features.
- Areas of formal planting.
- Providing areas for ‘events’.
- Providing habitats for wildlife.

Parks and Recreation Grounds are generally ‘multi-functional’ (an important aspect identified in the PPG17 companion guide) and therefore can host a range of activities. Parks (and public gardens) tend to be found in the larger settlements. In the smaller settlements the nearest equivalent is Recreation Grounds.

### 5.4 Outdoor Sports

With the exception of golf, those outdoor sports that tend to require most space to accommodate activity are the various pitch sports, and athletics. Grass pitches remain the surface of choice for most pitch sports at the community level. Many pitches within the Borough (apart from education provision) tend to be situated in recreation grounds, and this is especially the case in the rural areas. On the other hand there are standalone sports grounds (often privately owned) that also meet the needs of certain sports, notably cricket and rugby.

### 5.5 Equipped Children and Young People’s Space

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

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

The study has recorded the following:

- Equipped children’s space (for pre-teens).
- Provision for teenagers.

The former comprises equipped areas of play that cater for the needs of children up to and around 12 years. The latter comprises informal recreation opportunities for, broadly, the 13 to 16/17 age group, and which might include facilities like skateboard parks, basketball courts and ‘free access’ Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs). In practice, there will always be some blurring around the edges in terms of younger children using equipment aimed for older persons and vice versa.

## 5.6 Informal Greenspace

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

- Unlikely to be physically demarcated by walls or fences.
- Predominantly lain down to (mown) grass.
- Unlikely to have identifiable entrance points (unlike parks).
- Unlikely to have planted flower beds or other formal planted layouts, although they may have shrub and tree planting.
- Generally no other recreational facilities and fixtures (such as play equipment or ball courts), although there may be items such as litter bins and benches.

Examples might include both small and larger informal grassed areas in housing estates and general recreation spaces. They can serve a variety of functions dependent on their size, shape, location and topography. Some may be used for informal recreation activities, whilst others by themselves, or else collectively, contribute to the overall visual amenity of an area. However, as a general rule such spaces will not include highway verges and other incidental open space that does not fall within the definition of recreational open space contained within **Section 1**.

## 5.7 Natural Greenspace

For the purpose of this study, Natural Greenspace covers a variety of partly or wholly accessible spaces including meadows, river floodplain, woodland and copse all of which share a trait of having natural characteristics and wildlife value, but which are also open to public use and enjoyment. Research elsewhere and the local consultation for this study have identified the value attached to such space for recreation and emotional well-being. A sense of ‘closeness to nature’ with its attendant benefits for people is something that is all too easily lost in urban areas. Natural Greenspaces should be viewed as important a component of community infrastructure in planning for new development as other forms of open space or ‘built’ recreation facilities. Natural Greenspaces can make important contributions towards local Biodiversity Action Plan targets and can also raise awareness of biodiversity values and issues.

Some sites will have statutory rights or permissive codes allowing the public to wander in these sites. Others may have defined Rights of Way or permissive routes running through them. For the remainder of sites there may be some access on a managed basis. Although many natural spaces may not be ‘accessible’ in the sense that they cannot be entered and used by the general community, they can be appreciated from a distance, and contribute to visual amenity.

## 5.8 Allotments

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

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

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

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

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

In this country an Allotment Garden is generally distinct from a ‘Community Garden’. A Community Garden in the UK tends to be situated in a built-up area and is typically run by an independent non-profit organisation. It is also likely to perform a dual function as an open space or play area: while it may offer plots to individual cultivators the organisation that administers the garden will normally have a great deal of the responsibility for its planting, landscaping and upkeep.

## 5.9 Routeways and Green Corridors

Walking and cycling are continually identified by national surveys as major recreation activities in their own right, but are also endemic to everyday ‘healthy living’ (such as walking or cycling to work, the shops, or school). As activities they should be encouraged as a means of making both recreation and utility trips. Green recreational corridors can include:

- The local public Rights of Way network.
- Promoted long distance footpaths and cycleways.
- Permissive routes.

Links between town and countryside are important for accessing the wider rights of way network and quiet lanes, and can help to reduce car usage.

## 5.10 Other Open Space

The study has also identified a variety of other open spaces. These include churchyards and cemeteries, golf courses, and some large private spaces. These are not open spaces which are of central concern to this study given their specialist and (often) private nature. However, their existence should be acknowledged as well as the general contribution that they can make to the character and amenity of an area.

## 5.11 Issues with auditing open space

In practice it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between certain types of open space:

- Some of the larger local spaces (such as recreation grounds) may clearly serve more than one of the above functions. For example, a large recreation ground may include children’s play facilities, sports pitches, natural areas and more. On the other hand, many large spaces may serve predominantly one function.
- It is often difficult to differentiate between various types of informal recreation space, as local people do not necessarily draw distinction between (for example) a ‘recreation ground’, a park, and a large area of amenity open space; all are capable of meeting local need for informal activity and enjoyment. This demonstrates the need for flexibility in the perception of and planning for open space, which should have implications for the development and application of new local standards for open space.
- Some of the (larger) identified sites have been broken down as appropriate to reflect the above diversity of use. Other sites have not been broken down as such, and they are categorised according to their identified primary use.
- Much of the open space considered in this report is ‘free and open to use’. Access is not generally monitored for most sites considered and is often possible from a variety of points and directions. This makes it difficult to quantify with any precision the levels of use of different open spaces. However, as is seen in Section 4, local consultation has identified clearly the desire of residents to have access to such spaces for informal recreation opportunities.

## 5.12 Existing provision: a summary

The following pages summarise in pictures, charts and words the existing provision of open space in:

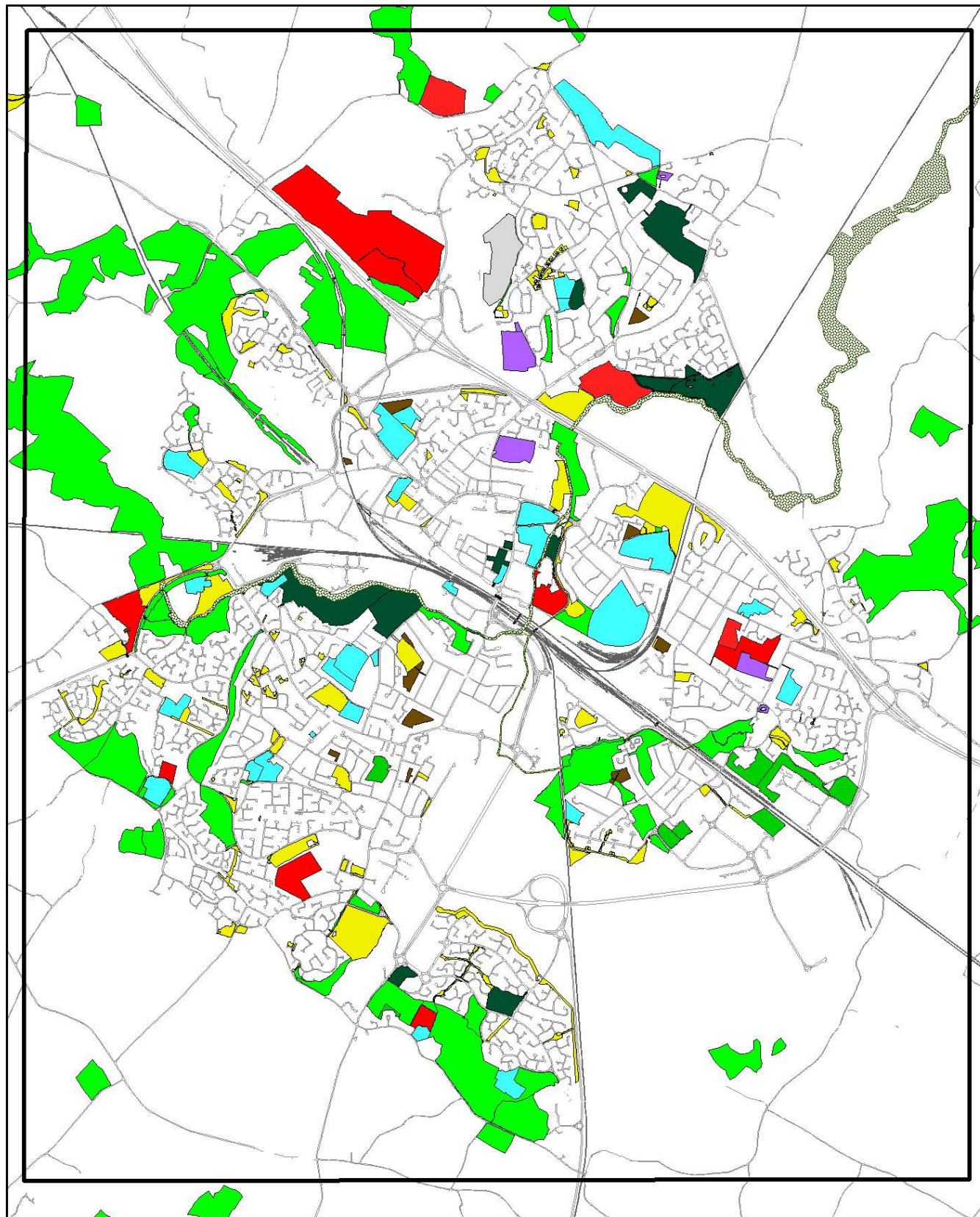
- the overall urban area
- the three urban sub areas (north, central, south)
- the overall rural area

For all areas more detailed information is contained in **Part 2** of the report, together with the supporting electronic databases.

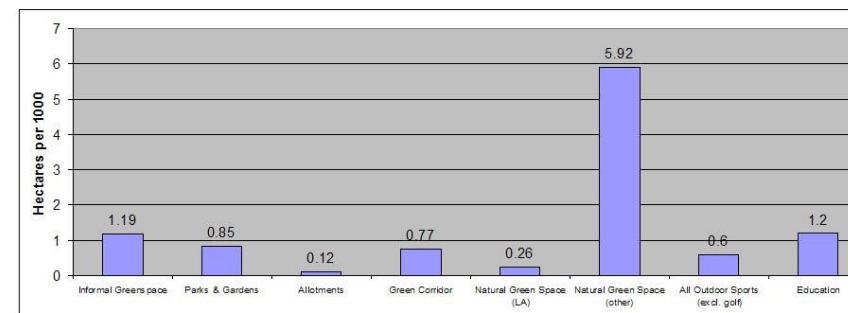
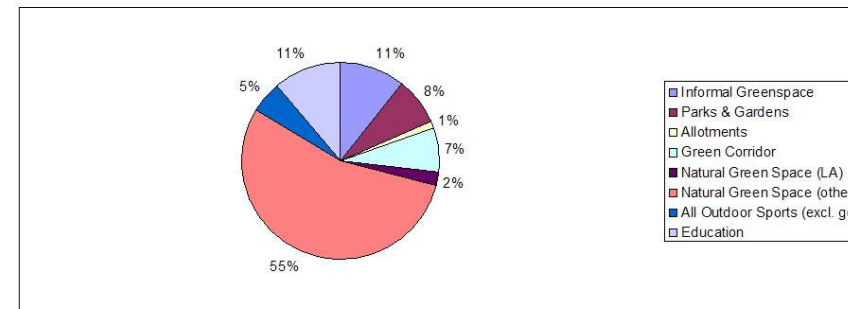
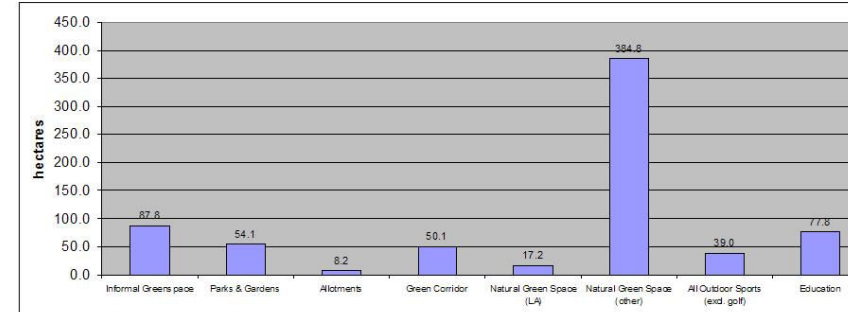
## 5.13 Provision in the urban area

The following maps summarise provision within the urban area as a whole, and also the three sub areas.

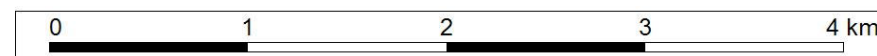




## Urban Area Key Statistics



Notes: 1) For the purpose of this map various subsets of the different open space types have been combined, of which Outdoor Sports Space and Natural Green Space are the main examples. 2) Small defined areas for equipped play and sports pitches are not shown on this map.



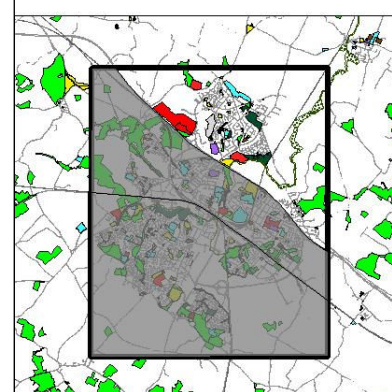
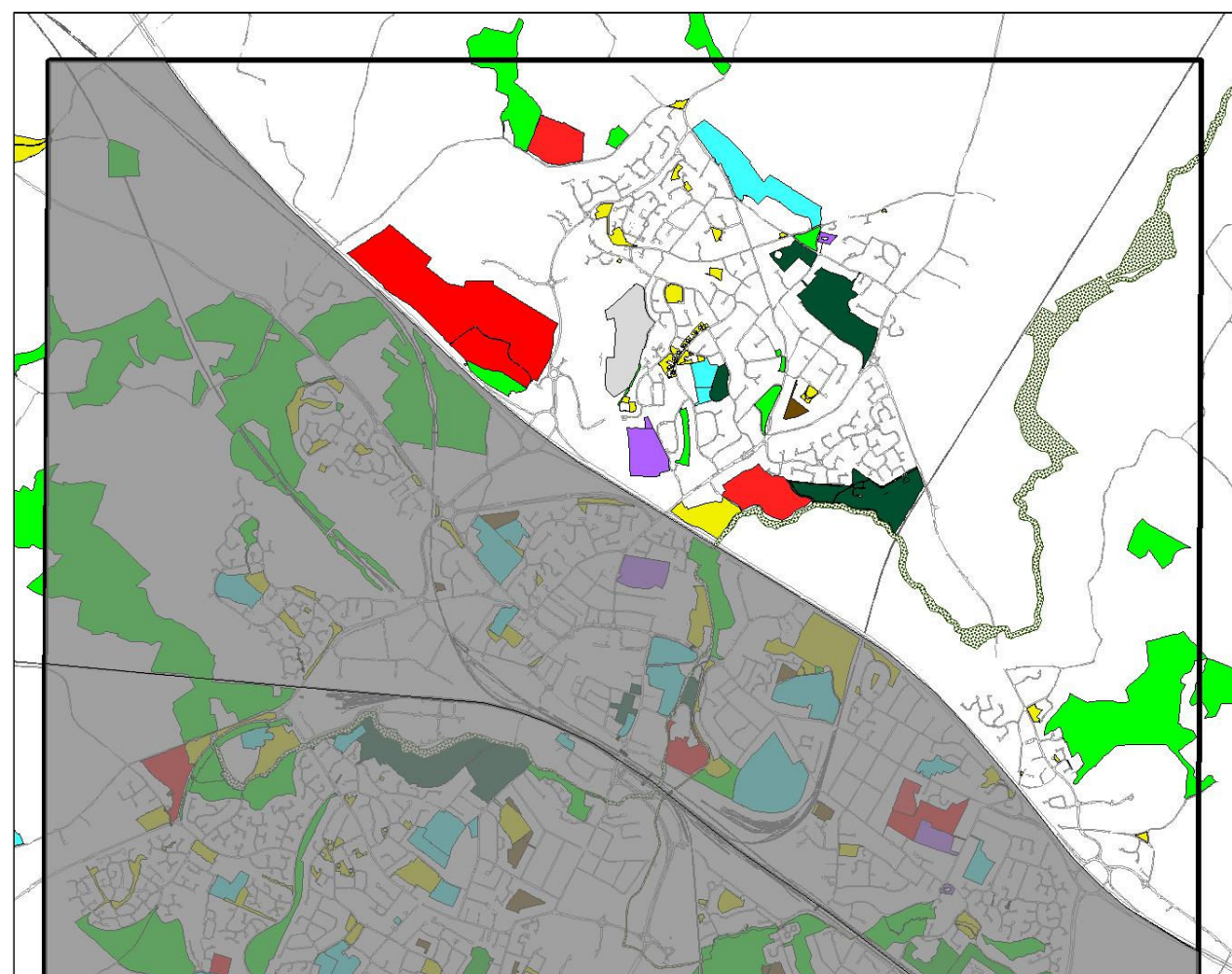
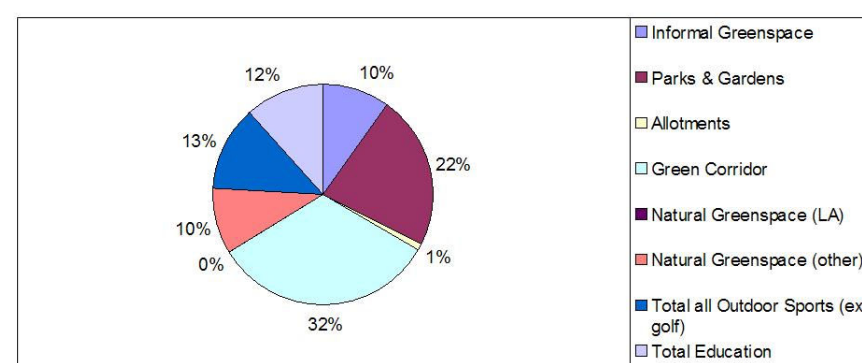
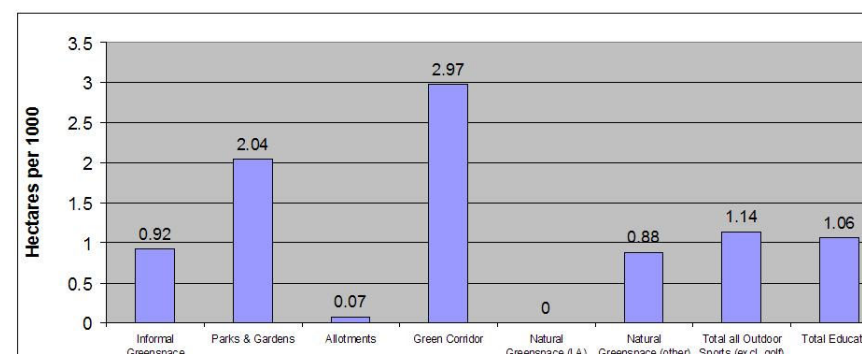
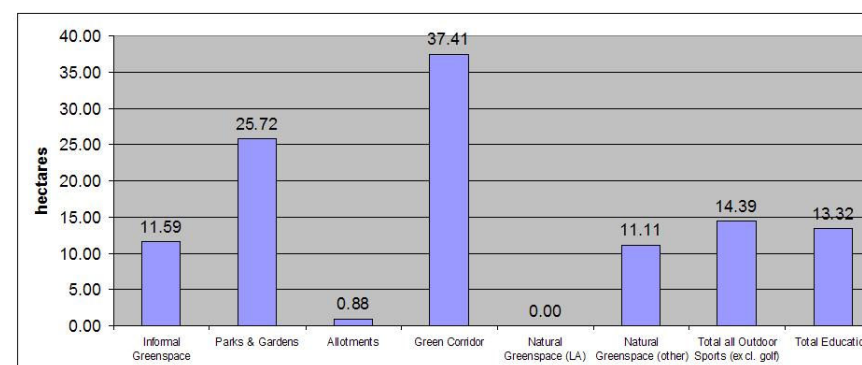
This Map 'Urban Area Key Statistics' provides a general indication of overall supply of open space within the Urban Area. The figure does not include equipped provision for children and young people, as the sites tend to be very small and would not show on the map or the accompanying charts. Such provision is dealt with later in this report. The map and accompanying charts show the dominance of natural and informal space within the urban area. The size of the Education sector is also noteworthy.

This overall level of provision hides considerable variation between the three urban sub areas, as shown on the following three maps.



# Urban Area: North

The northern part of the urban area is characterised by a relatively high level of provision of Parks and Gardens, as well as Green Corridor because of the river being so prominent in this part of the Town.

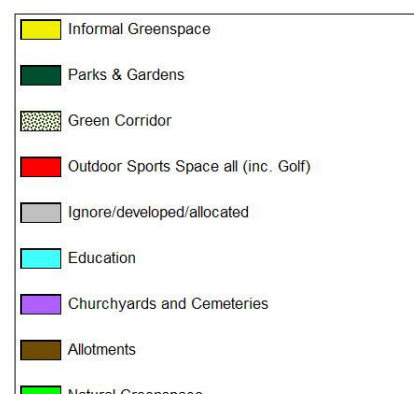
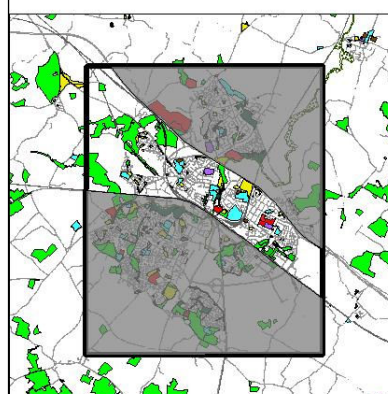
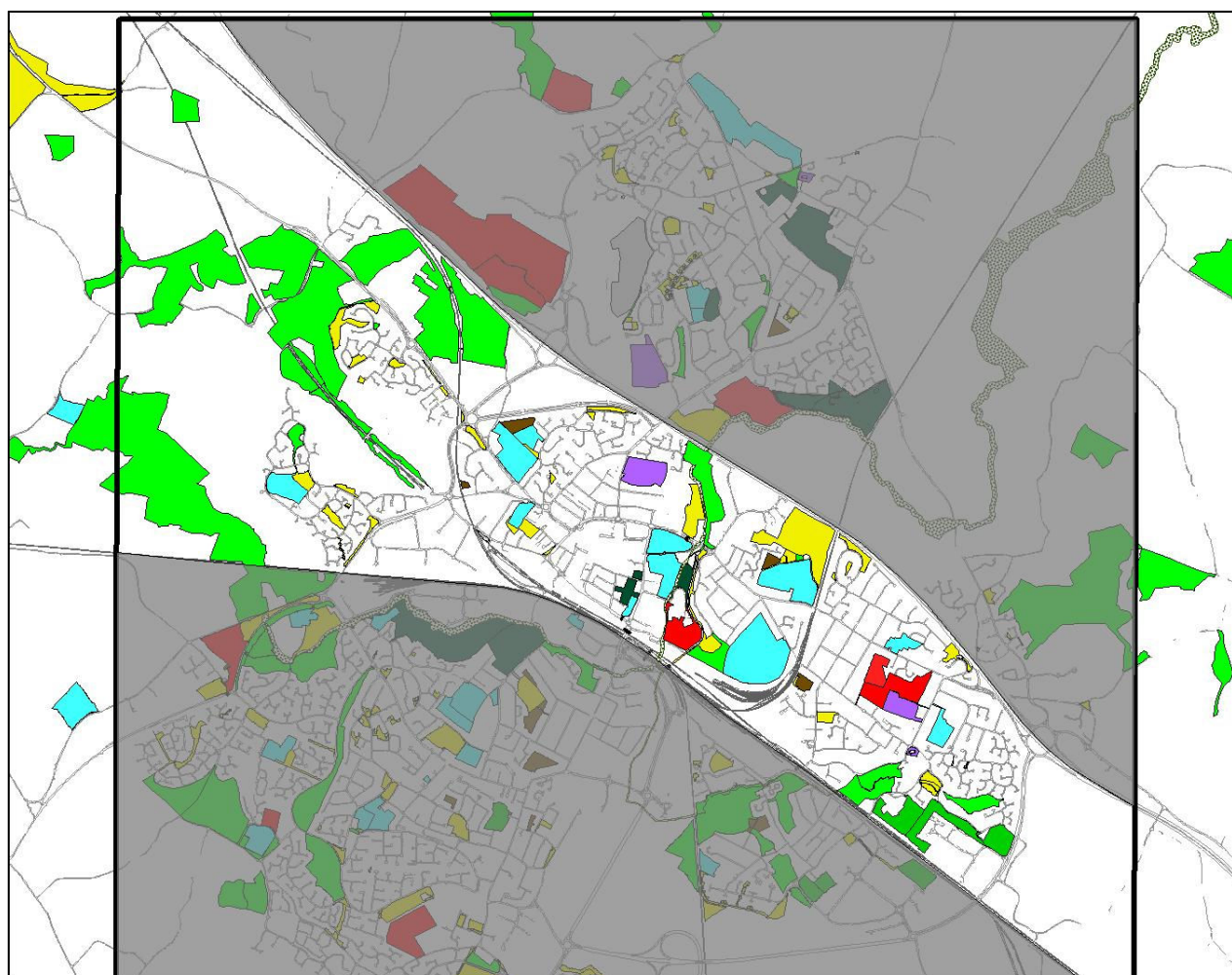


- Informal Greenspace
- Parks & Gardens
- Green Corridor
- Outdoor Sports Space all (inc. Golf)
- Ignore/developed/allocated
- Education
- Churchyards and Cemeteries
- Allotments
- Natural Greenspace

Notes: 1) For the purpose of this map various subsets of the different open space types have been combined, of which Outdoor Sports Space and Natural Green Space are the main examples. 2) Small defined areas for equipped play and sports pitches are not shown on this map.

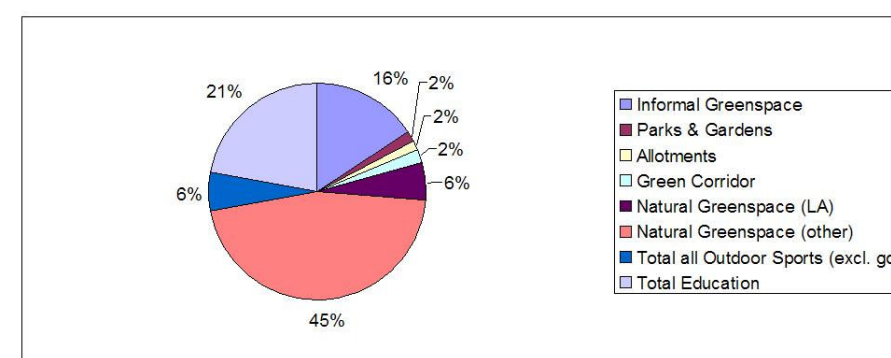
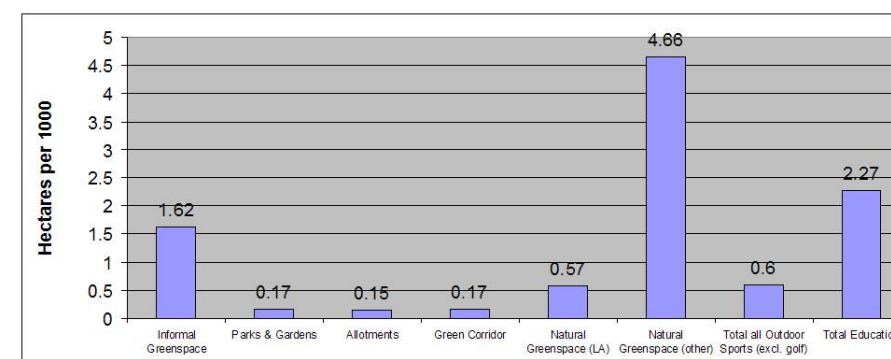
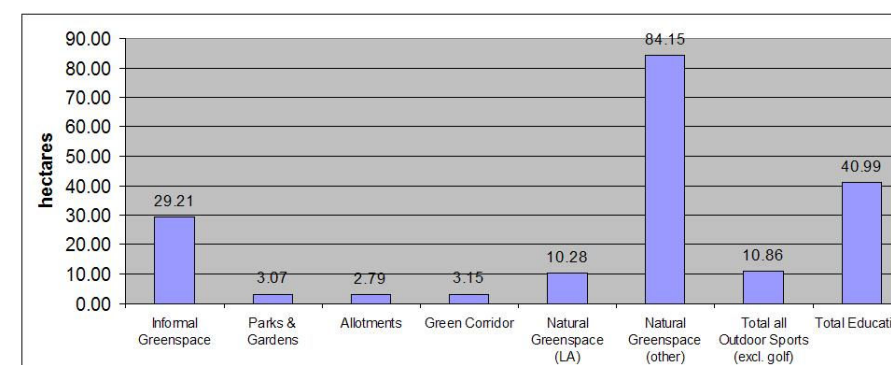
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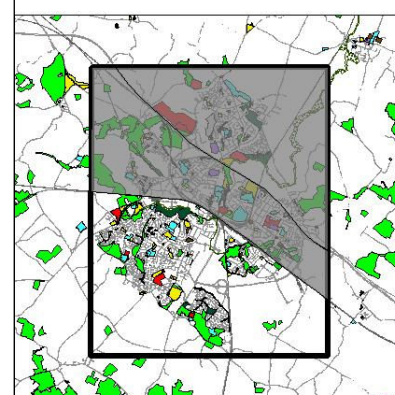
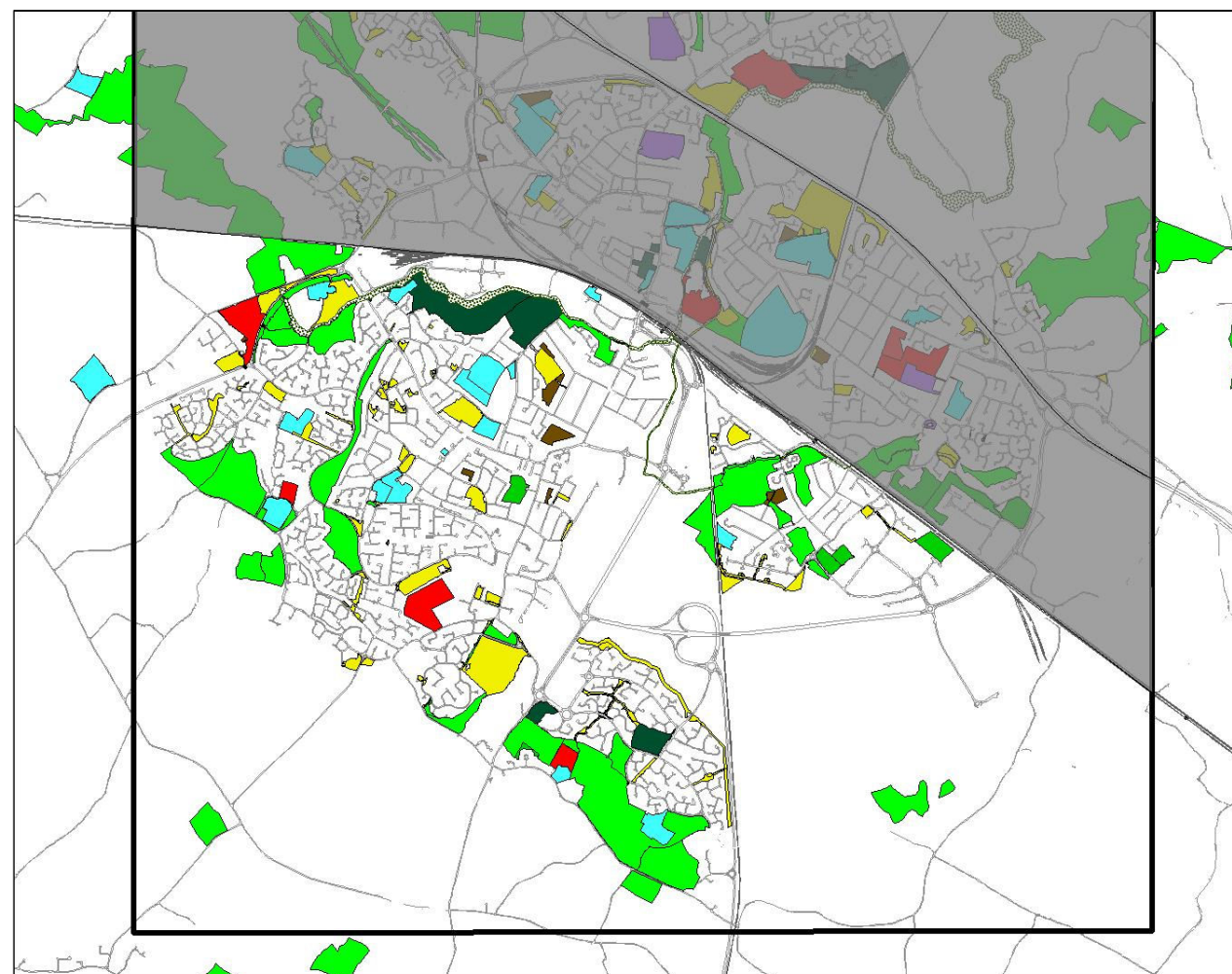
Notes: 1) For the purpose of this map various subsets of the different open space types have been combined, of which Outdoor Sports Space and Natural Green Space are the main examples. 2) Small defined areas for equipped play and sports pitches are not shown on this map.

## Urban Area: Central



In contrast, the central part of the urban area alone has relatively high levels of provision of Natural and Informal Greenspace. There is a relatively small provision for outdoor sports. The Education sector land holding is a very significant provider in this part of the Town.



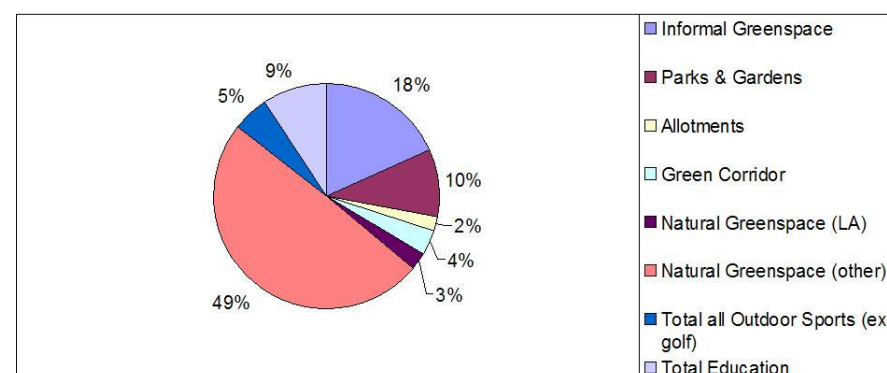
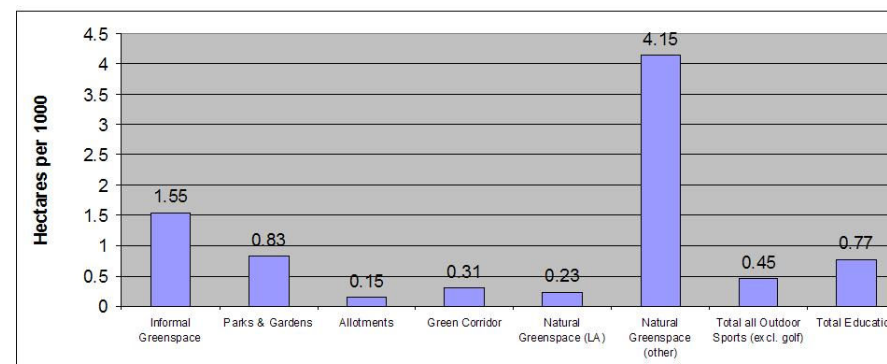
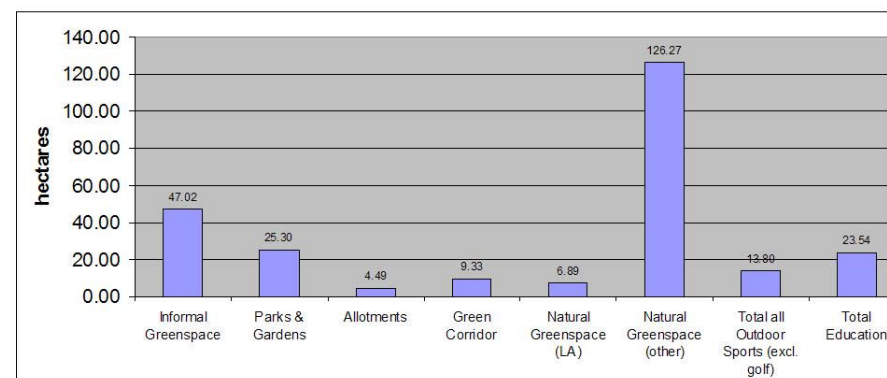


- Informal Greenspace
- Parks & Gardens
- Green Corridor
- Outdoor Sports Space all (inc. Golf)
- Ignore/developed/allocated
- Education
- Churchyards and Cemeteries
- Allotments
- Natural Greenspace

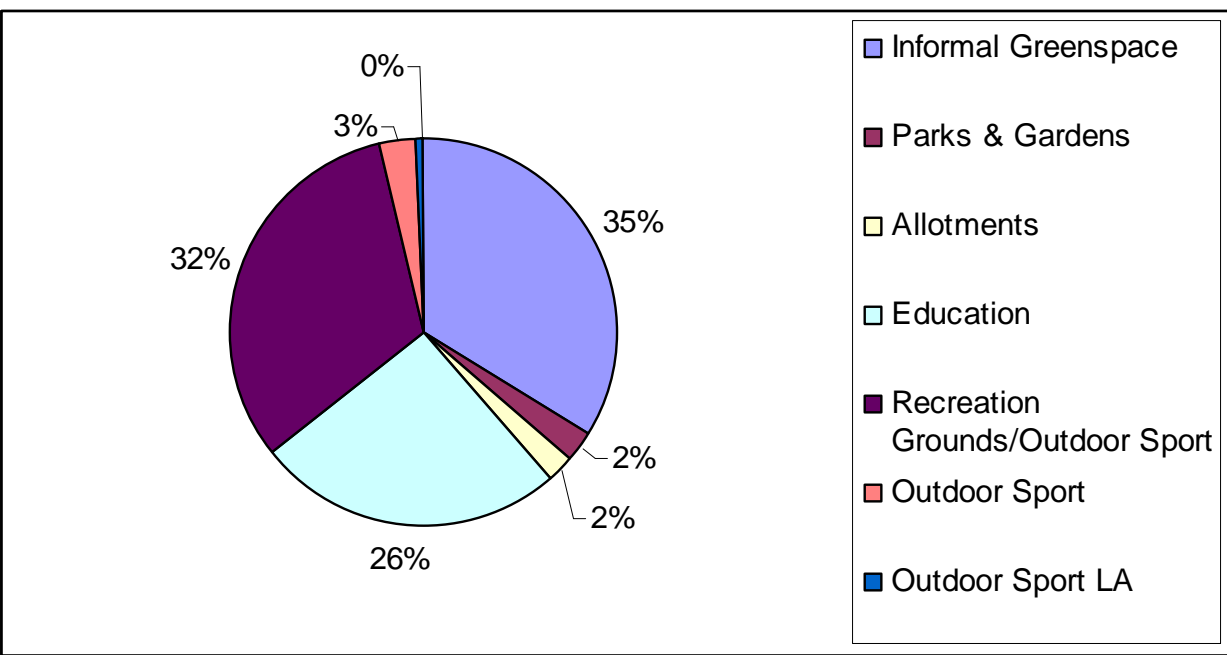
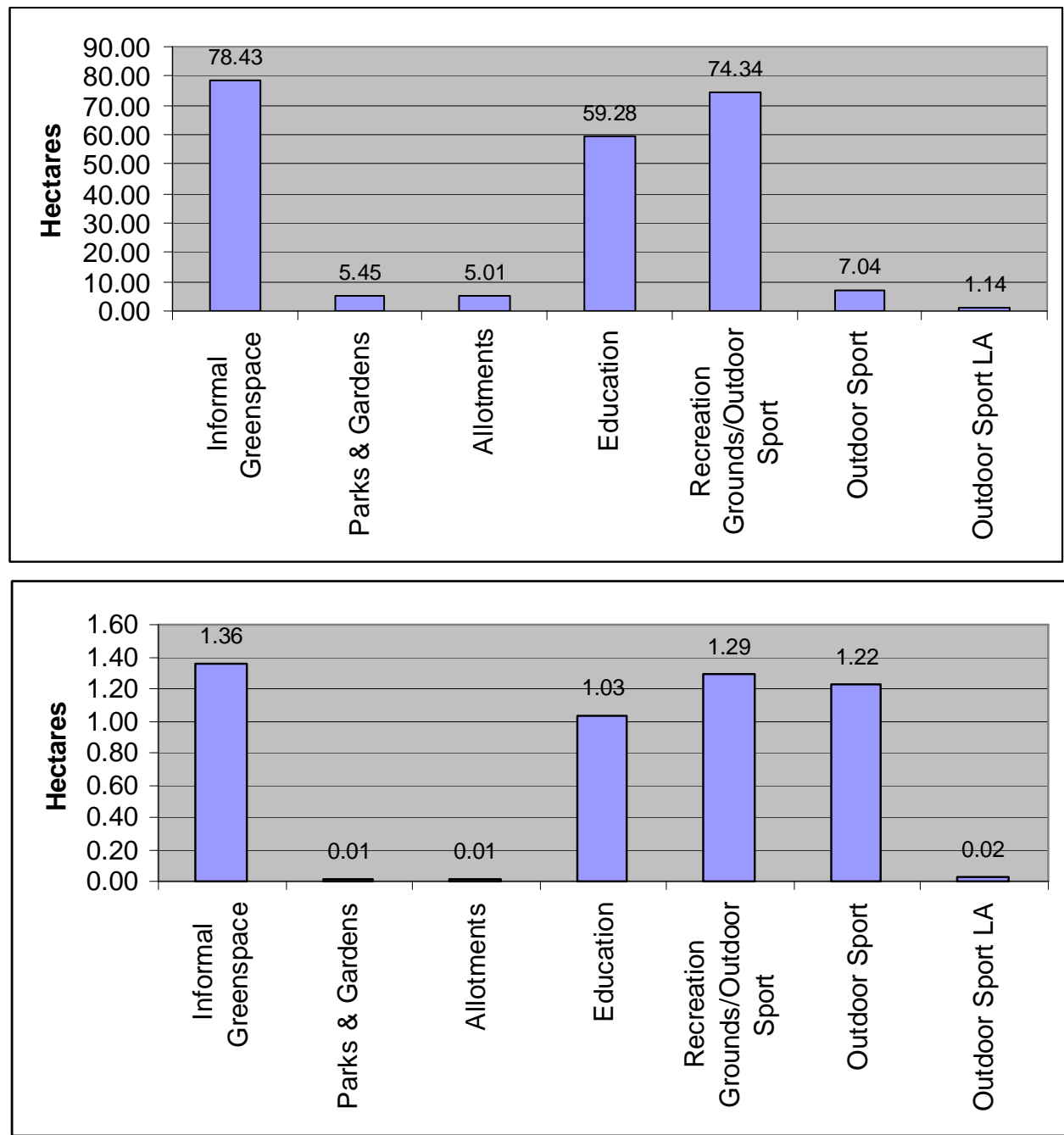
Notes: 1) For the purpose of this map various subsets of the different open space types have been combined, of which Outdoor Sports Space and Natural Green Space are the main examples. 2) Small defined areas for equipped play and sports pitches are not shown on this map.

## Urban Area: South

In the southern part of the urban area, there is relatively high provision of Informal Greenspace

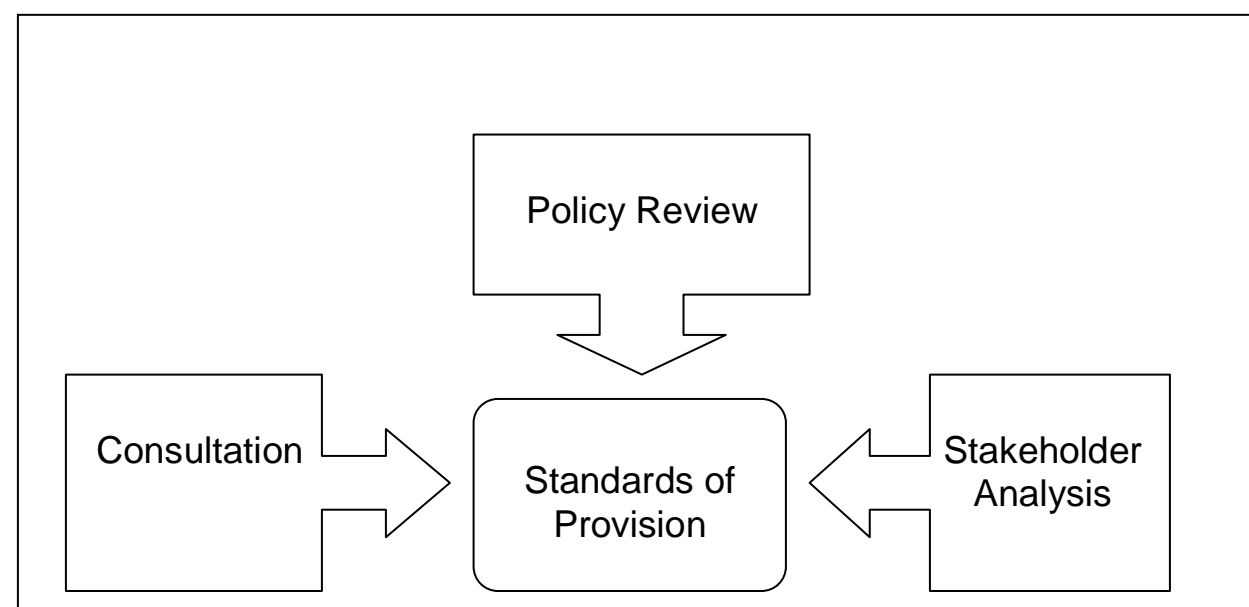


5.14 Provision in the rural area.



The figures for the parishes are not directly comparable with those for the urban area. The main difference is in respect to the significance of Recreation Grounds, which frequently double as outdoor sports venues. 'Outdoor Sport', and 'Outdoor Sport LA' (local Authority) are categories strongly associated with provision in those parishes forming part of the Ashford Urban area.

The figures do not include equipped provision for children and young people, as the sites tend to be very small and would not show on the map or the accompanying charts. Such provision is dealt with later in this report. Neither is provision of Natural Greenspace included as it would dominate the charts at the expense of being able to show clearly provision of other types of space. In rural areas the main consideration is not so much the overall quantity of Natural Greenspace, but rather how easy to reach and access is such space. This consideration is picked up later in the report.



### 5.15 Towards New Standards of Provision

Information on the supply and location of open space, together with the findings from the policy and stakeholder review, and the information from the community consultation, are considered together to inform the development of standards for open space, sport and recreation provision, which is outlined in **Section 6**.

## 6.0 PROPOSED STANDARDS FOR ASHFORD BOROUGH

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

### 6.1 The development of standards

The standards for open space and built facilities have been developed using guidance in the PPG17 companion guide. Standards have been developed with the following components:

- **Quantity standards:** These are determined by the analysis of the existing quantity of provision in the light of community views as to its adequacy and levels of use. Furthermore, it is essential that the quantity standards proposed are achievable.
- **Quality standards:** The standards for each form of provision are derived from the quality audit and from the views of the community and those that use the spaces. Again, quality standards should be achievable and reflect the priorities that emerge through consultation.
- **Accessibility standards:** These reflect the needs of potential users. Spaces and facilities likely to be used on a frequent and regular basis need to be within easy walking distance and safe to access. Other opportunities which are used less frequently, for example country parks, where visits are longer but perhaps less frequent can be further away.

The standards that have been proposed are for minimum guidance levels of provision. However, just because geographical areas may enjoy levels of provision exceeding minimum standards does not mean there is surplus provision, as all such provision may be well used.

	PPG17 Typology	Primary purpose
Greenspaces	Parks and gardens	Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events
	Natural and semi-natural greenspaces, including urban woodland	Wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness
	Green corridors	Walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife migration
	Outdoor sports facilities	Participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports
	Amenity greenspace	Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
	Provision for children and young people	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard areas and teenage shelters
	Allotments, community gardens and urban farms	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion
	Cemeteries, disused churchyards and other burial grounds	Quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity
Civic spaces	Civic and market squares and other hard surfaced areas designed for pedestrians	Providing a setting for civic buildings, public demonstrations and community events

The standards have been developed using guidance within the PPG17 companion guide (as outlined on the left), but allowing for local variation. The PPG 17 guidance suggests a typology for open spaces recommended by the Urban Greenspaces Task Force (UGSTF) or a variation of it. For Ashford Borough, local variations have been developed, and standards proposed for the following types of open space:

- Informal and Natural Green Space.
- Outdoor Sports Space.
- Other Space (which might include provision for children and young people, allotments, and parks and gardens).

The above three categories represent a clear rationalisation of those provided in the PPG17 guidance.

- The term Amenity Space is not used. Instead a standard is proposed which covers both Informal Greenspace and Natural Greenspace. This standard will also cover Green Corridors.
- Outdoor sports facilities is effectively covered by Outdoor Sports Space.
- Parks and gardens, allotments, and provision for children and young people are covered by the standard for 'Other Open Space'.

The reasoning behind this rationalisation is fully explained later in this section. However, in very general terms it seeks to strike a balance between offering detailed guidance reflecting local people's expressed needs; and, achieving appropriate flexibility in the way that standards might be interpreted to reflect specific circumstances.

Cemeteries, disused churchyards and other burial grounds have not been made the subject of a standard. Although such spaces have been identified and mapped where known. Whilst churchyards can provide important open space, this is very much incidental to their main use, and there is little opportunity to have a strategic influence over them (the ultimate end goal in PPG17).

## 6.2 Summary of standards

This table summarises the proposed quantity and access components of the standards. Justification for these standards is outlined over the following pages.

### Summary of quantity and access standards for open space

Typology	Quantity Standard	Access Standard	Notes
Informal/Natural Greenspace	2.0 hectares per 1000 persons	300 m (c. 10 minutes walktime)	Guidance on access times may vary when dealing with provision of a larger 'strategic' nature.
Outdoor Sports Space	1.6 hectares per 1000 persons	300 m (c. 10 minutes walktime)	
Other Open Space	0.8 hectares per 1000 persons	300 m (c. 10 minutes walktime)	

## 6.3 Justification of standards

The standards are explained in the following section, for each standard there is a description of:

- Existing relevant National and Local Policies.
- General justification for a standard.
- A justified Quantity standard.
- A justified Accessibility standard.
- A justified Quality standard.
- Other supporting information where appropriate.

## 6.4 Informal Greenspace/Natural Greenspace

Quantity Standard	Access Standard
2.0 hectares per 1000 persons	300 m (c. 10 minutes walk). For larger 'strategic' sites, the same travel time by motorised trip mode may be acceptable in some circumstances.

### Existing National and Local Policies

The NPFA's (Now called Fields in Trust) Six Acre Standard advocates provision of casual or informal playing space within housing areas as part of the overall standard. The existing Local Plan provides for 0.8 ha per 1000 people of 'Informal Space', to be comprised of equipped and unequipped play opportunities. The existing Borough Local Plan is based upon the relevant component of the Six Acre Standard (i.e. 0.8 hectares per 1000 persons), albeit this is aimed primarily at provision of play opportunities.

Natural England promote a standard for Accessible Natural Green Space (referred to as ANGSt). This recommends a hierarchy of provision:

- Everybody should be within a natural greenspace of at least 2 hectares in size.
- There should be at least one local nature reserve for every 1000 persons
- There should be at least:
  - 20 hectares of natural greenspace within 2 km of each person
  - 100 hectares of natural greenspace within 5 km of each person
  - 500 hectares of natural greenspace within 10 km of each person



## General justification for a local standard

The consultation has identified the importance attached by local people to space close to home. It is also very clear from the local consultation that informal and natural space is valued by local people. Informal Greenspace might be viewed as important for recreation, play, or visual attraction. Its value must be recognised particularly within and near housing areas, where it can provide important local opportunities for play, exercise and visual amenity that are almost immediately accessible. The consultation has identified the significance of and importance attached to natural greenspaces. The importance of attractive natural environment for informal recreation (which might include play) is therefore considerable and is not sufficiently reflected in existing Borough Local Plan standards. As will be discussed shortly (under Outdoor Sports Space), the lack of clear guidance on local provision for informal and natural space may lead to conflicts of interest arising between causal and organised uses of public open space.

It is therefore desirable for local standards of provision to cover such opportunities. A key issue is whether provision of this kind of space should be reflected in two distinct standards, or else combined within a single standard. Including two kinds of open space within the same standard allows for a flexible approach to interpretation and avoids a confusing over proliferation of standards. In reality the distinction can be blurred between space viewed as 'natural' and informal space on many sites. The intention in any event should be to move away from the all too familiar scenario of sterile 'prairie' grasslands prevalent in many housing estates, which are largely devoid of natural and aesthetic qualities. More specific guidance to apply this standard to specific circumstances can be provided through SPDs.

## Quantity

The existing average level of provision of natural and informal greenspace within the urban area is estimated to be 8.14 hectares per 1000 persons. This figure includes identified Green Corridor. Within the rural area the corresponding ratio of provision is far higher (better) because of the prevalence of natural space. In terms of the natural component of this greenspace the extent to which such space is wholly or partly accessible by the general community will vary between each site.

The household consultation asked specific questions in relation to satisfaction with the amount of open space. The results identified the following:

- Local countryside, green routes and green space (as opposed to areas such as playing fields) tended to be used by most by respondents on a daily basis.
- Local wildlife areas are a form of open space of which respondents expressed a preference to see more.

A standard of **2.0 ha per 1000 people** is proposed, both as a basis for a contribution from new housing, but also as a minimum target for provision across the Borough. This level of provision is considerably less than current overall levels of provision, but in the urban area in particular it is considered to be realistic given other land use needs, and working alongside policies securing the protection of existing spaces. The standard is also consistent with the element of the ANGSt dealing with the provision of local nature reserves.

## Accessibility

The household 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 being by foot. Therefore, a distance of **300 metres** (straightline), or just under **10 minutes** walking time is proposed as the qualitative component of the standard. The household survey also indicates a preparedness to use a car to make short trips to natural spaces. Therefore, in some circumstances it might be considered appropriate to apply this same travel time to a motorised trip mode.

## Quality

Both the residents' and parish survey indicate very strongly the value attached to certain attributes of open space, in particular:

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

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

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

Wherever possible these sites should be linked to help improve wildlife value. There should be parallel commitments to maintain natural greenspace through appropriate maintenance techniques reflecting the primary purpose of promoting natural habitats and biodiversity that can also be accessed and enjoyed by local people. On new space, access by people should not be restricted to narrow corridors, but should allow freedom to wander within reason.

It will be very important to use this standard to help improve local access to such opportunities. In areas where it may be impossible or inappropriate to provide additional natural greenspace consistent with the standard, other approaches should be pursued which could include (for example):

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

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

Further guidance in this regard should be included in appropriate SPDs.

6.5 Outdoor Sports Space

Quantity Standard	Access Standard
1.6 hectares per 1000 persons	300 m (c. 10 minutes walk). For larger ‘strategic’ sites, the same travel time by motorised trip mode may be acceptable in some circumstances.

Existing National and Local Policies

The standard in the Borough Local Plan refers to provision for Playing Fields (1.6ha/1000) this is not directly comparable with this new category. This is based upon the relevant component of the NPFA’s Six Acre Standard. In addition to the Borough Local Plan standard, there also exists a set of play provision standards and principles within the Ashford Play Strategy. These have no statutory weight, unlike the Borough Local Plan standards

General justification for a local standard

Although the local consultation suggests that formal outdoor sports space may not be used as frequently by the majority of the population as less formal spaces, it is clearly essential for organised sport. It is football that tends to dominate participation in terms of outdoor organised sport, although within the Borough cricket is also strongly represented. In relation to the numbers of players involved in organised sport, the land requirement can be very extensive. For example, a full size football pitch complete with run off margins may require almost a hectare of land, and its use for this purpose will be generally confined to weekend activity. For cricket (in the summer) there will tend to be more mid week games, but the land required for a cricket field is even greater. Private and voluntary club sports grounds usually have ‘dedicated’ playing field space, where other use is very much incidental. On the other hand playing pitches on Borough Council and parish/town council controlled recreation grounds also tend to be used for informal recreation as there is general public access. This situation can lead to ‘conflict’ between the interests of players and casual users of such space. As mentioned in Section 4, local football leagues have complained about the quality of some of the local pitches upon which they play. Several factors may contribute to this problem, but is quite likely that shared use of these surfaces by sport and informal activity will feature significantly. Looking at the problem from another perspective, grass sports pitches by their nature do not make for aesthetically or ecologically rich environments, and many informal users would presumably prefer more attractive environments to walk the dog, run around, jog etc.

There is a movement in football to promote the use of artificial surfaces for both training and competitive. If this were to occur on a large scale it would mean much less of a demand being placed on greenspace for such activity. However, this scenario is currently far from realisation, and other pitch sports are highly unlikely to follow suite.

The above reasons suggest it is important for local standards to reflect adequate provision for outdoor sport.

**Quantity**

Within the urban area there is an estimated 39 hectares of outdoor sports space. This excludes provision for golf and education provision, but includes playing fields and sports grounds that are controlled by the Borough Council as well as those within club controlled venues. The overall level of provision expressed in hectares per 1000 persons is therefore around 0.6 hectares. Within the rural areas (where much sport is played within recreation grounds) the nearest equivalent figures are around 74 hectares and 1.29 hectares per 1000 persons.

The residents survey indicated a propensity not to visit ‘playing fields’ as regularly as other forms of space, and that they generally felt that there were ‘enough’. Responses in this regard are possibly skewed by the demographic of the respondents. On the other hand studies conducted by the Borough Council (reported in Section 4) indicate on balance a general satisfaction with the overall current supply of spots pitches, at least in the urban area; although this is not a universally held view, and especially in terms of junior size football pitches. The poor quality or none existence of ancillary accommodation for football in particular is perhaps seen as a bigger problem, together with often low quality drainage

Within the rural areas several parish councils have reported concerns in relation to the local supply of pitches, although these are sporadic. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that the majority of people are happy with the existing levels of provision.

Therefore, a new minimum standard of **1.6 ha per 1000 people** is proposed both as a basis for a contribution from new housing and as a minimum target for provision across the Borough. This is similar to the existing Local Plan standard, as well as the NPFA Six Acre Standard. It will provide an opportunity for better segregating sport from informal activity for the general benefit of both interests.

**Accessibility**

A distance of **300 metres (straightline)**, or about **10 minutes walking time** is proposed (so that local people can gain convenient access by foot). The public consultation identified that a large majority would be prepared to travel around 10 minutes to reach a local park, and that many of these trips would be by foot. However, the need to take equipment to play sport often means that many trips are motorised in practice.

**Quality**

Local consultation both for this study and for other Borough Council studies suggest for grass pitches the importance of good quality surfaces and ancillary accommodation. As a minimum outdoor sports areas should have an appropriately maintained and drained playing surface, and be serviced by appropriate built accommodation (changing rooms/pavilion), and parking space. Further guidance on this matter should be included in a SPD.

Sometimes it may be appropriate to consider the provision of outdoor sports space in the form of synthetic/hard surface provision. This will be entirely appropriate where the views of the local sports community indicate this would be a better option than grass provision. Because such surfaces have a higher use capacity than grass surfaces, the Borough Council should consider whether SPD should offer guidance on general equivalence of provision between grass and synthetic surfaces. (For example 1 hectare of synthetic surface might equate to 2 hectares of grass surface for the purpose of applying the standard).

**6.6 Other open space**

Quantity Standard	Access Standard
0.8 hectares per 1000 persons	300 m (c. 10 minutes walk). For larger ‘strategic’ sites, the same travel time by motorised trip mode may be acceptable in some circumstances.

## Existing National and Local Policies

The standard for Other Open Space is intended to cover amongst other things, needs in relation to: equipped provision for both children and young people; space to help provide multi function parks; and, allotments/community gardens. There is no national or local policy guidance dealing specifically with standards for the latter two. The NPFA (Now called Fields in Trust) Six Acre Standard advocates provision of casual or equipped playing space within housing areas as part of the overall standard. The existing Local Plan provides for 0.8 ha per 1000 people of 'Informal Space', to be comprised of equipped and unequipped play opportunities. The existing Borough Local Plan is based upon the relevant component of the Six Acre Standard (i.e. 0.8 hectares per 1000 persons), albeit this is aimed primarily at provision of play opportunities. A revised standard is proposed in the document 'Play Matters: a Play Strategy for the Borough of Ashford 2007 to 2011'. This does not have the statutory weight of the Local Plan standard, but is considered again shortly.

Land required for allotments and equipped children and young people's space has historically been less than for outdoor sport and informal space (for example). Children and young people make use of many other forms of open space as part of their outdoor recreation activities and equipped provision, although important, is but one form of opportunity. The level of allotment provision has declined nationally with the trend towards private gardens and contrasting expansion in the availability of mass produced food and spending power. However, certain factors suggest a resurgence in the demand for allotments, including:

- The move towards greater development densities in new housing (leading to reduced provision of private garden space).
- An expansion in interest in 'grow your own' food.

Allied to this, longer term pressures on food supplies resulting in the need to reduce 'food miles' and competing food demands from emerging economies may well lead to a growth in local food horticulture, of which allotment gardening is one form. There is currently no national or Local Plan guidance in relation to standards for allotments.

There is no national or Local Plan guidance on standards for Parks or Recreation Grounds.

It is felt appropriate to cater for these potential forms of open space through a separate standard. SPDs could detail the way in which the standard is broken down in individual circumstances, although an appropriate split might be along the lines of:

Children's equipped space:	0.15 hectares per 1000 persons (excludes any required buffer space)
Young people's equipped space:	0.15 hectares per 1000 persons (excludes any required buffer space)
Allotments:	0.20 hectares per 1000 persons
<u>Parks (link space):</u>	<u>0.30 hectares per 1000 persons</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>0.80 hectares per 1000 persons</b>

The following comments can also be made in respect of the above forms of open space and the way they might be interpreted by the standard.

### Children and young people's equipped space.

#### *Quantity*

The consultation provided a strong message about the importance of provision for children and young people, but in particular the need to improve provision for teenagers.

Within the urban area there is an estimated 3.95 hectares of children and young people's equipped space. The overall level of provision expressed in hectares per 1000 persons is therefore around 0.06 hectares. In the parishes the corresponding figures are 3.13 hectares and 0.05 hectares per 1000 persons. The NPFA guidance for children's play (on which the Borough Local Plan's standard is based) has been criticised because it can result in a proliferation of equipment which is difficult to maintain, as well as setting unrealistic aspirations in urban areas where insufficient land is available to provide facilities. An additional problem is that the current NPFA guidance does not cover the needs of most teenagers specifically within the standard, and it is felt that this is a significant problem in the study area (confirmed by findings of the community consultation). The Borough Council Play Strategy 'Play Matters: a play strategy for the Borough of Ashford 2007-2011'. Offers the following alternative guidance (in summary):

- A standard Play Area Unit including 0.08 hectares of fenced/equipped play; 0.15 hectares for informal ball games; and 0.25 hectares of 'buffer space'.

- For every 500 people a standard Play Area unit.
- For every 1000 people a standard Play Area unit plus a ‘wheels’ facility; or, paved kickabout area; or, extension of play area; or, for 4 x teenage shelters plus goals.
- For every 1500 people a standard Play Area unit plus any three of the above items.

When ‘Buffer Space’ is excluded (which in all likelihood will be provided by locating provision in larger areas of new or existing or open space) these requirements could be met within the suggested 0.30 hectares per 1000 persons.

### ***Accessibility***

The consultation suggested a general preparedness to travel up to 10 minutes to reach a play area, largely by foot. Therefore an access standard of 300 metres (10 minutes walk is proposed).

### ***Quality***

Further guidance can be obtained from the Play Strategy which (along with the following) might be included in SPDs.

Provision could include the following:

- ***For young preschool children:*** Small low key games area preferably with play features and 3 items of ‘small scale’ items of play equipment. Seating for accompanying adults.
- ***For other children up to teenage years:*** About 5 items of play equipment and a small flat ball games area with kick walls and ‘low level’ hoops and ‘very low key’ wheel play facility (undulating riding surface with features). Seating for accompanying adults.
- ***For young people:*** About 5 types of play equipment, Ball Play and Wheeled Play opportunities, and covered seating for teenagers to use as a meeting place.
- ***Provision for those with disabilities:*** At least some of the larger play areas should contain equipment designed to meet the specific needs of children with disabilities.

### ***Consultation***

Guidance should be applied flexibly and imaginatively, taking into account the views of local residents, potential users and various interests wherever possible. Meaningful consultation will therefore help to make new provision sensitive and appropriate to local circumstances.

### ***Safety***

All **new** Children’s Outdoor Playing Spaces, equipment and ancillary facilities need to conform to all aspects of safety standards EN 1176 & 1177. Items not covered by either standard or exceptions to the standards must be justified and made explicit.

### ***Combined Provision***

It may sometimes be appropriate to provide for all age groups at the same location separated only by a short distance or by enclosing the separate areas. This might be most appropriate in the case of sites of a more strategic nature, such as in parks and leisure centre grounds in the towns and larger villages.

### ***Achieving the Standard in Small Settlements***

The intention should be that these play standards are applied flexibly and with imagination. Many settlements will not be of the size to justify full provision in accordance with the above. However, even a relatively small developer contribution can be invested imaginatively in improving local play opportunities. For example:

- Individual contributions could be used to improve/upgrade the existing provision, which in a small village is likely to be within convenient distance of the funding development.
- Individual contributions could be married to other Council and partner funding to provide new or improved provision.

- Public consultation may show a desire and willingness to consider innovative community based solutions to provision. ‘Self help’ schemes, perhaps involving young people in design and creation, can often prove much cheaper and reflective of true local needs than ‘off-the-shelf’ installations.

A key issue is how to best provide for the needs of youth in rural locations where it will not generally be feasible to provide facilities on the scale that might be envisaged in the larger settlements. In many ways this is an intractable problem, but in others it may not be so difficult to resolve. Fundamentally, all young people are asking for is somewhere to meet, play, and feel independent. Bespoke play equipment and sites may be one way of providing for these needs. But there may be other much cheaper solutions involving, for example, inexpensive but intelligent landscaping on the edges of village recreation grounds; encouraging young people to become involved in the design and development of home spun facilities, such as cut and fill BMX tracks; planting trees with low branches to encourage climbing etc, and the creation of dens. All these are ‘low tech’ solutions, but could be of immense local benefit to youngsters. A prerequisite to such initiatives is perhaps a change of mindset (on the part of facility managers), in some circumstances, and greater tolerance to such projects and activity.

### ***Issues Relating to Risk***

There is growing concern about how safety is being addressed in children's play provision. Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives. The effect is to stop children from enjoying a healthy range of play opportunities, limiting their enjoyment and causing potentially damaging consequences for their development.

This approach ignores clear evidence that use of play provision is a comparatively low risk activity for children. Of the two million or so childhood accident cases treated by hospitals each year, fewer than two per cent involve playground equipment. Participation in sports like soccer, widely acknowledged as ‘good’ for a child's development, involve a greater risk of injury than visiting a playground. Fatalities on playgrounds are very rare – about one per three or four years on average nationally. This compares with, for instance, more than 100 child pedestrian fatalities a year and more than 500 child fatalities from accidents overall.

New provision should try and establish a balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm. The provision should extend the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.

### **Allotments**

#### ***Quantity***

Within the urban area there is an estimated 8.17 hectares of allotment space. The overall level of provision expressed in hectares per 1000 persons is therefore around 0.12 hectares. The corresponding figures for the parishes are 5.01 and 0.09 hectares per 1000 persons. With no clear opinions from the community in relation to quantity, the suggested guidance (0.2 hectares per 1000 persons) is an increase on the current levels of provision to accommodate the identified future growth in potential demand.

A minimum level of provision of **0.20 ha per 1000 people** is proposed, both as a basis for a contribution from new housing, but also a minimum target for provision across the Borough.

#### ***Accessibility***

A distance of 300 metres (10 minutes walktime) is proposed. However, given the need to transport equipment to and from sites it is accepted that users may often need to drive to the site.

#### ***Quality***

The information gathered in relation to allotments is more difficult to assess in comparison to other types of open space. The reason for this is two fold: Firstly, the number of people who actually use allotments is very low compared to the numbers who use other types of open space and, therefore specific comments related to the quality of allotments are less frequent; Secondly, the majority of allotments sites are locked, and the quality audit only allows for assessment against key criteria such as the level of cultivation and general maintenance, which is less comprehensive than the assessments of other open space

For allotments therefore, a number of general recommendations are made, which would benefit from further guidance being provided by the Council in due course. However, provision should include the following:

- Well-drained soil which is capable of cultivation to a reasonable standard.
- A sunny, open aspect preferably on a southern facing slope.
- Limited overhang from trees and buildings either bounding or within the site.
- Adequate lockable storage facilities, and a good water supply within easy walking distance of individual plots.
- Provision for composting facilities.
- Secure boundary fencing.
- Good access within the site both for pedestrians and vehicles.
- Good vehicular access into the site and adequate parking and manoeuvring space.
- Disabled access.
- Toilets.
- Notice boards.

## Parks and Recreation Grounds

Parks and Recreation Grounds are a major resource within the Borough and their importance should therefore be recognised explicitly in standards. Most parks are a composition of different types of space. A provision for 'link space' within local standards would provide better opportunities for natural, sports and play space to be bound together effectively where appropriate in the form of a park or recreation ground. A figure of 0.3 hectares per 1000 is suggested.

## 6.7 Routeways and Corridors

No standards are proposed for Routeways and Corridors. However, the standard for Informal Open Space and Accessible Natural Greenspace can be applied and interpreted flexibly to create or improve existing routes for walking, cycling and riding in both built up and rural areas. For example one hectare of Informal Green Space is sufficient to create a route 10 metres wide and 1 kilometre long. In rural and urban fringe locations contributions to both the Informal Open Space and Accessible Natural Green Space standard might be invested in helping to expand, and/or improve parts of the Rights of Way network. In built up areas, contributions might be used to improve links by foot and bike between important destinations such as work places, schools, shopping areas, parks, and leisure facilities. They might also be used to help improve access by foot and bike to the outlying Rights of Way network.

## 6.8 Developing a hierarchy of provision

Many local authorities are developing 'hierarchies of provision' for their open spaces. These may vary from area to area, although there are some emerging models, such as through the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) and the model being developed by the London Boroughs. It is therefore recommended that Ashford Borough considers the value of working with other local authorities towards a hierarchy embracing provision aimed at frequent local use, and also regular (but perhaps less frequent) strategic use, as outlined below:

- **Strategic level:** Landscaping with a variety of natural and semi natural features, including natural habitats and planted beds. Space for outdoor pitch and other sports provision as appropriate (see separate standards). Space for children's and youth play facilities (see separate standards). Car parking. Footpaths. Cycleways. Buildings for secured storage and for catering outlets. Due regard to external links by foot and bicycle which may require improvements to the external environment (see below). Event venue. A notable and defining architectural feature. Seating. Litter and dog bins. Toilets. Refreshment venues. Picnic tables. Consideration of zoning between active and passive zones. The overall size of the park might be expected to be approaching or greater than **40 hectares**. Strategic provision might also take the form of a contribution towards a Country Park, or other existing publicly accessible forested/woodland area.
- **Local level:** Landscaping with a variety of natural features, including natural habitats. Space for outdoor pitch and other sports provision as appropriate (see separate standards). Space for children's and youth play facilities (see separate standards). Car parking. Footpaths. Cycleways. Buildings for secured storage and/or catering outlets (if appropriate). Due regard to external links by foot and bicycle which may require improvements to the external environment. Seating. Litter and dog bins. The overall size of the park might be expected to be at least **2 hectares**.

Beyond this 2-tier hierarchy contributions from developers arising from the application of this standard could also be used to create small 'pocket parks' in certain circumstances.

An element of contributions based on this standard might also be used towards the provision of a Country Park. This is an example of where local authorities could pool developer contributions in

helping to provide an opportunity of cross authority benefit. The expansion and/or improvement of venues such as these could meet the needs of local populations, and those of neighbouring expansion areas.

Access by foot and bike could also be encouraged by focused improvements to the strategic Rights of Way network, linking these areas to towns and villages.

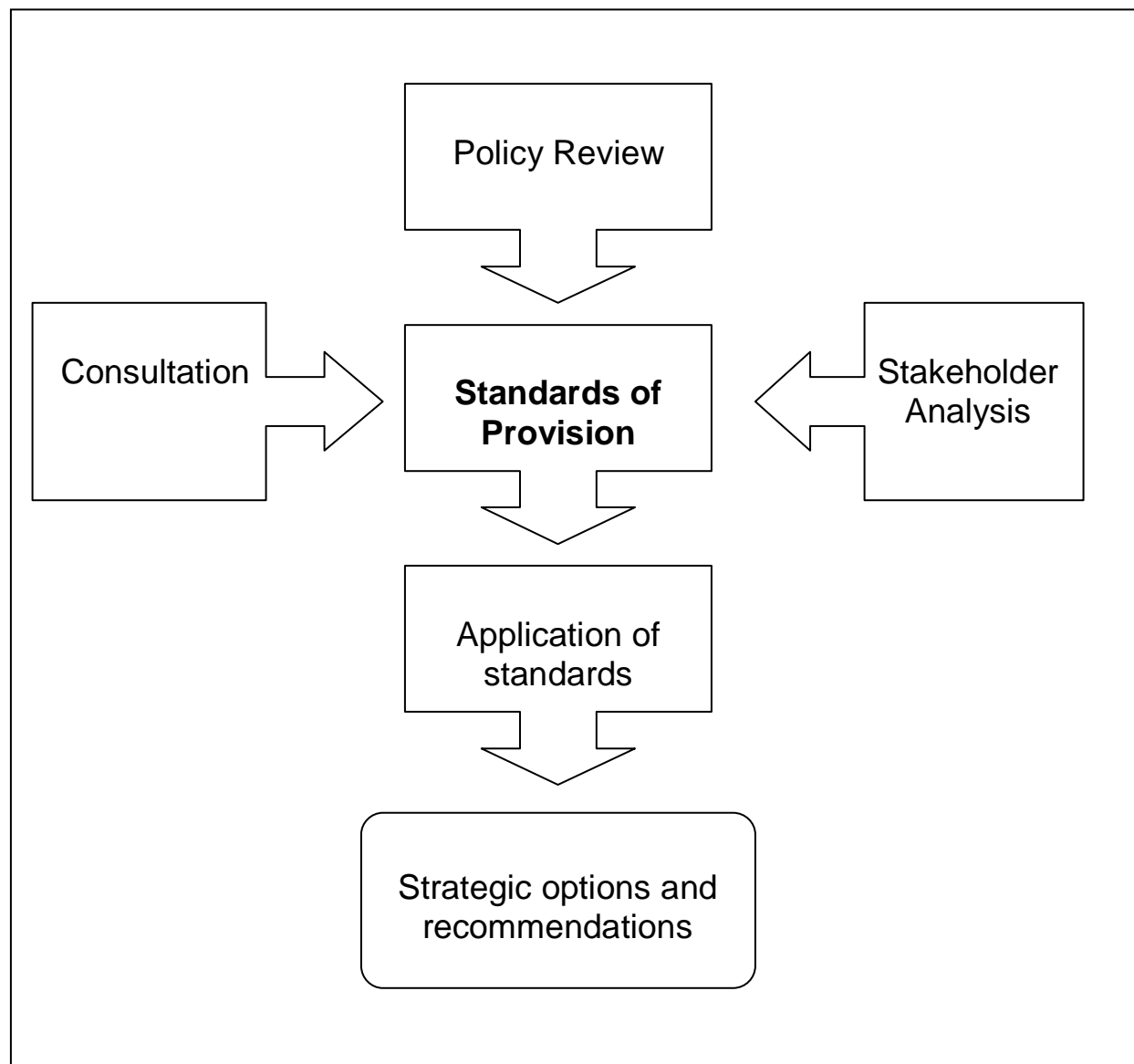
## **6.9 Access to and links between Open Spaces**

Although the study area's parks, sports and recreation grounds are appreciated and valued, their use clearly depends on how easy they are to access. There is little point in considering the provision of new facilities or the improvement of existing facilities without considering the means of access to them at the same time. This will be especially important by foot and bike, including access for people with disabilities. This is critical for certain groups in the community, particularly children and teenagers. New standards for open space should therefore also include guidance on the improvement of approach routes by foot and bike for which developer contributions should be sought. The Council will need to determine:

- The linear distance threshold upon which such contributions should be based.
- The nature of improvements sought to facilitate and improve upon ease and safety of access. These might include clearly defined cycle lanes, safe crossing points, provision for disabled access etc.



## 7.0 STRATEGIC OPTIONS



### 7.1 Developing strategic options

The PPG 17 guidance recommends the study should be brought together to identify and evaluate strategic options and draft policies. This information is gathered from all previous elements of the study as shown in the figure.

Specifically, the guidance recommends that the strategic options should consider four basic components:

- Existing provision to be protected.
- Existing provision to be enhanced.
- Existing provision to be relocated in order to meet local needs more effectively or make better overall use of land.
- Proposals for new provision.

The guidance also identifies that consideration should be given to a fifth component – open space which is surplus to requirements and therefore no longer needed. Further clarification of the above is outlined below, and a summary of the policies or recommendations related to each option is summarised in Section 7.2.

#### ***Existing provision to be protected***

Existing open spaces which should be given the highest level of protection by the planning system are those which are either:

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

The priorities emerging from this study focus on those open spaces which avoid recreation deficiencies.

#### ***Existing provision to be enhanced***

This includes those open spaces which:

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

#### ***Existing provision to be relocated***

In some areas it may be possible to make better use of land by relocating an open space, especially if this will enhance its quality or accessibility for existing users, or use land which is not suitable for another purpose.

### ***Proposals for new provision***

New provision may be required where there will be a planned increase in population. It may also be required:

- In areas outside the distance thresholds of each different type of open space adopted provision hierarchy containing sufficient people to justify new provision; **or**
- Where the level of existing provision fails to accord with the quantity standard, to a detrimental extent.

## **7.2 Strategic Options**

This section outlines the recommendations or policies **(R)** in relation to each of the strategic options identified above.

### **Strategic option 1: Existing provision to be protected**

**R1.** Application of the minimum standards suggests and informed by local consultation suggests no clear evidence of an overprovision of open space in those parts of the Borough subject to development pressures. With the anticipated population growth it will be very important to conserve the current stock of open space both to help meet current needs but also contribute to meeting the needs of new residents. Therefore, no open space should be lost unless alternative provision can be made, or else there is clear evidence of a local overprovision relative to the needs of the area. However, within this general presumption of resistance to the loss of open space, there may be circumstances where some space might be wholly or partly redeployed as explained under Strategic Option 2 (below).

**R2.** Achievement of minimum quantity standards should not by itself suggest ‘sufficient supply’, as it does not by itself reflect demonstrable local usage and need. Neither does it imply sufficiency in terms of either ‘quality’ and/or ‘accessibility, as alternative space might be too far away to reach easily, or else of insufficient quality. Open space may be protected for other reasons beyond recreation value. The most obvious example in this respect will be land identified as Natural Greenspace. Section 7.3 outlines a decision process that should be followed before any open space is determined to be ‘surplus to requirements’.

### **Strategic option 2: Existing provision to be relocated**

**R3.** There are no specific opportunities identified for relocating open space within the Borough. However Part 2 of this report indicates a small number of existing open spaces the partial/whole redeployment of which could help to achieve net open spaces improvements in the local and wider area. These suggestions are listed and should be referred to at para 1.4 in Part 2 of the report.

### **Strategic option 3: Existing provision to be enhanced**

**R4.** Application of the proposed standards indicated by the various maps and associated charts in Part 2 of this report indicate specific areas where there are gaps in access to open space. The highest priority should be to address lack of accessibility to open space in those areas where there is a high population density. Sometimes it may not be possible to achieve this through conventional forms of open space provision. In these circumstances, the kinds of solution identified in Section 6 might be elaborated upon in SPD.

**R5.** The site audit underpinning this study, together with previous Borough Council studies indicate the variable and often dysfunctional and poor quality of much of open space within the existing urban area. A long term strategy for achieving improvements is required (to be delivered through a Greenspace Strategy). This is consistent with the ‘mend before extend’ principle supported in the Core Strategy.

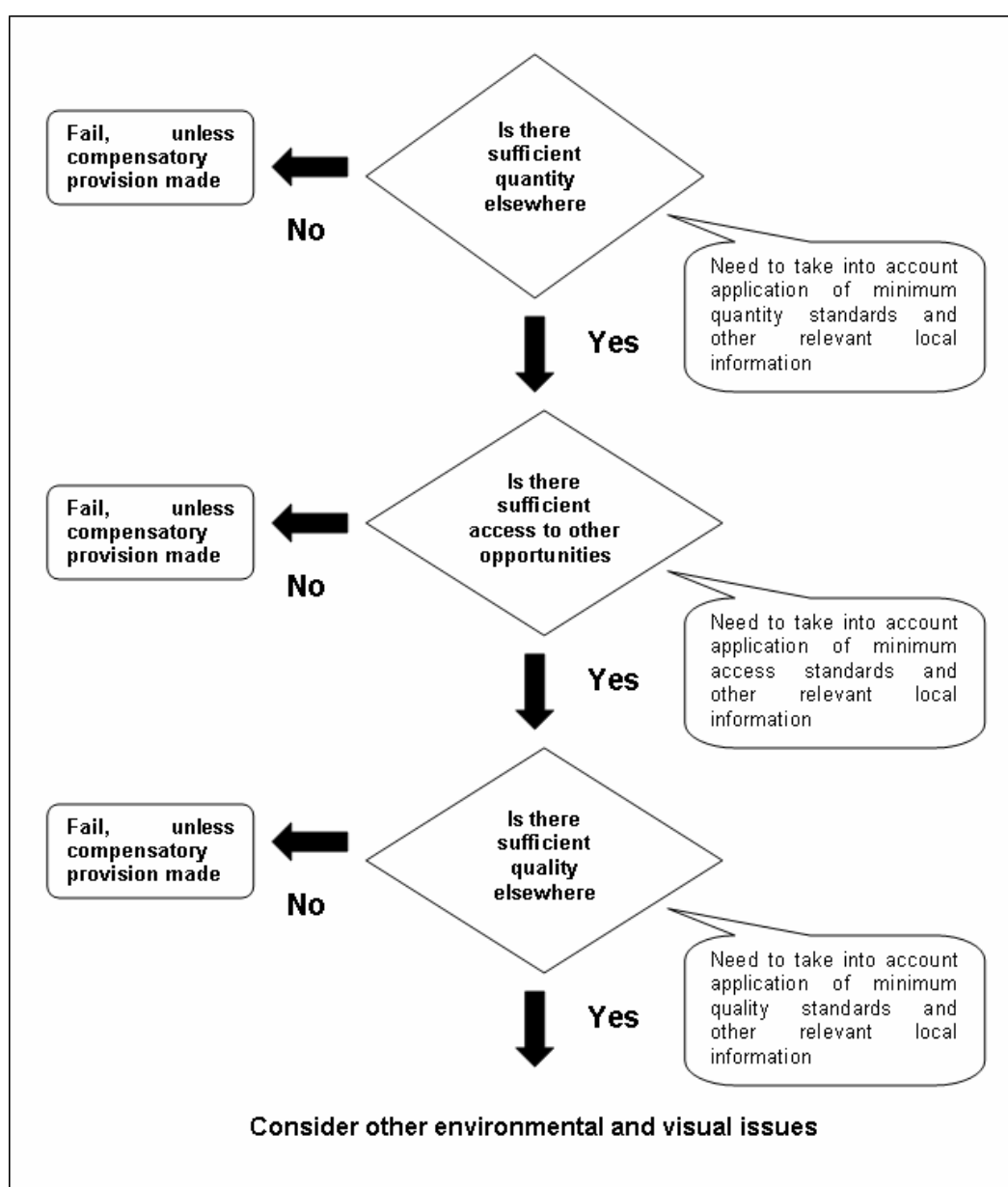
**R6.** A Greenspace Strategy should outline options for funding improvements, the most significant opportunities being developer contributions, grant funding, council funding, and sale of land. The sites database for this report contains independent quality and potential assessments for many sites within the Borough. This database, together with information previously collected by the Borough Council should provide the foundation of information for the Greenspace Strategy. Application of the access components of the standards under para 1.2 of Part 2 indicate, with particular regard to Natural Greenspace and Parks, that there are quite large areas of informal greenspace having the potential to be ‘naturalised’ and/or converted into multifunctional parks, where the need is articulated (perhaps through the Greenspace Strategy).

#### Strategic option 4: Proposals for new provision

**R7.** New provision of open space will be required as part of new development and to meet any deficiencies in provision in both quantity and access (as outlined in Part 2 of the report). Development should provide open space in line with the proposed open space standards, and provide off site contributions as appropriate. Paragraph 1.5 of Part 2 indicates the general location of major new development and the overall quantity of new space required to meet the proposed standards arising from this development. Existing open spaces (including the education sector, woodlands etc) may offer the potential to be enhanced and 'opened up' for wider community use consistent with the Core Strategy's 'mend before extend' principle.

**R8.** Future LDDs and possible SPD should consider the opportunities for creating both utility and recreation routes for use by foot and bike in both urban and rural areas. Creative application of the informal/ natural green space components of the proposed overall standard in respect of new development should be explored.

**R9.** The Borough Council should prepare and adopt Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) to further interpret and apply the standards recommended in this report.



### 7.3 Facilities that are surplus to requirement

In addition to the strategic options outlined above, the PPG17 guidance also recommends that consideration should be given to facilities that are surplus to requirement.

There are important issues to resolve in terms of getting the correct balance of open spaces across the Borough before any disposal can be contemplated. The Sub Area Profiles and parish maps in Part 2 of this report suggest that whilst there is under provision relative to the minimum standards in some areas, there are other areas where provision compares favourably with the minimum standards. However, it is once again emphasised that the proposed standards are for *minimum* levels of provision. Factors to be taken into account before any decision to release open space for alternative uses can be taken include:

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

The following figure suggests an outline of the decision process to go through before development of an open space can be seriously contemplated.

***A hypothetical example of how this might be applied is as follows as related to an area of informal/amenity space.***

**Q.** Is there sufficient quantity?

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

**Q.** Is there sufficient access to other opportunities?

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

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

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

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