

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
19 JANUARY 2022

OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENT & STRATEGY

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Committee on progress towards the Open Space Assessment & Strategy, including responses to the consultation, and to seek approval for its endorsement as part of the wider Development Plan evidence base to support decision-making.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The Council's existing open space evidence base and strategy has now been updated. Knight Kavanagh & Page ('KKP') were appointed to undertake an assessment of the existing and future open space needs of communities and prepare an Open Space Assessment & Strategy. It will be used to set open space standards in new development, determine where Section 106 monies should be spent to improve existing facilities and inform the direction on the future provision of accessible, high quality, sustainable provision of open spaces in the District.
- 2.2 As part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency, KKP have particularly investigated potential opportunities for reducing carbon and mitigating the impact of climate change in the District's Open Spaces.
- 2.3 Over the summer, Officers carried out an initial consultation with relevant Ward Members and Parish Councils to 'sense check' the results of the draft assessment and proposed strategy. A number of minor amendments were made to the Open Space Assessment & Strategy (mostly typographical errors) prior to public consultation commencing.
- 2.4 Public Consultation on the Open Space Assessment & Strategy was undertaken between 27 July and 21 September 2021, which lasted for a period of eight weeks. A total of 28 responses were received.

3.0 Overview of Open Space Assessment & Strategy

Background

- 3.1 The strategy is based on a comprehensive assessment of open space in the 17 larger settlements in the District. Open Spaces (typically over 0.2ha) in these settlements have been assigned one of the following typologies based on its primary function:

1. Parks and Gardens
2. Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace
3. Amenity Greenspace
4. Provision for Children and Young People
5. Allotments
6. Cemeteries / Churchyards

- 3.2 It should be noted that sports pitches are covered by a separate Playing Pitch Strategy, however a number of the open spaces within the assessment are multifunctional and will contain some sports pitches along with other open space provision (e.g. Sconce & Devon Park) and this is acknowledged within the report.
- 3.3 The key stages of the methodology to assess existing open space in the District are:
- Auditing existing local provision;
 - Assigning a quality and value score to each site based on a number of criteria;
 - Identifying quality and value thresholds to determine whether sites are high or low quality with primary aim of identifying where investment and / or improvements are required.
- 3.4 In order to understand what future open space provision is required provision standards have been developed. These standards will be used to influence future investment in open space by the District/Town/Parish Council's and other landowners and through open space secured as part of new development. The provision standards are also used to understand the extent to which current provision adequately meets current need. Catchment mapping for each open space typology has also been developed to understand the spread of provision within and between settlements.

Overview of Findings

- 3.5 There are 476 open space sites in the District that have been assessed in the Open Space Assessment & Strategy which is equivalent to 3,638ha of open space. Whilst the focus for analysis of the study is on the 17 larger settlements in the District, there are also those sites which are located outside of these 17 settlements. It should be noted that not all open spaces have been assessed in the Strategy (due to their size of less than 0.2ha) but are given protection under Spatial Policy 8. There are 19 sites within the audit which do not receive a quality or value rating, most of these are identified as being inaccessible.
- 3.6 The table below summarises the results of the quality assessment for open spaces in the District. 62% of sites scored high for quality. Sites which scored low for quality often reflect a lack of ancillary features (e.g. seating, bins, signage etc.). A summary of the results at the settlement level can be viewed in Chapters 4 – 20 of the full report.

Table 1: Quality Scores for Assessed Open Space Typologies

Typology	Threshold	Scores (%)			No. of sites	
		Lowest score	Average score	Highest score	Low	High
Park and gardens	60%	42%	61%	88%	8	8
Natural & semi-natural greenspace	40%	19%	46%	87%	30	50
Amenity greenspace	50%	25%	54%	82%	43	96
Provision for children & young people	60%	29%	67%	90%	32	81
Allotments	40%	18%	38%	64%	19	17
Cemeteries/churchyards	40%	20%	38%	73%	41	32
TOTAL					173	284

3.7 The table below summarises the results of the value assessment for open spaces in the District. 87% of sites scored high for value. This reflects the role and importance of open space provision to local communities and environments. The provision to rate below the value threshold reflects a general lack of maintenance or use at the site (i.e. overgrown or difficult to access).

Table 2: Value Scores for Assessed Open Space Typologies

Typology	Threshold	Scores (%)			No. of sites	
		Lowest score	Average score	Highest score	Low	High
Park and gardens	20%	22%	53%	95%	0	16
Natural & semi-natural greenspace		10%	33%	77%	4	76
Amenity greenspace		6%	29%	60%	23	116
Provision for children & young people		20%	40%	73%	0	113
Allotments		10%	24%	42%	8	28
Cemeteries/churchyards		16%	25%	65%	20	53
TOTAL					55	402

3.8 The Open Space Assessment & Strategy also sets quantity standards to identify areas of shortfalls and help with determining requirements for the future. The quantity standards applied to open space have been set using a locally based approach. Whilst there are no formal national standards established, the Fields in Trust standard is a long-established benchmark for open spaces, originally known as the '6 Acre Standard'. In setting the District's open space standards, it was considered at the time to be essential that they were locally determined (i.e. higher) to reflect the District's open space assets but also that it reflected the aspirations of stakeholders to ensure sustainability for future generations. As such, the standards applied by the District Council are far more aspirational than the Fields in Trust benchmark. The table below illustrates the Council's position when assessed against the Council's quantity standards (at a district level).

Table 3: Current Provision Compared Against NSDC Quantity Standards

NSDC Quantity Standards										
Settlement	Parks and gardens		Natural & Semi-natural		Amenity greenspace		Allotments		Children's Play	
	(Hectares per 1000 population)									
	0.6		10		0.6		0.5		0.75	
	Current provision	+ / -	Current provision	+ / -	Current provision	+ / -	Current provision	+ / -	Current provision	+ / -
District	0.32	-0.28	7.58	-2.42	0.83	0.23	0.33	-0.17	0.06	-0.69

3.9 A summary of the key conclusions are:

- There is a district wide deficiency across all open space typologies except for amenity greenspace.
- Largest deficiencies are in natural / semi-natural greenspace typology (particularly in Southwell, Collingham and Sutton on Trent).

3.10 The report also highlights areas of the District vulnerable to climate change and the open spaces located in these areas in order to inform appropriate policy responses and actions for the future. It can be used as a starting point for new projects or innovative ideas to support this agenda. This is contained in Chapter 22.4 of the full report and a brief summary is contained in the Executive Summary.

3.11 In addition to the above, the Open Space Assessment & Strategy also incorporates and recommends what the Council should be seeking to achieve in order to help address the issues highlighted as well as the priorities for meeting demand from future growth (Section 23 & 24 of Main Report) including:

- Sites helping (or with the potential to help) serve areas identified as having gaps in catchment mapping that should be prioritised for enhancement;
- Ensuring low quality / value sites (which help to serve potential gaps in accessibility catchments) are prioritised for enhancement;
- Recognise where low quality and value sites may be able to meet other needs (i.e. different open space typology);
- Keeping data, the Main Report and supporting evidence base up-to-date to reflect changes over time.

4.0 Consultation Responses & Proposals

4.1 Public Consultation on the Open Space Assessment & Strategy was undertaken between 27th July 2021 and 21st September 2021, which lasted for a period of eight weeks. A total of 28 responses were received. Following the consultation, officers considered the issues raised, prepared responses and as a result a number of minor changes were made to the document. These actions and the details of the changes are contained within **Appendix A** to this report. The Assessment & Strategy has now been finalised and is available to view on the Council's website (<https://www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/your-council/planning-policy/other-planning-policy-information/open-space-strategy/>).

4.2 It is therefore proposed that the Open Space Assessment & Strategy is endorsed as part of the wider Development Plan evidence base to support decision-making.

4.3 The Assessment & Strategy will be used by the Planning Development and Planning Policy & Infrastructure Business Units to assist with the day to day determination of applications – both where developments could result in the loss of open space and in terms of the type and quantity of open space that will be sought on new developments. As an evidence base document it will also assist with plan-making and the production of the new Developer Contributions and Planning Obligations SPD.

4.4 The Assessment & Strategy will be used by the Environmental Services Business Unit to respond to operational and day-to-day management of open spaces, develop long term investment plans for Council owned and managed open spaces and provide advice on the open space elements of planning applications to the Planning Development Business Unit.

4.5 It is proposed that the Council will write to those who responded to the consultation informing them of its endorsement, and that the final version of the Open Space Assessment & Strategy has been published on the Council's website.

5.0 Equalities Implications

- 5.1 The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) (which incorporates an Equalities Impact Assessment into the Plan Review) has been undertaken on the Amended Core Strategy including Spatial Policy 8 – Promoting and Protecting Leisure and Community Facilities which concluded that the protection, enhancement and provision of community and leisure facilities can help ensure that there is a supply of locally accessible provision available to all communities.

6.0 Digital Implications

- 6.1 There are no digital implications arising directly as a result of endorsing this Open Space Assessment & Strategy.

7.0 Financial Implications FIN21-22/3358

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of endorsing the Open Space Assessment & Strategy for use by the Council. Consideration will now need to be given to how the Council implements the Strategy's recommendations. Some of the actions required to implement may have financial implications which require member approval as part of a future report.

8.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

- 8.1 The Community Plan Objective "Continue to maintain the high standard of cleanliness and appearance of the local environment" is supported by the production of the Open Space Assessment & Strategy as it seeks to identify areas of open space with a need for enhancement. This, in turn, supports this Objective by potentially improving the appearance of the environment and managing green spaces within the public realm.
- 8.2 The Community Plan Objective "Enhance and protect the District's natural environment" is supported by the production of the Open Space Assessment & Strategy by contributing to the Emergency Tree Plan for the UK by identifying some potential locations for tree planting. The Strategy also identifies sites in need of enhancements which would assist in the aim of maintaining sites with Green Flag status.
- 8.3 The Community Plan Objective "Improve the health and wellbeing of local residents" is supported by the production of the Open Space Assessment & Strategy by providing more opportunities for inactive people to increase levels of physical activity and sport through additional provision.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- a) the results of the consultation and the Officer responses be noted; and
- b) the Open Space Strategy be endorsed as part of the wider Development Plan evidence base to support decision-making and inform future open space management and investment.

Reason for Recommendations

To allow the committee to endorse the finalised Open Space Assessment & Strategy and its findings for use by the Council in its Planning and Open Space decision making.

Background Papers

Newark & Sherwood Open Space Assessment & Strategy January 2022

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