Walsall Council

Open Space, Sport & Recreational Facilities PPG17 Audit & Assessment

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Executive Summary

The Walsall PPG17 Audit & Assessment has been prepared to inform the preparation of policies in the Local Development Framework and provide evidence for considering planning applications and proposals for developments affecting open space, sport and recreational facilities.

The study will help the council to plan positively, effectively and creatively to ensure that there is adequate provision of accessible, high quality open space, sport and recreation facilities that meets the needs and aspirations of local communities, local people and people who work or visit the Borough.

The study findings are drawn from a comprehensive technical assessment that assesses the quality, quantity and accessibility of open space, sport and recreational facilities in the Borough in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) 'Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities' (2002) and the supporting Companion Guide 'Assessing Local Needs and Opportunities' (ODPM, now DCLG).

The study focuses on local needs and local provision and the need to make the most effective use of available resources both now and in the future. As such the focus has been the following:

- **To Identify local needs**

- **To audit and digitally map local provision**

- **To set local provision standards based on the findings identified in the PPG17 assessment for quality, quantity and accessibility**

- **To apply the provision targets**

The study recognises the importance of National, Regional and Local policy context and the strategic vision for Walsall.

The vision for Walsall's open space mirrors that of the Walsall Greenspace Strategy:

> **'To have excellent, well used and valued open space, sport and recreation facilities that are safe, accessible and welcoming at the heart of all local communities that meet the needs of current and future generations'**

The vision for future provision of indoor sport and leisure facilities in Walsall is:

> **"To provide a range of high quality, well designed and up-to-date sports, leisure, recreation and cultural facilities, and associated support services, which will support improvements in health inequalities and the quality of life across the Borough."**

In keeping with PPG17 guidance the study has been formulated around provision that is publicly accessible. The analysis has been undertaken at a Boroughwide level and also on Walsall's six neighbourhood management areas.

The study sets standards of provision for the differing types of open space, sport and recreational facilities within the Borough. The standards have been set using the baseline data from the quantity and quality auditing and the accessibility evidence of consultation with stakeholders, user groups and local residents.

The standards that have been established as the minimum for the future are outlined below:

Typology	Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Parks and Gardens	**Standard** **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 1.08 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To achieve and maintain Green Flag status in 6 parks across the Borough (one in each neighbourhood)** **To strive for all Borough sites to be of a 'good' quality (61% or above)** **To strive for all Neighbourhood sites to be of an average to good quality (46-75% or above)** **For all Local sites to be of average quality (46% or above)**	**Standard** **To provide access to parks and gardens and for all households in the Borough to be within:** • **1,200m of a Borough site, or** • **600m of a Neighbourhood site, or** • **400m of a Local site**
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	**Standard** **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 2.70 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To strive for all Destination sites to be of a 'good' quality (61% or above)** **All Neighbourhood sites to be of an 'average' quality (46% or above)**	**Standard** **To provide access to natural and semi-natural greenspace and for all households in the Borough to be within:** • **1,200m of a Borough site, or** • **600m of a Neighbourhood site, or** • **400m of a Local site**
Amenity Greenspace	**Standard** **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.73 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.**	**Standard** **To provide amenity greenspace within 400m of where people live**

Typology	Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Green Corridors	**Standard** **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.12 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.**	**Standard** **To provide green corridors within 1,000m of where people live**
Formal Outdoor Sports	**Standard** **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.62 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To strive for all formal outdoor sport sites to be of an 'average' quality (46% or above)**	**Standard** **To provide an accessible outdoor sports facility within 1,000m of where people live**
Provision for Children & Young People	**Standard** **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.17 ha per 1,000 children's population (aged 0-19 years)**	**Standard** **To strive for all play sites to be of an 'average' play quality (46% and above)**	**Standard** **To provide access for all households in the Borough to be within 600m of provision for children and young people**
Allotments	**Standard** **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.17 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.**	**Standard** **To provide an accessible allotment plot within 1,000m of where people live**
Cemeteries & Churchyards	**Standard** **No quantitative standard set**	**Standard** **The proposed standard for Cemeteries is 61% plus or to a 'good' standard**	**Standard** **No accessibility standard set**
Indoor Sports Facilities	**The recommended standards are:** • **Swimming Pools** – 5.6sqm per 1000 population (based on swimming population of 224,574 requiring 1,248 sq m of water space) • **Sports Halls** – 63.85 sq m (0.43 of a badminton court) per 1000 population (based on sports hall using population of 225,513 requiring 97 badminton courts)		

Typology	Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
	• **Fitness Suites –** 3.4 stations per 1000 population (based on fitness participating population of 188.635 requiring 655 stations)		

1 Introduction and Background

Introduction

1.1 **Section 1** of the report identifies the context, background and methodology against which this report has been developed.

1.2 Strategic Leisure was appointed in September 2009 to undertake an audit and assessment of open space, sport and recreational facilities for Walsall (PPG 17[1] compliant). The study will inform the preparation of policies in the Local Development Framework and provide evidence for considering planning applications and proposals for developments affecting open space, sport and recreational facilities. The work also includes an update of the 2003 Playing Pitch Strategy produced as part of a separate report.

1.3 Over the last decade it has been increasingly recognised that aspects of the urban environment, including open space provision, has contributed to urban decline. There has been a lot of research into the importance and value of urban parks and green spaces and an increasing focus on increasing participation in sport and exercise, in the context of reducing health problems and obesity. In 2002 Planning Policy Guidance note 17: 'Open Space, Sport and Recreation' set out the Governments priorities and aims for high standard open space provision in the right locations. It requires local authorities to identify deficiencies in both open space and sport facilities and to remedy these deficiencies.

1.4 The study will help the council to plan positively, effectively and creatively to ensure that there is adequate provision of accessible, high quality open space, sport and recreation facilities that meets the needs and aspirations of local communities, local people and people who work or visit the Borough.

A Vision for Open Space, Sport & Recreational Facilities in Walsall

1.5 The vision for Walsall's open space mirrors that of the Walsall Greenspace Strategy:

> *"To have excellent, well used and valued open space, sport and recreation facilities that are safe, accessible and welcoming at the heart of all local communities that meet the needs of current and future generations"*

1.6 The vision for future provision of indoor sport and leisure facilities in Walsall is:

> *"To provide a range of high quality, well designed and up-to-date sports, leisure, recreation and cultural facilities, and associated support services, which will support improvements in health inequalities and the quality of life across the Borough"*

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[1] PPG 17 – Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sports and Recreational Facilities, 2002, ODPM (now DCLG)

Purpose of the Study

1.7   This work has been developed to provide Walsall with a strategic framework that will guide the future planning and management of the Borough's open spaces.

1.8   The study addresses the Government's requirement for the Council to undertake a Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) 'assessment of local need' in relation to developing a comprehensive audit of local need and providing transparency in the Council's future planning policy.

1.9   The study has been developed in accordance with the stages outlined in the Companion Guide to PPG 17 'Assessing Needs and Opportunities' (2002) and has involved the following steps and tasks:

- **The development of an open space working group of internal and external stakeholders to work alongside the development of the PPG17 audit.**

- **A review of existing strategies, policies and corporate information that may influence the provision of open space, outdoor sport or recreational facilities, this has involved a comprehensive review of existing planning policy administered by the Council in relation to existing provision.**

- **A review of all data held by the Council in relation to current levels of open space, sport and recreation facilities within the Borough.**

- **A digital mapping assessment that initially identified the range of provision by its specific type or purpose. This in turn has been built into a comprehensive dataset that has incorporated the quality and accessibility findings from the site audits and consultation. The Geographic Information System (GIS) digital map can be reviewed and updated to guide and support the Council to make informed spatial management decisions in the future.**

- **Consultation with stakeholders across the Council, local people and relevant user groups and organisations.**

- **The GIS data set has enabled the Council to test quantitative, qualitative and accessibility standards for each type of provision and at different levels from area based to Borough-wide analysis.**

1.10   A key output is the development of a Playing Pitch Strategy that will support and guide the future management and investment of playing pitches in the Borough.

1.11   PPG17 requires local authorities to develop and establish standards of provision for open space, sport and recreational facilities. It also requires that when setting such standards, local authorities recognise the current levels of provision and also the needs of local people regarding both the present and future provision. Therefore there are three core elements of work required by local authorities, these being audit of current provision, public consultation and the development of local standards.

1.12   The audit of current provision involves an assessment of quantity, quality and accessibility and for each element the information required is outlined as follows:-

- **Quantity** - to identify the site by type and to develop a local typology that identifies what type of open space or facility it is, what is its primary purpose and how much is there?

- **Quality** - what is the current physical condition of each site and its infrastructure and does it meet the purpose for which it was provided?

- **Accessibility** - Is the right type of provision in the right place to meet local need or demand, which neighbourhoods or communities are not served by provision and what is an acceptable distance for local people to travel to the differing provision?

1.13   Consultation has to be undertaken with stakeholders, governing bodies, local people, schools, clubs and people with an interest in open space, sport and recreational provision. This is necessary to establish the local levels of use made for each type of space or facility. It also lets people have their say as to whether provision meets their local needs and to what extent it meets their aspirations. It helps identify the barriers that may prevent people from using the space or facilities provided.

1.14   The development of local standards will help to guide the planning process in relation to identifying deficiencies in provision in terms of which neighbourhoods or local communities are not best served by open space, indoor sport and space for other recreational needs. The standards will establish clear thresholds for quantity, quality and accessibility of provision and guide the space and facilities required from development.

1.15   The audit or local assessment is based on the following guiding principles:-

- **The enhancement and improvement of the quality and accessibility of existing provision and facilities;**

- **The development and delivery of a network of good quality open space and sports facilities that are sustainable;**

- **Local need identified through consultation and the establishment of standards;**

- **The value of open space for the wider benefits they bring through health, social interaction, community cohesion, biodiversity and the well being of local people.**

1.16   The outcome will be the development of a robust evidence base of provision and standards for all types of open space, sport and recreation at both the Borough and neighbourhood level.

1.17   In addressing the requirements of PPG17, the study has established standards of provision to enable the Council to plan for the future provision of open space, sport and recreational facilities. In developing the standards of provision each type of provision has been categorised and a standard has been established based on the quality, quantity and accessibility and to address local need both now and in the future.

1.18   The purpose of the study (PPG17 and Playing Pitch Strategy) is to fulfil the following objectives:

- **To provide supporting technical evidence for policy formulation within the Black Country Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and to inform future Local Development Documents (LDD) as required as part of Walsall's Local Development Framework (LDF).**

- **To use the audit and assessment to set locally derived open space and recreation provision standards, addressing accessibility (including disabled access), quality and quantity.**

- **To identify any deficiencies or surpluses in provision and provide recommendations for dealing with these issues.**

- **To provide appropriate information to assess the feasibility of the Council collecting developer contributions for the provision, improvement or maintenance of open space, sport and recreational facilities.**

- **To inform the delivery of accessible, high quality open space and sports and recreational facilities in the borough, and ensure an appropriate balance between new provision and the enhancement of existing provision.**

- **To inform and support the Council's emerging strategy for the future of its own leisure centres.**

Overview of Walsall

1.19 Walsall has a population of just over 250,000 and is one of seven metropolitan boroughs located in the West Midlands. Walsall lies some 12 miles north of Birmingham and 6 miles east of Wolverhampton and is bordered to the south by the M6 before it dissects the western part of the borough running in a north-south direction. The borough of Walsall contains a mixture of urban and rural land uses with the town centre of Walsall being the key focus of activity.

1.20 38% of the borough area, predominantly in the eastern half, is green belt with substantial areas of green space managed to reflect this less formal and more natural character, and provide access to the wider countryside. In the higher density and more industrialised western part of the Borough there is far less accessible green space and its impact on the area is less pronounced.

Demographic Profile

1.21 It is important to consider the demographic make up of the Borough as key demographic and socio-economic characteristics are known to influence demand characteristics. For example, certain age-groups are known to register higher participation rates in a number of sport and leisure activities; deprived communities often experience issues relating to access to services and opportunities; cultural backgrounds may result in some passive and active recreation pursuits being favoured over others; car ownership levels can impact on the range of facilities that can be accessed.

1.22 The population of the Borough is 254,473 (Source: ONS, mid-year estimates 2007), for the purpose of this study these figures are utilised.

Car Ownership

1.23 31% of all households (31,463 households) have no access to a car. This is lower than the regional average which identifies 34% of all households to have no car (ONS, 2001 Census)

Ethnic Origins

1.24 Walsall has a higher proportion of ethnic minority groups, at 13.6% than the West Midlands (10.3%) and England and Wales (8.2%). In 2001, a high proportion of Walsall's ethnic population comprised of Indian's / Pakistani's and Bangladeshi's (10.1%), this compares to 7.6% in 1991. Those from mixed groups totalled 1.4% (Source: ONS, 2001 Census).

Deprivation Indices

1.25 The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2007 combines 7 different elements of deprivation at a local level. Walsall is ranked as the 45th most deprived nationally out of 354 local authorities. Levels of deprivation are measured on a localised basis through data from "lower super output areas". These provide a clearer picture then ward data, on which previous indices of deprivation were based (Source: Department for Communities and Local Government).

1.26 From an area perspective Areas 1 and 2 in the north and east of the borough are much less deprived than the borough overall. Area 5 in the south west of the borough is slightly less deprived than the borough overall. Areas 3, 4 and 6 in the west and central parts of the borough are more deprived than the borough overall. Further information can be found in Table 1.

Health Profile

1.27   The health of the people of Walsall is generally worse than the England average. However, levels of children's tooth decay and road injury and death rates are better than the England average. Men from the least deprived areas can expect to live 7.3 years longer than those in the more deprived areas, whilst in women this difference is 3.6 years.

1.28   Early death rates from heart disease and stroke and from cancer have fallen but they remain above the England average and the gap does not seem to be narrowing. Much of this is due to early deaths in men.

1.29   The percentage of women who smoke in pregnancy is above the England average as are deaths from smoking, heart disease and stroke and from cancer. Hospital stays for alcohol related harm and rates of drug misuse are also above the England average. The estimated percentage of obese adults is high and those who are adequately physically active is low. Diagnoses of diabetes are above the England average. Priorities for Walsall are reducing infant mortality, promoting health lifestyles and managing long-term conditions (Source: APHO and Department of Health, 2009).

The Importance of Open Space, Sport & Recreational Facilities

1.30   The following information identifies how open space, sport and recreational facilities are important to local people and how they contribute to wider social agendas of Health, Local Pride, Education and the Environment and then its importance locally in Walsall.

Health

1.31   The health benefits of open space, sport and recreational facilities are well documented. Access to good quality, well maintained open space has significant impact on our physical health and mental well being. Open spaces of all kinds provide opportunities to enjoy the natural world and to get involved in a wide range of leisure activities; they encourage people to walk more, to participate in sport or to simply enjoy the green and natural environment. The more attractive and accessible the green space is, the more likely it is to be used by a wide range of people. Physical activity is a major contributor to good health and can reduce coronary heart problems, diabetes, certain cancers and mental health problems. Trees and woodlands help reduce the effect of urban pollution and allotments provide opportunity for more sustainable organic lifestyles, as well as improved health from the regular exercise involved.

Sense of Place and Civic Pride

1.32   Open space, sport and recreational facilities are important to community cohesion by bringing people together, by providing meeting venues and social spaces for events and activities. They are an essential part of urban heritage and the urban fabric that makes up an area. As such they have an integral role in providing balanced and sustainable communities.

1.33   Well managed, good quality open spaces improve the appearance of an area, not least because they attract tourists and visitors. An urban area with good quality open spaces and areas for wildlife creates a positive image and can be a factor that helps attract inward investment from the relocation of businesses. In turn this increases employment opportunities for local people and supports physical regeneration. At the local level they stimulate local pride and make people feel good about where they live.

Education

1.34   Open space, sport and recreational facilities provide a valuable resource for education as outdoor classrooms, and also spaces for training in vocations such as nature conservation, horticulture, community work, landscaping, forestry and sports development. They also provide an important environment for children to learn, take part in physical activity and play through social interaction.

Environment

1.35   Open spaces are essential to supporting the species diversity of the Borough, providing habitat and access to a rich variety of flora and fauna in an increasingly urbanised society where urban expansion has meant that true countryside becomes increasingly distant from most people. Open spaces can act as flood storage and wildlife corridors allowing populations of plants and animals to move from one area to another, thereby acting as important stepping stone links between urban and rural areas ensuring wildlife in both can connect.

1.36   Open space also has an increasingly important role to play in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Informing the Local Development Framework

1.37   The benefits to accrue from having a wealth of both quantitative and qualitative open space, sport and recreational facilities is embedded in a range of advisory documents. PPG17 states: "Open spaces, sport and recreation all underpin people's quality of life. Well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are therefore fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives."

1.38   Thus PPG17 (together with its Companion Guide) emphasises the role of the planning system in assessing not only opportunities and needs for sport and recreation provision, but also safeguarding open space and facilities which have recreational value. Accordingly, PPG17 helps ensure that, when reviewing strategic policy and preparing development plans, councils have a robust framework against which adequate land and water resources for organised sport and informal recreation can be allocated. Local planning authorities have a duty to take account of the community's need for recreational space, and in so doing must have regard to current levels of provision and deficiencies. Likewise there is a need to balance the competing demands of pressure for development of open space and the potential conflict with the wider public interest.

1.39   A key component of this study is to ensure that it offers a clear and consistent strategic approach to open space, sport and recreational facilities that supports the Local Development Framework. Indeed, the increased focus on spatial planning and 'place making' evolving from the 2004 changes to the planning regime makes it essential that the Council takes forward its policies on open space, sport and recreation in a robust manner.

1.40   The Walsall Greenspace Strategy (2006-2011) has been used to guide the management, maintenance and development of Walsall's parks and green spaces over the past five years. The strategy was informed by an audit and assessment of open space in 2006. It is intended that this study will update this original piece of work. By commissioning this study the Council will continue to underpin and reinforce the robustness of its approach to the provision, use and management of open space, sport and recreational facilities. This is because the Companion Guide to PPG17 makes it clear that, provided local authorities have undertaken assessments of need and audits of existing facilities compliant with PPG17, any locally determined provision standards will meet the tests of "reasonableness" set out in DoE Circular 05/2005, (relating to Planning Obligations). This means that authorities will be justified in using them as the basis for planning conditions or obligations in appropriate circumstances. However, there will be a need to apply any policy with pragmatism, certainly in the short term where the use of planning agreements might be contemplated. This is because the present economic climate has alerted local planning authorities to the risk of development being stifled by unreasonable demands on planning gain that could, effectively be the difference between a project either being brought forward or being rendered unviable.

1.41   That said, PPG17 (paragraphs 23 and 33) reinforces the message that obligations can be used to reduce or prevent both quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in provision. Accordingly, a key purpose underlying this study has been to ensure this test of reasonableness can be met and thereby to provide Walsall Council - as local planning authority - with the information necessary to draft plans and policies including supplementary planning guidance.

1.42   When formulating and framing policies, local planning authorities will need to reflect the Government's objectives referred to earlier and as set out in the prologue to PPG17. These are:

- "**Supporting an urban renaissance** - local networks of high quality and well managed and maintained open spaces, sports and recreational facilities help create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe. Green spaces in urban areas perform vital functions as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity and by acting as 'green lungs' can assist in meeting objectives to improve air quality."

- "**Supporting a rural renewal -** the countryside can provide opportunities for recreation and visitors can play an important role in the regeneration of the economies of rural areas. Open spaces within rural settlements and accessibility to local sports and recreational facilities contribute to the quality of life and well being of people who live in rural areas."

- "**Promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion -** well planned and maintained open spaces and good quality sports and recreational facilities can play a major part in improving people's sense of well being in the place they live. As a focal point for community activities, they can bring together members of deprived communities and provide opportunities for people for social interaction."

- "**Health and well being -** open spaces, sports and recreational facilities have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, and in the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others."

- "**Promoting more sustainable development -** by ensuring that open space, sports and recreational facilities (particularly in urban areas) are easily accessible by walking and cycling and that more heavily used or intensive sports and recreational facilities are planned for locations well served by public transport."

1.43   Extending the advice in PPG17 and its Companion Guide to ensure that the Council's evolving strategy and polices embrace the concepts of sustainability and place-making espoused by the 2004 Planning Act, the following additional considerations will be relevant:

- **How to protect and/or enhance existing open spaces and sport/recreational facilities valued by the local community.**

- **Situations where the local planning authority may wish to allow the redevelopment of existing open space or sport/recreational facility. PPG17 offers guidance and establishes the circumstances where this approach can be acceptable.**

- **Opportunities for relocation of poorly located but necessary open space or sport/ recreation facilities.**

- **An assessment of what additional onsite or offsite provision may be required as a result of new developments.**

2   Methodology

Definition of Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities

2.1   The most complete description of open space comes from the Council of Europe Recommendation No. R (86)11 of the Committee of Ministers States on Urban Open Space (1) as revised by the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management. This states:

> *"Urban parks and green spaces are an essential part of the urban heritage and infrastructure, being a strong element in the architectural and landscape character of towns and cities, providing a sense of place and engendering civic pride. They are important for enabling social interaction and fostering community development, as well as providing an outdoor classroom for biological and ecological studies. Public green spaces help to conserve natural systems, supporting ecosystems and providing the contrast of designed landscapes and conserved wildlife habitats within our urban settlements".*

2.2   The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 defines open space as "land laid out as a public garden or used for the purpose of public recreation or previously used as burial ground". This definition does not go far enough in recognising the variety of open space types both private and public.

2.3   For the purpose of developing this study open space is the collective term that pulls together the provision of parks and public gardens, natural open spaces (nature reserves, public woodlands) outdoor sports, amenity areas, children's play areas, allotments, cemeteries and churchyards.

2.4   In accordance with the guidance advocated by PPG17 each of the different types of open space provision has been developed into a local typology for the Borough and this refers to the diverse range of green open spaces within Walsall that are used by local people.

2.5   The indoor sports and recreation provision covered in the assessment include the public, commercial, education and voluntary sectors, in terms of facilities and services. Principally this relates to sports halls, swimming pools and health and fitness facilities, although where appropriate, links are made to major outdoor provision.

2.6   Inclusion of all providers is particularly key as provision of sport and leisure facilities provides an opportunity for partnership working, to ensure quality, fit for purpose and complementary provision, across the sectors.

2.7   Given the current level of provision in Walsall and the nature of current providers, it is important to be very clear about the future partnership potential with the education sector including secondary schools, further and higher education.

2.8   In developing the study, the Borough has been subdivided into the 6 Neighbourhood Management Areas. Table 1 identifies the wards in each area, their demographics and levels of deprivation based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2007. These areas are also shown geographically in Map 1. Using the area analysis enables the Council to identify the priorities for each area of the Borough in relation to the emerging Local Development Framework.

Map 1 : Walsall Neighbourhood Management Areas
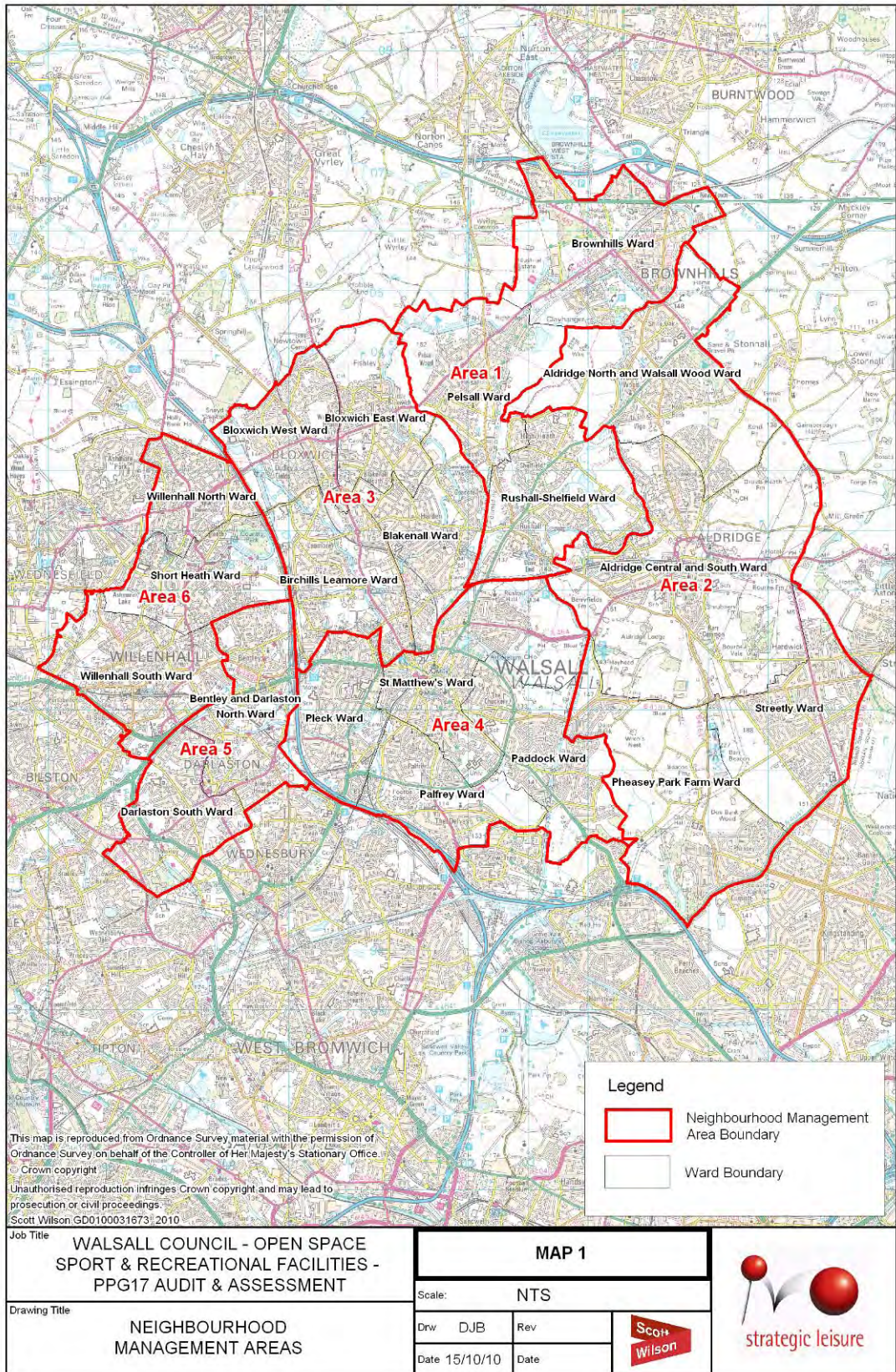
Table 1 - Area Breakdown by Ward

Area	Wards	Total Population (and % of Borough Total)	Children & Young People's Population Aged 0-19	Average Deprivation Score	Rank of Local Authority Districts*
Area 1	Brownhills Pelsall Rushall Shelfield	35,939 (14%)	8,609 (13%)	23.55	100-101 / 354
Area 2	Aldridge North and Walsall Wood Aldridge Central and South Pheasey Park Farm Streetly	49,579 (20%)	11,203 (17%)	13.37	242-243 / 354
Area 3	Birchills Leamore Blakenall Bloxwich East Bloxwich West	51,506 (20%)	14,631 (22%)	43.45	4-5 / 354
Area 4	Paddock Palfrey Pleck St Matthew's	53,456 (21%)	15,474 (23%)	34.67	20-21 / 354
Area 5	Bentley and Darlaston North Darlaston South	25,555 (10%)	7,371 (11%)	28.01	59-60 / 354
Area 6	Short Heath Willenhall North Willenhall South	38,438 (15%)	9,772 (14%)	38.54	10-11 / 354
	Borough Total	**254,473**	**67,060**	**30.14**	**45 / 354**

* (1=most deprived, 354 = least deprived)

2.9   This PPG17 study establishes the plans and policies for each specific type of open space, sport and recreation facility and identifies or proposes standards of provision for the Borough that are aimed at ensuring local people have equal access to a balanced range of good quality provision regardless of where they live.

2.10   A comprehensive audit was undertaken between October 2009 and January 2010, the audit examined the range and quality of provision in the Borough's parks and open spaces, natural green spaces, allotments, children's play areas, outdoor sports facilities, cemeteries, indoor sport and recreational facilities.

2.11   Each site was visited and evaluated by experienced auditors who assessed the sites against best practice methodologies such as the Green Flag Award – the national quality standard for parks. The results of the audit were considered against feedback from the consultation to enable standards of provision to be set for each type of open space, sport and recreational facility in the Borough.

2.12   The feedback from consultation includes responses from local residents who regularly use open space and specific user groups such as children and young people, friends groups, allotment societies, sports clubs and community associations. Relevant consultation in the Walsall Greenspace Strategy has also been taken into consideration alongside recent consultation for the Arboretum Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

2.13   The outcome has been to develop a PPG17 study that is firmly based on local evidence and a robust assessment of need. The typologies for Walsall are identified in Table 2 and mirror the existing typologies in the Walsall Greenspace Strategy.

Table 2 - Walsall PPG17 Typologies

Typology	Hierarchy of Provision	Primary Purpose
Parks and Gardens	Borough	Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events.
	Neighbourhood	
	Local	
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	Borough	Natural and semi-natural areas providing access to wildlife, environmental education and awareness, biodiversity and nature conservation. The typology includes woodlands, scrubland, wetland and nature conservation areas.
	Neighbourhood	
	Local	
Amenity Greenspace	Amenity Greenspace	Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
Green Corridors	Green Corridors	Walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife migration.
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Outdoor Sports Facilities	Sites specifically intended to meet demand for formal participation in outdoor sports including pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports.
Provision for Children and Young People	Provision for Children & Young People	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, multi-use games areas and skateboard parks.
Allotments	Allotments	Opportunities for those people who wish to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion

Typology	Hierarchy of Provision	Primary Purpose
Cemeteries and Churchyards	Cemeteries and Churchyards	Quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation, biodiversity and to provide a link to the past. Also includes closed burial grounds used for informal recreation.
Institutional Land	Institutional Land	Educational land or land owned by other institutions such as hospitals and government agencies.
Indoor Sports Facilities	Indoor Sports Facilities	Provision of facilities (sports halls, swimming pools, health and fitness) for participation in indoor sport and leisure activities

2.14   The study covers all open space, sport and recreational provision across the Borough as identified in the Walsall Greenspace Strategy and updated to reflect current circumstances. Table 3 sets out the accessibility levels that have been used to classify the Borough's open space.

Table 3 – Accessibility Levels for Open Space in Walsall

Accessibility Level	Definition
Unrestricted	Sites have unrestricted public access although some sites may have limitations to access between dusk and dawn.
Limited	Sites may be publicly or privately owned but access is limited either by a physical barrier such as membership, or psychological barrier such as a feeling that an open space is private.
Not accessible	Sites are out of bounds to the general public

2.15   The analysis and collective data of sites is restricted to the sites that are within the definitive administrative boundary of Walsall Council. For the purpose of setting standards, sites that are classified as 'not accessible' have been excluded from the analysis.

A review of existing policy, strategy and plans

2.16   In order to develop a PPG17 study for the Borough it is necessary to consider and review the existing large number of plans, policies and strategies produced by the Council and its partners that have an influence on open space, sport and recreation across the Borough. These existing documents have to be considered as they provide an important source of information, background and context with regard to provision and policy that has shaped the current provision across the Borough.

National Standards

2.17   Open space policy in Walsall has been influenced by national standards that have been produced by national bodies. The most influential has been the standards set through Fields in Trust (formerly the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA)) and Sport England. Other national bodies such as Natural England (formerly English Nature), the Lawn Tennis Association and to a lesser degree the Association of Leisure and Allotment Gardens have all promoted standards of provision.

2.18 These have all been considered and applied where relevant or possible and are discussed within the relevant sections of the study. Crucially, PPG17 advocates the development of locally determined provision standards based on local needs that are sustainable and more importantly reflect local circumstance.

Audit and Digital Mapping

2.19 The study adheres to the guidance detailed in "Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17", providing guidance on undertaking local assessments of open space, sport and recreation provision.

2.20 A key stage in developing the study was to collate the information currently held by the Council and governing bodies into a digital database. The database pulls together the threads of information and captures sites by creating digital layers for each of the different typologies. It will enable the Council to regularly update the information for use as a management tool to guide future decisions for planning and management of open space.

2.21 In developing the PPG17 study a comprehensive qualitative audit of open space, sport and recreation has been undertaken to support the quantitative data captured as part of the digital mapping. This qualitative audit has assessed each site against best practice in terms of both the physical condition of the site and the infrastructure within them.

2.22 Digital maps have been produced from the database and are an important element in providing the information that has guided the development of this study.

Assessing Quantity

2.23 The Borough's provision of open space, sport and outdoor recreation can be classified simply into ten core types and an associated hierarchy within them. The hierarchy of provision developed by the Borough in conjunction with other agencies and the local community recognises the variety of spaces across the Borough. A definition of the hierarchy can be found in Table 4. These spaces include the Borough's parks and gardens and natural and semi-natural greenspaces.

Table 4 - Hierarchy of Provision

Hierarchy	Definition
Borough	Those sites whose significance should attract people from across the entire Borough. Usually large sites with a range of facilities or designated importance for history or nature conservation
Neighbourhood	Those sites which perform a function that serves a more immediate community. Unlikely to attract people from across the Borough
Local	Those sites which perform a function to a small area – typically areas of amenity green space.

2.24 The objective of the hierarchy is to provide the Borough with a network of spaces that are accessible to people. The hierarchy will ensure that people have access to a wide range of sites from the largest such as the borough sites down to the smaller local spaces provided in new residential areas. Many sites will contain other types of provision such as the more formal and specific children's fixed play areas or provision for sport such as bowls or tennis, others will provide for specific needs. What they will have in common is that wherever possible they will be linked as part of an open space network.

2.25   The assessment and subsequent analysis of provision has been undertaken on a Borough wide and neighbourhood area basis. The analysis and standards will allow the Council to benchmark and to make informed decisions about the supply and demand of provision across the Borough.

2.26   In accordance with the PPG17 guidance, standards have been set following a robust assessment that considered the quality and quantity of open space provision across the Borough by type.

2.27   In order to set local standards existing and previous consultation with regards to open space has been considered. Further consultation has taken place with key stakeholders, schools and colleges, local residents and user groups. The assessment has also considered existing policies, strategic documents and national, regional and local policy.

Assessing Quality

2.28   To ensure the study complies with PPG17 guidance a quality assessment has been undertaken to the Borough's open space, sport and recreational facilities. The quality audit essentially has four recognised purposes these are:

- **To gauge the quality of each site at a given time, through the evaluation of the site infrastructure its condition and quality. The sites are measured in a consistent and objective way and the audit reflects the condition of sites from a visitors perspective;**

- **To identify site characteristics and features that result in some sites being low quality and to provide information regarding the opportunity for improvement;**

- **To establish a quality standard for the Borough's open space provision;**

- **To identify sites that the Council should protect and those that would benefit from improvement.**

2.29   Quality relates to the range of facilities and physical infrastructure contained within individual sites, the audit considers factors such as accessibility, safety, management, maintenance and overall impression.

2.30   Although the audit was primarily driven by PPG17, the information collated will provide the Borough with a comprehensive overview of the condition of provision and will provide a level of management information not previously available. The information will enable the Borough to make informed decisions with regards to the resources required to undertake improvements in management and maintenance.

2.31   A comprehensive audit of 350+ individual sites has been undertaken based on the variety of open space, sport and recreation provision across the Borough. The scores provide a means of comparing sites both by type and within the individual hierarchical tiers that have been developed as part of the study. The audit also gives a clear and robust overview of the physical condition of open space across the Borough and within defined areas.

2.32   Quality Inspections have been undertaken via a site visit and the completion of a scored proforma. The quality assessment proforma is based on a number of key criteria encompassing the quality aspects of the Green Flag Award. The quality assessment results are attached as Appendix 1 and the quality criteria in Appendix 3. The site scores are translated into a percentage and then measured against the quality line rating:

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent

2.33   The quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a "snapshot" in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit audit.

Assessing Accessibility

2.34   An assessment of accessibility has been undertaken to identify the extent to which local residents are able to access the various differing forms of provision across the Borough. This is based on travel time and travel method to the variety of provision. Distance thresholds have been calculated for each typology, responses from consultation alongside a benchmarking exercise with neighbouring Local Authorities.

2.35   The maps in Appendix 4 represent the Borough provision and distance thresholds illustrating each typology. They are based on straight line distance and do take into consideration local geography, and major severance lines where appropriate e.g. motorways, canals and railways.

Assessing Needs

2.36   Consultation has taken the form of questionnaire surveys to the public and user groups, face to face consultation, telephone and questionnaire surveys of key stakeholders and other interested bodies.

Area Analysis

2.37   In order for the study to reflect the differences in provision and spatial distribution of facilities within local communities the strategy considers provision on two levels. Firstly the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space at a Borough-wide provision level and secondly by grouping the Borough's existing wards into areas. Each area represents the emerging Neighbourhood Management Areas and by undertaking the analysis on this basis it ensures each area has a fair distribution of provision made accessible to all.

2.38   By making use of the 6 areas the PPG17 study will:

- **Allow a comparison to be made between the different areas of the Borough;**

- **Identify the spatial distribution and accessibility of facilities within each Area compared to the Borough overall;**

- **Provide an insight into what facilities or provision needs investment, replacement or new provision when negotiating financial contributions with developers.**

2.39   The data collected in developing the PPG17 study has been developed in such a way as to enable the Council to drill down further and to undertake analysis if needed at a ward level.

2.40   For the purpose of this study the following definitions are relevant;

- **Boroughwide** – everything within the administrative footprint of Walsall Borough

- **Neighbourhood Area** – the six area divisions within the Borough

- **Wards** – the electoral boundaries that elected members represent

Comparison with other local authorities

2.41   It is useful to gauge provision within the Borough against other similar local authorities, and as such the findings and standards from other PPG17 assessments provide a valuable point of comparison. The use of this information is dependent upon its availability and accessibility.

2.42   Provision within the Borough has been compared with neighbouring local authorities in and those of a similar size where possible. This benchmarking data has been used to compare both quantity and accessibility standards. See pages 155-156 for this information.

2.43   PPG17 advocates that local authorities should move away from the use of national provision standards in order to develop local standards that best fit the Borough and local need. The use of benchmarking with other local authorities is useful to ensure the people of Walsall are provided with a good level of facilities and provision.

3   Strategic Context

3.1   In developing the study it is important to consider and recognise national, regional and local planning policy and guidance. The relevant provisions are summarised below:

National Policy

Planning Policy Statements / Guidance (PPS/PPG)

3.2   National guidance seeks to ensure Local Authorities plan effectively for open space, sport and recreation by using a number of tools, including:

- **Assessments of needs and opportunities - Local Authorities are required to carry out open space assessments and to consult with local people to identify local needs;**

- **Setting standards - National standards such as the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standards for outdoor sport and children's play will be replaced by local standards set in development plans that must include quality, quantity and accessibility and are based on local needs;**

- **Maintaining an adequate supply of open space and sports and recreational facilities:**
  - Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless the land can be shown as surplus to requirements (A key driver for PPG17 is not to dispose of sites, rather to ensure local people have access to a range of good quality provision)

  - High quality open spaces and those of particular value to communities should be protected through development plan policies;

  - Planning conditions or obligations can be used to enhance the quality of existing spaces or create new ones where an assessment recognises a deficit in provision of open spaces, sport or recreational facilities;

  - Local Authorities should also ensure that commercial and industrial developments do not just include landscaping, but also consider visitors' needs such as accessibility and safety and ensure the development has an element of open space provision;

  - Planning Obligation funding can also be used as investment in parks, open spaces and tourist areas to improve the quality and accessibility for local people;

  - That provision should be based on local need and the crux of the guidance is not to provide more of the same, rather improve and enhance what is already there.

3.3   When planning new open space and sports and recreational facilities, local authorities should:

- **Develop and locate intensive recreational uses where they can contribute to town centre vitality and viability;**

- **Strive to avoid any significant loss of amenity to residents, neighbouring uses or biodiversity;**

- **Aim to improve quality through good design;**

- **Seek to promote accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, and ensure that facilities are accessible for all;**

- **Continue to add to and enhance the range and quality of existing facilities;**

- **Seek to promote areas of open space in commercial and industrial areas;**

- **Consider using any surplus land for open space, sport or recreational use, weighing this against alternative uses;**

- **Assess the impact of new facilities on social inclusion and consider the recreational needs of visitors and tourists;**

- **Meet the regeneration needs of areas;**

- **Consider security and personal safety, especially for children.**

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17: Planning for Open Space Sport and Recreation, 2002)

3.4   The Government's policy objectives for open space, sport and recreation are set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17 – Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, 2002). In terms of delivery the long term aims are to:

- **Ensure the provision of networks of accessible, high quality open spaces and sport and recreation facilities in both urban and rural areas, which meet residents and visitors needs, are economically and environmentally sustainable and are fit for purpose;**

- **To ensure an appropriate balance between new provision and the enhancement of existing provision;**

- **To provide clarity and reasonable certainty for developers and landowners in relation to the requirements and expectations of the local planning authority in respect of open space and recreational provision.**

3.5   A key aspect of PPG17 is that local authorities should undertake a local needs assessment and audit of existing provision. The objective is to move away from the use of national standards of provision and to establish local standards of provision that address quality, quantity and accessibility.

3.6   The guidance advises (in paragraphs 1-10) Local Authorities to undertake and consider:

- **Undertake robust assessments of existing and future need to guide effective planning for open space, sport and recreation, therefore consultation is essential to ensure the needs of the local communities are known**

- **As a minimum needs assessment should include the differing population and community needs for open space sport and recreational facilities**

- **The needs of people living working and visiting should be taken into account**

- **To undertake an assessment that identifies specific surpluses and deficiencies that can form the basis to guide the development of a more strategic framework and approach to management and future provision at a local level**

- **Ensure that sport and recreation facilities are easily accessible by a choice of transport modes and wherever appropriate the facilities are centrally located**

- **To consider factors such as cost and location as an accessibility factor**

- **Quality audits will be important as they will allow the identification of potential for increased use through better design management and maintenance**

- **The assessment will enable the Council to deliver more effective planning policy**

- **Provide good quality open space and recreational facilities as an integral part of new communities not as a bolt on to ensure they are attractive places for people to live and work**

- **To develop locally derived standards of provision which are evidence based**

- **Adopt a strategic approach and to plan in a progressive and positive manner for the provision and enhancement of well designed open space, recreational and sporting facilities**

- **To provide the strongest protection for open space that is or that has the potential to be of value to local people**

3.7   PPG17 states that local authorities should utilise the information gathered from undertaking a needs and opportunities assessment and set locally derived standards of provision for open space, sport and recreation. In setting local standards they should include:

- **A quantitative assessments (i.e. how much have they got and how much do they need and where?);**

- **A qualitative standard which can be used as a means of measuring what needs to be improved and assessing performance though the number of sites that have been improved;**

- **An accessibility standard that considers how people travel, how long it takes and if travel time is acceptable. It should also consider other factors such as cost and barriers to use.**

3.8   Setting such standards based on local needs will form the basis for redressing the surplus or deficiencies through the planning process. It will also allow standards to inform LDF documents and other Council strategies or plans.

3.9   The guidance advocates a cross departmental approach to undertaking the needs assessment and auditing. This approach links planning processes with the Community Strategy and Best Value process. Local planners, managers of parks and open space, outdoor sport and recreation are encouraged to work together in the delivery of the audit and assessment. External stakeholders and local people are also an integral part of the assessment.

3.10   The Guidance identifies a five step process for undertaking a local assessment

Step 1   Identify Local Need

Step 2   Audit Local Provision

Step 3   Determine Provision Standards

Step 4   Apply Provision Standards

Step 5   Draft Local Policies

3.11   PPG17 maintains that open spaces, sport and recreation all underpin people's quality of life. Well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are therefore fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives.

3.12   PPG17 stresses the importance of protecting and enhancing the Public Right of Way network for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The guidance also stresses that parks, recreation grounds, playing fields and allotments must not be regarded as 'previously-developed land'.

3.13 PPG17 states that open space and sports and recreational facilities that are of high quality, or of particular value to a local community, should be recognised and given protection by local authorities through appropriate policies in plans. Areas of particular quality may include small areas of open space in urban areas that provide an important local amenity and offer recreational and play opportunities:

- **Areas of open space that provide a community resource and can be used for informal or formal events such as religious and cultural festivals, agricultural shows and travelling fairs. Travelling fairs may also require suitable winter quarters;**

- **Areas of open space that particularly benefit wildlife and biodiversity.**

3.14 The strategy will ensure the Borough meets the requirements placed on the Council by PPG17 by setting local standards of provision for each different type of open space. The local standards will be derived from existing provision and consultation with key stakeholders (both internal and external), local people and interested groups.

3.15 PPG17 directs local authorities away from the use of traditional simple standards such as the National Playing Field Association (NPFA) 6-acre Standard. The standard has been used traditionally by planners as the generic standard to adopt, even though it was never intended to be a prop for planners it somehow became one. The 6-acre standard, whilst a worthwhile tool, did not set standards for every type of space such as parks or natural areas.

3.16 In addition, PPG17 has a number of wider objectives set out in its Companion Guide. These are:

- **Supporting an urban renaissance - local networks of high quality and well managed and maintained open spaces, sports and recreational facilities help create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe. Green spaces in urban areas perform vital functions as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity and by acting as 'green lungs' can assist in meeting objectives to improve air quality.**

- **Supporting a rural renewal - the countryside can provide opportunities for recreation and visitors can play an important role in the regeneration of the economies of rural areas. Open spaces within rural settlements and accessibility to local sports and recreational facilities contribute to the quality of life and well being of people who live in rural areas.**

- **Promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion: well planned and maintained open spaces and good quality sports and recreational facilities can play a major part in improving people's sense of well being in the place they live. As a focal point for community activities, they can bring together members of deprived communities and provide opportunities for people for social interaction.**

- **Health and well being - open spaces, sports and recreational facilities have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, and in the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others.**

- **Promoting more sustainable development - by ensuring that open space, sports and recreational facilities (particularly in urban areas) are easily accessible by walking and cycling and that more heavily used or intensive sports and recreational facilities are planned for locations well served by public transport.**

(Source ODPM Assessing Needs and Opportunities –A Companion Guide to PPG17 2002)

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development)

3.17   PPS1 has sustainable development as the core principle for planning policy nationally. Sustainable development delivery aims to

- **To provide high quality developments of mixed use and sustainable communities**

- **Reduce the need to travel by car**

- **Using land in an efficient manner including re-using sites that have previously been developed**

3.18   In applying this to the Open Space Strategy it has important links in developing open spaces that are sustainable, valued by local communities and will support the Council in providing a balance of provision across the Borough and local areas through determining deficiencies or surpluses and potentially changing the management regimes on sites to meet the needs.

Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3: Housing)

3.19   This states that new residential environments should provide or enable good access to community space including green space, open amenity and recreational space (including play space) and that emphasis should be given to the needs of children and young people. The guidance advocates the need for well designed, safe and secure stimulating areas with safe pedestrian access.

3.20   Nationally the Government has encouraged local authorities to develop an open space strategy as part of the national drive to create cleaner, greener, safer sustainable communities.

3.21   Green spaces are important to the health and everyday well being of the people of the Borough. Therefore well designed and implemented planning policies are fundamental, and it is essential that the Council provides sufficient facilities of the right type in the right places and that these facilities are correctly resourced, well managed and maintained both now and in the future.

3.22   The Open Space Strategy will help to meet the need for accessible good quality green spaces that meet local needs through the creation of networks of provision that are sustainable and valued by the communities they are designed to serve. It will ensure that the Council provides an appropriate balance and equal access to a network of good quality provision through enhancement, refurbishment or new provision where necessary. It will provide a clear framework for investment and management action.

Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS12: Local Spatial Planning)

3.23   PPS12 explains what local spatial planning is, and how it benefits communities. It also sets out what the key ingredients of local spatial plans are and the key government policies on how they should be prepared. It should be taken into account by local planning authorities in preparing development plan documents and other local development documents.

3.24   Each local authority is required to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) following consultation with their local communities and key local partners through the Local Strategic Partnership. The Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the strategic vision for a place and is linked into overarching regional strategies. It provides the vehicle for considering and deciding how to address difficult cross-cutting issues such as the economic future of an area, social exclusion and climate change. Building these factors into the community's vision in an integrated way is at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level.

3.25 A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is normally a three year agreement, based on the SCS vision, that sets out improvement targets for the priorities of a local area. The agreement is made between Central Government and local authorities and their partners on the Local Strategic Partnership. Local authorities and their public sector partners are now under a duty to co-operate to agree LAA targets and to have regard to them in exercising their day-to-day functions. The LAA is a key delivery mechanism for the SCS.

3.26 PPS12 therefore offers, and requires, the development of a stronger leadership role for local authorities and elected members, built on collaboration through Local Strategic Partnerships and accountable delivery through LAAs. The government intends that spatial planning objectives for local areas, as set out in the Local Development Framework, should be aligned not only with national and regional plans, but also with the shared local priorities set out in Sustainable Community Strategies where these are consistent with national and regional policy. To achieve this, the Local Government White Paper strongly encourages local authorities to ensure that:

- **Their Sustainable Community Strategy takes full account of spatial, economic, social and environmental issues;**

- **Key spatial planning objectives for the area as set out in the Local Development Framework Core Strategy are in harmony with SCS priorities; and**

- **The Local Area Agreement, as the delivery agreement with central government, is based on the priorities of the SCS and supported by local planning policy to deliver the outcomes agreed.**

Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation)

3.27 This guidance seeks to ensure that enhancement and conservation of biological and geological diversity are an integral part of sustainable development and that they contribute towards urban renewal and the wider urban renaissance.

3.28 Conservation and enhancement are seen as important in the guidance. The guidance refers to local importance, such as veteran trees and ancient woodland. It also advocates that conservation, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity and geology should be an intrinsic part of the strategic approach to development location and form.

3.29 The Council will need to ensure that future development plan documents will identify the location of sites designated as important for bio diversity and geological importance. The document will also need to recognise the need for the creation of new habitats in order to meet future targets.

3.30 PPS9 re-affirms the Government's position on the conservation of the natural environment. It outlines the need to protect sites that are both designated and undesignated and to manage wisely and promote the creation of new habitats. The guidance advocates the integration of measures to promote and protect nature across all aspects of the Council's work.

3.31 The standards set and subsequent policy guidance will be based on a comprehensive audit that considers quantity, quality and accessibility of the provision within the Borough. The standards and subsequent policy framework recommendations will be in keeping with national, regional and local plans and strategies and will support the emerging Local Development Framework.

Circular 05/2005 Planning Obligations

3.32 This Circular provides revised guidance for local authorities on the use of planning obligation funding such as section 106 agreements made under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It clarifies the policy terms and outlines appropriate processes for securing planning obligations.

3.33   The Circular defines planning obligations as 'Private Agreements' negotiated by the local authority and private developers or people who wish to develop a piece of land. The purpose is to limit the impact of development or to allow development in circumstances that would otherwise be unacceptable from a planning perspective. It means developers may have to commit to a recreational provision or contribute to improvement off site. This can be either a required new provision, a provision off site or a financial contribution.

3.34   Obligations (Financial) can be made to compensate for loss or damage caused by the development or to reduce the impact of a development. This again may comprise on or off site financial obligations.

3.35   A planning obligation may therefore be used to restrict development or require the land to be utilised in a specific way and require a payment to the local authority for loss or future maintenance (if it is new provision).

3.36   Circular 05/2005 stipulates a number of tests to ensure a planning obligation is an appropriate mechanism. It has to be:

1.   **Relevant to planning**

2.   **Necessary to make proposed development acceptable in planning terms**

3.   **Related directly to proposed development**

4.   **Fairly and reasonably related in scale an type**

5.   **Reasonable in all other respects**

3.37   Tests 1 and 2 'relevant and necessary' requires justification for developer obligations to be established in national, regional or local planning policy.

3.38   The Circular and associated tests allow for improving both quantity and quality of open space and associated facilities. It also allows for the pooling of contributions towards strategic provision. This includes pooled provision with neighbouring authorities.

3.39   Developer contribution as a support for new facilities is allowed. For example, developer funding can be utilised as a contribution towards a facility planned by the Council.

3.40   The Circular also advises on maintenance payments for facilities that are primarily for the benefit of users and the associated development. Developers may be required to make payment in perpetuity for the subsequent maintenance of such provision.

3.41   The Government's objective in relation to planning policy and developer contributions is for local authorities to provide clear and specific justification within the local development framework that is based on clear and robust evidence, particularly local need.

Summary of Audit Commission Report (June 2006)

3.42   The Audit Commission reported on a study aimed at examining how local authorities in England were managing their approach to providing their public sports and recreation facilities and attempts to improve access and value for money.

3.43   Observations were made on strategic planning of sport and recreation services, operational management options and success of options appraisals.

3.44   It was recommended that Councils should improve the strategic planning of sports and recreation provision and increase overall efficiency by:

- **Assessing current and future sports and recreation needs**

- **Forming partnerships to aid the planning, procurement and delivery of services**

- **Appraise the options for delivery and test the market to ensure that the best value option is identified**

- **Improve the collection, analysis and use of performance information.**

Urban Greenspaces Task Force "Greenspaces, Better Places" (September 2006)

3.45   The report highlights principles and recommendations to support the renaissance of sustainable parks and green spaces and rekindle the relationship between people and the places in which they live.

3.46   It recognises that parks and open spaces have the potential to make a significant contribution to urban regeneration by making places more liveable and sustainable whilst also enriching the quality of people's lives.

National Agency Guidance

Sport England: Spatial Planning for Sport and Active Recreation : Sport and Recreation in Supplementary Planning Documents (2009)

3.47   Sport England's interests relate to the development of policy within Local Development Documents and the implementation of policy through development control. This guidance helps to clarify how the interests of sport and recreation are best represented at a local level.

3.48   Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) provide a means of amplifying policy presented in the parent Core Strategy and can therefore prove a useful tool in helping to clarify particular issues and promote the interests of sport and recreation. The specification of planning obligations is the commonest example of the consideration of sport and recreation issues (typically as community infrastructure), but there are other examples of the potential for taking a wider view on the contribution of sport and recreation to achieving improvements in quality of life for local communities. Sport and recreation issues in SPDs relate principally to guidance on developer contributions to the provision of community infrastructure. As such they are widely applicable, and sport and recreation issues are now typically considered as part of an authority's wider approach to planning obligations.

Planning for Open Space (2002)

3.49   The key messages advocated by Sport England in this publication are:

- **Policy on planning applications for the development of playing fields provides 5 exceptions to the opposition normally raised by Sport England to the loss of facilities**

- **Any development affecting playing fields has to have been considered by Sport England as a key consultee.**

- **Planning Inspectors will no longer accept the traditional 6 Acre standard approach in emerging development plans within local authorities and expect to see the development of local standards of provision.**

- **Local authorities will need to consider the Towards a Level Playing Field Methodology (guidance on the production of playing pitch strategies) when undertaking open space assessments.**

CABE Space

3.50   CABE Space is a part of The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), and was set up in early 2003. It has a primary role to champion excellence in the design and management of parks, streets and squares in towns and cities.

3.51   CABE Space receives its funding through central government and their work is to encourage a more holistic approach to open space. A primary objective for CABE Space is to ensure people have access to good quality, well designed, and well managed public open spaces. They are raising the profile and importance of open space in the wider agenda of regeneration, health and well being of local communities.

3.52   The key document relevant to this strategy is the best practice guidance for developing Open Space Strategies (2009).

Open Space Strategies – Best Practice Guidance (2009)

3.53   The guidance has been developed to support the guiding messages in PPG17 and to contribute to the wider agenda of improving open space through a more strategic approach. The document outlines the importance of good strategic planning in relation to open space and the benefits it can bring.

3.54   The document demonstrates the importance of developing an open space strategy and the benefits it can bring. These include:

- **Reinforce local identity and civic pride**

- **Enhance the physical character of an area, shaping existing and future development**

- **Improve physical and social inclusion, including accessibility**

- **Provide connected routes between places for wildlife, recreation, walking and cycling, and safer routes to schools**

- **Protect and enhance biodiversity and ecological habitats**

- **Provide green infrastructure and ecosystem services**

- **Provide for children and young people's play and recreation**

- **Raise property values and aid urban regeneration**

- **Boost the economic potential of tourism, leisure and cultural activities**

- **Provide cultural, social, recreational, sporting and community facilities**

- **Protect and promote understanding of the historical, cultural and archaeological value of places**

- **Contribute to the creation of healthy places, including quiet areas**

- **Provide popular outdoor educational facilities**

- **Promote the opportunities for local food production**

- **Help mitigate and adapt to climate change**

- **Improve opportunities to enjoy contact with the natural world**

3.55   The guidance outlines 3 stages to developing an open space strategy:

- **Stage 1 Prepare** - includes the importance of robust consultation, reviewing core documents and policies from national to local level, development of local typologies and the use of digital mapping to establish quantity, quality and accessibility of open space. The gathering of evidence is crucial to providing a robust assessment and to enabling informed management decisions

- **Stage 2 Deliver** - pulling together the key themes and strands into a clear and concise framework, establishing standard of provision and preparing a final strategy

- **Stage 3 Monitor and Review –** providing key performance indicators, establishing responsibility for delivery and timescales for reviewing the action plan and strategy.

Is the Grass Greener? (2004)

3.56   Using international examples of both good and bad practice to demonstrate issues common in many local authorities that have been encountered abroad, the guide focuses on maintenance and management practices to provide challenging solutions to common issues, such as:

- **Poor maintenance**

- **Hostile environments**

- **Lack of a strategic coherent approach to the management of greenspace**

- **Poor design**

- **Lacking of facilities to engage users**

3.57   CABE Space have produced a wealth of similar publications including 'A Manifesto for Better Public Spaces (2003) and 'The Value of Public Space (2004)', which promote and advise on the value and benefit that good quality well managed open space can provide. Key messages from all the documents include:

- **High quality public environment is a vital part of any regeneration strategy and can have a positive impact on the value of property**

- **Good quality accessible open space is important to our mental well being and research shows that well maintained spaces can help reduce stress and encourage more people to become active**

- **Open spaces that are well designed, well used and intrinsic to a community can reduce crime or the fear of crime, they benefit young people and encourage children to play freely outdoors experiencing the natural environment**

- **Well designed and well maintained spaces can bring people together and foster social ties**

- **Open space brings people closer to the natural environment, biodiversity and wildlife**

The Green Flag Award - The National Standard for Parks and Open Spaces

3.58   This is a national award scheme for parks and open space in England, Wales and more recently Scotland. The Civic Trust manages the award on behalf of central government and is backed by Natural England, English Heritage, the Countryside Commission for Wales, the Heritage Lottery and other similar organisations.

3.59   The scheme encourages the provision of good quality parks and open spaces that are well managed and sustainable. The award encourages community involvement and stipulates that sites must have a management plan in order to be considered.

3.60   The award is increasingly raising expectations as to what public open spaces can offer and gives reassurance to people that the value they place on their local space is not misdirected.

Local Policy

Unitary Development Plan (UDP) – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (2005)

3.61   One of the key functions of Walsall's UDP is that the Council are able to use it in making decisions on planning proposals. It aims to help towards the achievement of many of the priorities of Walsall Council.

3.62   The UDP also considers providing for leisure and community needs within Walsall and the Council seeks to collaborate with other partners to improve and expand facilities for:

- **Entertainment and culture** – increase and improve the provision of entertainment and culture facilities.

- **Urban open space** – protect, maintain and enhance existing open space. The aim is that all people will have convenient, safe access to a range of open space facilities, and that they will be encouraged to use them. The focus will be on improving existing open spaces rather than creating new ones.

- **Greenways** - construct, safeguard and promote a Greenway network along linear features such as canals, disused rail formations and open spaces, for use by pedestrians and cyclists.

- **Canals and waterways** - enhance the navigation, recreation, nature conservation, heritage and environmental value of the Borough's waterway network, including disused waterway features.

- **Sport and recreation** - protect, enhance and expand facilities for sport and recreation, both formal and informal.

- **Education, health and community activity** – enhance existing, and the provision of new, facilities for education, health and other community needs will be encouraged.

3.63   It is the Council's aim to promote the provision of a wide range of sport, recreation, leisure, entertainment, arts, education, health and other community facilities in locations that are easily accessible by a choice of means of transport.

3.64   The Council will produce an Annual Monitoring Report which will be used to review progress on implementing the UDP, identify new trends which may influence it, and examine the need for review or alteration.

Annual Monitoring Report 2009 (Monitoring Year April 2008 – March 2009)

3.65   The Annual Monitoring Report provides information on the implementation of the local development scheme, and the extent to which the policies set out in the local development documents are being achieved. This report also contains information about key indicators including population, the state of the economy and the environment that reflect the quality of life in the borough.

3.66   The report summarises the implementation of policies relating to leisure and community needs for 2008/09. This includes the retention of the Green Flag Award for Palfrey Park and Willenhall Memorial Park. In addition the report highlights that no development has taken place on protected urban open spaces or playing fields / sports pitches in accordance with policies LC1 and LC6.

Black Country Core Strategy Submission Document (2010)

3.67   The four Black Country Local Authorities (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton) have agreed to work together to produce a Black Country Core Strategy in partnership with the community and other key organisations such as voluntary and private sector bodies and businesses. This will be a 'spatial planning document' (dealing not only with land use but also environmental, economic and social issues) that will set out the vision, objectives and strategy for future development in the Black Country to 2026. The Core Strategy will be a Development Plan Document and will form the basis of the Black Country Local Authorities' Local Development Frameworks.

3.68   The key policy area within the Core Strategy relating to open space, sport and recreation is ENV 6, this states that: "In addition to the values and functions of open space set out in Government Policy and Guidance, development proposals should recognise the following roles that are of particular importance in the Black Country:

- **Improving the image and environmental quality of the Black Country;**

- **Defining and enhancing local distinctiveness;**

- **Reducing potential urban heat island effects;**

- **Preserving and enhancing diversity in the natural and built environment;**

- **Preserving and enhancing industrial, archaeological and architectural heritage, including canals;**

- **Providing components of a high quality, multifunctional green space network or "Urban Park";**

- **Enhancing people's mental and physical well-being;**

- **Strengthening (through extension, increased access and enhanced value) the existing greenway network.**

3.69   Development that would reduce the overall value of the open space, sport and recreation network in the Black Country will be resisted. Development that would increase the overall value of the open space, sport and recreation network will be encouraged, especially in areas of deficiency."

3.70   Many such areas of deficiency exist within 'regeneration corridors' devised as priority areas for investment and regeneration within the Black Country Joint Core Strategy. A key aim of this audit and assessment, in acting as technical evidence for future documents created as part of Walsall's Local Development Framework, is to confirm the need to safeguard and enhance open space, sport and recreational facilities in these priority areas for growth and regeneration.

3.71   A common theme for all of the Black Country regeneration corridors is to "provide a sustainable mix of modern, high quality employment land and new residential communities…set within and linked to by comprehensive networks of attractive green infrastructure". The results of this PPG17 assessment and the emerging Black Country Environmental Infrastructure Guidance (EIG) will help inform specific proposals for green infrastructure provision in the regeneration corridors.

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Urban Open Space – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (2006)

3.72   The aim is that the Council's SPD is used in conjunction with the UDP in order to explain local standards and the contributions which should be made towards the provision and improvement of open spaces.

3.73   The SPD outlines that there is more of an issue in the Borough with regard to the quality of facilities rather than quantity. The Council therefore intends to improve and maintain improvement to all existing open space wherever possible. The emphasis will be on coping with increased pressure on existing provision with focus on meeting the needs of the local people.

Sustainable Community Strategy (2008) – Walsall Borough Council

3.74   Walsall Borough Council's Sustainable Community Strategy is a twelve year plan which was produced as a result of a consultation with people who live and work in the area to find out about their aspirations for the future. The Strategy outlines the Council's priorities and how they will be achieved. It is split into three key themes which are people, places and prosperity.

- **People** – A key priority for people in the Walsall area is that they feel safe and keep healthy. It was made apparent that people in the area are concerned about the availability and adequacy of health care facilities. The Council intends to reduce the health inequalities which currently exist between the east and west of the borough. This will be achieved in a number of ways including the provision of services that encourage independence, and physical and emotional health. The Sustainable Community Strategy aims to establish what factors cause ill-health and work on these factors in order to improve life expectancy and reduce infant mortality.

- **Places** – The places section of the Strategy outlines the Council's intentions to focus investments in new homes, jobs, transport improvements, community facilities and the environment. The result of the consultation showed that people living in the borough would like their local neighbourhood to be a place where people have access to high quality open space for play, recreation and enjoyment. The Council aims to create cleaner, greener and safer neighbourhoods by maintaining existing feature, protect species and create new habitats. They also wish to value and preserve the natural environment by promoting the protection and conservation of species, habitats and geological features. The Strategy also outlines the Council's intentions to provide efficient and effective transport access to services and encourage active transport including walking and cycling.

- **Prosperity** – The prosperity part of the strategy aims to reduce the difference between rich and poor and thus improve the economy and social well-being for individuals. Those living in Walsall made it clear that they wished to see better use of canals and the development of amenities and attractions alongside them. Within the Sustainable Community Strategy, Walsall Council outline their intentions to make a special effort to link their footpaths and cycle routes to the borough's network of schools and local centres and encourage children to do more beneficial physical activity and reduce the negative impact of people travelling to school by car.

Walsall Greenspace Strategy 2006-2011 – Walsall Borough Council

3.75   The greenspace strategy is the council's response to the findings of a greenspace audit. The audit found that overall Walsall is well served by green spaces and the quantity of all the types of green spaces in the borough compares well with neighbouring boroughs and other similar local authorities nationally.

3.76   However, the amount of green space in some areas and the level of access to sites vary in different parts of the borough. It was also found that the quality of greenspace in the area varies across the borough.

3.77   The aim for Walsall's greenspace strategy is, "to have excellent, well used and valued green spaces that are safe, accessible and welcoming at the heart of all local communities that meet the needs of current and future generations"

3.78   The Council's greenspace strategy comprises of 5 visions for the area which are:

- **A better quality environment**

- **Healthy, safe and secure green space**

- **Raising standards**

- **Listening to and engaging people**

- **Achieving excellence within the authority**

3.79   It is also the aim that the strategy will raise standards, create good practice, improve quality and move forwards in the future.

3.80   The greenspace strategy proposes that the green space service focuses on a number of key green spaces including both formal parks and gardens and semi-natural green space and considers the resource allocation across these premier sites. The strategy suggests there are 25 premier green spaces in the Borough, these are listed in

3.81   Table 5.

Table 5 - Premier Green Spaces from the Walsall Greenspace Strategy

Site ID	Site Name	Hierarchy	Neighbourhood Management Area
8048	Arboretum	Borough	Area 4
7031	Arboretum Extension	Borough	Area 4
7028	Barr Beacon	Borough	Area 2
1032	Hay Head Wood	Borough	Area 2
9070	Rough Wood Chase	Borough	Area 6
1011	The Airport Playing Fields	Borough	Area 2
1008	Blackwood Park	Neighbourhood	Area 2
3030	Brownhills Common	Neighbourhood	Area 1
1034	Cuckoos Nook & The Dingle	Neighbourhood	Area 2
7009	Doe Bank Park	Neighbourhood	Area 2
4023	George Rose Park	Neighbourhood	Area 5
3012	Holland Park	Neighbourhood	Area 1
2059	King George Vth Playing Fields	Neighbourhood	Area 3
4015	Kings Hill Park	Neighbourhood	Area 5
2008	Leamore Park	Neighbourhood	Area 3
1001	Leighswood Park	Neighbourhood	Area 2
7008	Merrions Wood	Neighbourhood	Area 4
5004	Palfrey Park	Neighbourhood	Area 4
8014	Park Lime Pits	Neighbourhood	Area 4
6010	Pelsall Common	Neighbourhood	Area 1
6017	Pelsall North Common	Neighbourhood	Area 1
5010	Pleck Park	Neighbourhood	Area 4
8009	Reedswood Park	Neighbourhood	Area 3
3013	Shire Oak Park	Neighbourhood	Area 2
9019	Willenhall Memorial Park	Neighbourhood	Area 6

3.82   The greenspace strategy sets in place the improvements needed to ensure that the key green spaces in the borough are improved to a good standard and robust measures put in place to ensure that these standards, management and maintenance of all green spaces can be sustained. The Council aim to improve the average quality score of its premier green spaces and by the end of the strategy period these sites should be of Green Flag standard.

Walsall Corporate Plan 2009/10 to 2011/12 – Walsall Borough Council

3.83   The Council have identified a number of outcomes in the 2009/10 Corporate Plan, these outcomes are as follows:

- **Healthier Citizens** – This includes the reduction of health inequalities across the borough and addresses the difference in health experiences between those living in the west and the east. It is also the aim that through the Children and Young People's Plan services for children and young people will be developed and there will be an increase in the level of physical activity amongst this group.

- **Safer and More Secure Citizens** – The Council aims to assist more vulnerable adults to live safer and more independent lives within the community.

- **Aspiring and Achieving** Citizens – The aim is to encourage young people, parents, families and communities to have higher aspirations and achieve qualifications.

- **Higher Quality of Life (cleaner, greener, and mobile)** – It is the Council's view that a high quality environment improves quality of life. There are concerns about litter and graffiti in the area and the Council will improve household recycling in order to reduce the subsequent impact on the environment.

- **Active Citizens** – The Council will support citizens in becoming more active members of the community and encourage them to be more involved in decisions which affect them and the community they live in.

- **Financially and Materially Secure Citizens** – Local businesses and people will be supported by the Council with the aim of creating and maintaining employment and training opportunities.

- **Citizens Free From Discrimination and Harassment** – Through the Community Cohesion Strategy the Council aims to ensure that all residents are free from discrimination and harassment.

- **Effective use of Resources** – The Council aims to reduce energy use and the town centre office accommodation footprint in order to improve value for money.

- **Deliver Quality Services to Meet Customer Expectations** – Complaints will be responded to more quickly and it is hoped that this will be achieve by the Council listening to citizens in order to meet expectations.

- **Take Forward the Transformation Agenda** – The Council aims to be more lean, flexible and responsive in order to reduce its operating costs.

3.84   The Corporate Plan 2009/10 to 2011/12 included information regarding a consultation which was undertaken by Walsall Council between September and October 2008 as part of their budget allocation. The top 10 priorities which emerged from the consultation were activities for teenagers (37%), facilities for young children (21%), parks and open spaces (15%), and community activities (11%). Through the consultation it was found that local people wish to have cheaper sports and swimming, and see the introduction of local cycling initiatives in order to improve health in the area.

3.85   Walsall Council's Corporate Plan also discusses the involvement of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and the Primary Capital Programme (PCP) within the area. Combining these two schemes could lead to a large amount of investment being made in the schools in the area. Since this work was commissioned, the BSF Programme has been cancelled (June 2010) by the new Government. The investments proposed would have seen a development in the services for children in areas such as regeneration, sport and leisure. Despite the urgent need for investment in the education stock in Walsall, the re-development of 5 Wave 6a schools has now been cancelled in the Borough.

Walsall Local Compact (September 2005) – Walsall Borough Council

3.86   Walsall Local Compact is an agreement between Walsall Council, the local NHS, Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership, and the Voluntary and Community Sector. It is a framework which has been designed in order to get groups working together more effectively. It is the role of those groups in the Compact to address local issues and concerns and reflect the local context.

3.87   The partners involved in the Compact were selected by Walsall Council in order cover the varied needs, concerns and circumstances of those living in the area. Within the partners involved in the Compact are local clubs, societies and sports clubs. These clubs and societies are made up of a combination of small and large groups, and voluntary and employed staff in order to get a range of views.

Walsall Council Climate Change Strategy 2008-2012

3.88   The issue of climate change continues to rise up the political agenda. All organisations are increasingly affected by pressures to meet greenhouse gas emission reduction targets agreed under the Kyoto protocol, the EU and its own local commitments.

3.89   Many pressures to engage in the climate agenda are already being applied to local authorities through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process and through the introduction of the Local Government White Paper (Strong and Prosperous Communities), where councils are being encouraged to demonstrate community leadership by addressing climate change issues.

3.90   By adopting their Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan the council will have set a high benchmark in the global effort to tackle the issues associated with Climate Change and provide a standard for which all service areas can integrate climate change actions within their Service Plans.

3.91   The council aim to lead by example to reduce its carbon footprint by reducing energy consumption across its buildings and services, and adapt and prepare the borough for climate change through appropriate planning, investment and delivery of its services.

3.92   The Action Plan outlines medium and long-term actions structured into eight key themes:

- **Council buildings and local infrastructure**

- **Communication and leadership**

- **Procurement**

- **Waste**

- **Housing**

- **Planning and new development**

- **Biodiversity**

- **Transport and transport infrastructure**

3.93   The strategy will aid the council in considering how all of its services and actions contribute to, and are affected by climate change, and how by minimising impacts and adapting to the already current effects of a changing climate it can reduce the effects.

Walsall's Play Strategy (2007 – 2012) – Walsall Play Partnership

3.94   The strategy is the culmination of a number of different pieces of work carried out by member organisations of the Walsall Play Partnership. The focus of the strategy is the provision and improvement of free, open access play opportunities for children and young people aged from birth to 19 years.

3.95   The Strategy endeavours to adopt the children's play council's seven play objectives which are:

- **The provision extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.**

- **The provision recognises the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.**
- **The provision manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.**

- **The provision maximises the range of play opportunities.**

- **The provision fosters independence and self-esteem.**

- **The provision fosters children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.**

- **The provision fosters the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.**

3.96   The strategy aims to enhance play opportunities across the whole borough, with particular emphasis being placed on inclusive play.

Birmingham & The Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan (2000)

3.97   The Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan is made up of a Framework for Action which provides an introduction to the Biodiversity Action Plan followed by the individual Issues, Species and Habitat Action Plans which propose actions with target dates for the conservation of local biodiversity. The Biodiversity Action Plan is intended to inform policy and action by a range of organisations. Carrying out all the actions proposed within the Issues, Species and Habitat Action Plans is, however, beyond the resources of the organisations involved and therefore an important part of the Biodiversity Action Plan process is to establish priorities for action and to secure resources.

3.98   Publishing a Biodiversity Action Plan is only a start, to result in real change the proposals must be implemented. The Steering Group will continue to oversee and monitor the implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan in partnership with everyone currently involved in the process and those who will become involved in the future.

Walsall Council Allotment Strategy 2007 - 2012

3.99   The Allotment Strategy is a live document intended for regular review and has been drafted for the Council's allotments managed by the Council and local management associations, but not for privately managed allotments. The strategy aims to:

- **Clarify the status of, and council commitment to allotments**

- **Set standards for the provision of allotments in Walsall;**

- **Increase the uptake of allotments;**

- **Improve the standard of service provision;**

- **Increase the benefits derived from allotments.**

3.100   In implementing the Allotment Strategy a service will be developed in which people can expect:

- **Suitable available allotment gardens within 2 kilometres of every residential property.**

- **Safe and secure allotments sites with adequate fencing, good access, and adequate toilet facilities,**

- **Fair, efficient and effective allotment administration;**

- **Effective and appropriate allocation of resources;**

- **Adequate irrigation supplies by means of mains water standpipes; storage butts; and recycled rainwater provision.;**

- **Opportunities for developing gardening skills;**

- **Encouragement to sites and associations to develop local management;**

- **Fair and equitable rents and charges.**

4 Consultation

4.1 From the Consultation undertaken to inform this strategy a number of issues have been raised with regards to the provision, management and maintenance of open space, sport and recreation facilities in Walsall. The core key issues are outlined below, a more detailed breakdown can be found in Appendix 2.

Public Consultation

4.2 In order to develop a strategy and set local policies from it, it was essential to consult with the local community to gain an insight into local needs and aspirations. It was also important to ascertain the views of local communities as part of the community planning process. The Council undertook consultation with the residents and Borough Council staff living or working within Walsall. This took place through a standard questionnaire approach as follows:

- **Online Questionnaire –** this went 'live' in November 2009 and was made available to local people until January 2010. The survey was advertised in the local press, on the Council Web Site, public libraries and internal intranet.

- **Paper Questionnaires –** a paper copy of the questionnaire was available from Council Offices on request.

- **Freephone Consultation –** The Council advertised the opportunity to provide comments and complete the public survey via a freephone telephone line made available throughout the consultation process.

4.3 Consultation with the public has attempted to identify local needs and aspirations and importantly to identify the issues at a local level to enable informed decisions about the future management and provision of open space to be developed.

4.4 The questionnaire responses have been analysed, and a database has been established that will provide the Council with detailed analysis for types of open space and areas of residence. Evidence gathered from other Council-initiated consultation has also been used to strengthen the development of this study.

4.5 The survey was designed to assess views of residents, their attitude and aspirations with regard to open space, sport and recreation facilities across the Borough. In particular the survey set out to identify and establish the following:

- **The usage of open space, sport and recreational facilities by residents within the Borough**

- **The value local people attach to open space, sport and recreational facilities**

- **The attitude of local residents towards open space, sport and recreation facilities**

- **Attitudes to the level of existing provision and facilities**

- **The frequency of use by local residents to the differing types of provision**

- **Main mode of transport local resident use to access open space, sport and recreational facilities**

- **The views of residents on the accessibility of open space, sport and recreational facilities**

- **The barriers that prevent or reduce local use of open space, sport and recreational facilities**

- **Local needs and expectations**

Public Consultation Summary

4.6 The following provides a summary of the public consultation in Walsall. 425 local people completed the survey, it is important to note that not all respondents answered each question. 45% of respondents identified themselves as male, 49% identified themselves as female, and 6% did not disclose their gender.

4.7 Of the respondents who gave their ethnic group, 51% identified themselves as being White (British, Irish or Other), 40% identified themselves as Asian/Asian British, 4% identified themselves as Mixed British, and 3% identified themselves as Black/Black British.

4.8 4% of respondents indicated that they consider themselves to be disabled, 84% said that they do not consider themselves to be disabled and the remaining 12% did not answer the question.

4.9 Figure 1 identifies the number of users of each of the open space or facility types in the Borough. Of the 12 areas and facilities identified, parks and gardens are the most commonly used with 365 local people using them.

Figure 1– Number of users to open space, sport and recreation facilities
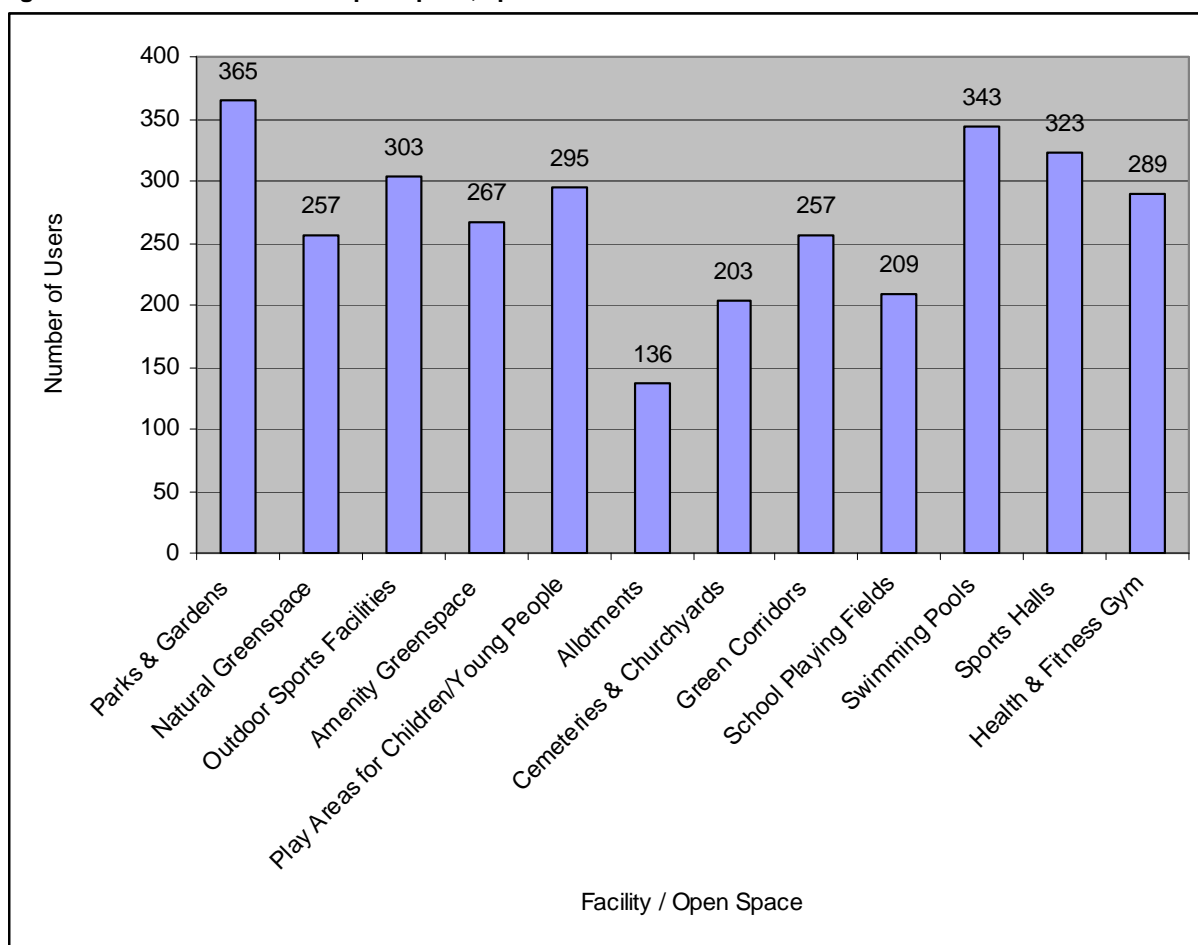
4.10   Figure 2 further breaks down the number of users of open space and identifies how frequently local people use each of the facilities in the Borough.

Figure 2 - Frequency of visitors to open space sport and recreation facilities
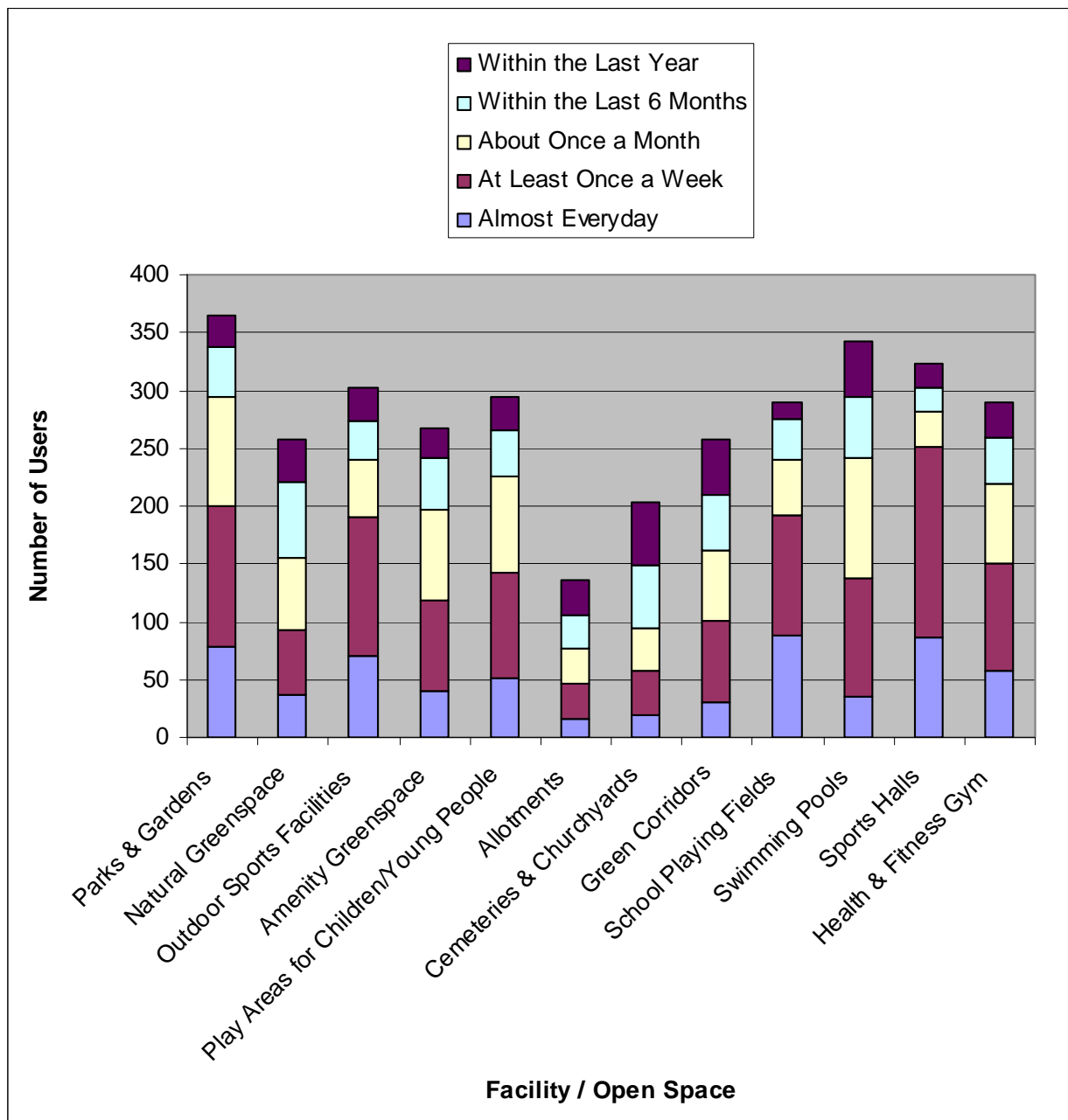
4.11   Figure 3 indicates the 6 areas which respondents are from, some of the local people who responded live in areas outside of the Walsall Borough and are included in the 'Other' category. In addition to this, some respondents either did not indicate their area of residence or were not specific enough in their response in order to be included in the figures for an area. Those local people who did not disclose this information are included in the 'None' category.

Figure 3 - Neighbourhood Areas where respondents are from
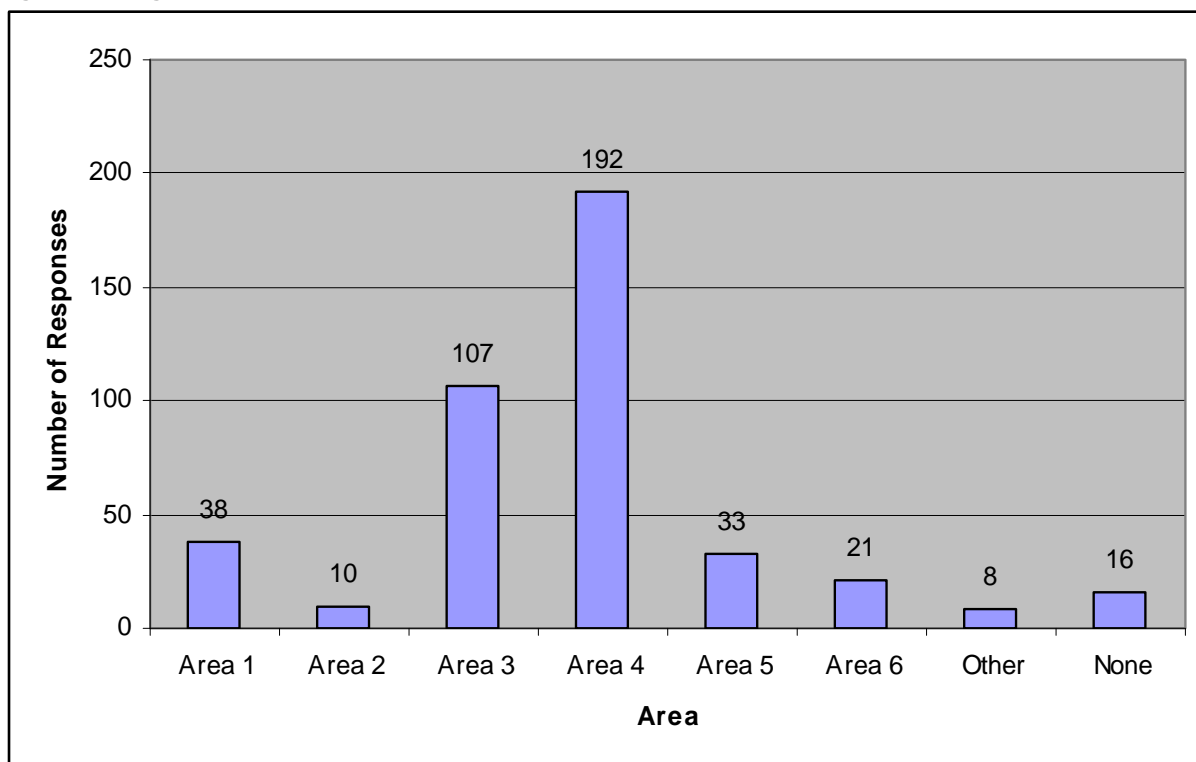
4.12   It is important that accessibility thresholds developed reflect local travel times. As such the accessibility thresholds have been established to reflect the more locally specific travel times and distance local people in Walsall travel to access the different types of provision. To establish accessibility thresholds the response given by local people has been utilised to illustrate the time and distance local residents are willing to travel to access the various types of provision.

4.13   Table 6 indicates the response given as to the main method of travel used to get to the different types of open space across the Borough. The table shows that the main method of travel is walking with the second most popular method of transport being driving.

4.14   Public transport (buses) and cycling accounts for between 2% and 9% within each typology.

Table 6 - Type of transport used to access open space

Type of Space	Walk	Drive	Public Transport	Cycle
Parks & Gardens	79%	14%	3%	4%
Natural Greenspace	63%	28%	4%	5%
Outdoor Sports Facilities	64%	27%	6%	3%
Amenity Greenspace	69%	20%	6%	5%
Play Areas for Children/Young People	80%	12%	3%	5%

Type of Space	Walk	Drive	Public Transport	Cycle
Allotments	62%	27%	5%	5%
Cemeteries & Churchyards	42%	45%	9%	4%
Green Corridors	70%	19%	4%	7%
School Playing Fields	82%	12%	4%	2%
Swimming Pools	57%	33%	9%	2%
Sports Halls	74%	19%	5%	2%
Health & Fitness Gym	58%	31%	8%	3%

4.15   Local residents were asked to identify how long it took for them to travel to facilities in the Borough. The results in Figure 4 indicated that most respondents rarely travel more than 20 minutes to reach their nearest open space.

4.16   Churchyards and Cemeteries appear to be the open spaces which people travel furthest to. This means that it takes local people longer to reach these open spaces than any other. Figure 4 does not include the information from respondents who did not indicate, or did not know how long it takes them to get to their nearest open space, sport or recreation facility.

Figure 4 - Time taken for local people to travel to open spaces in the Borough
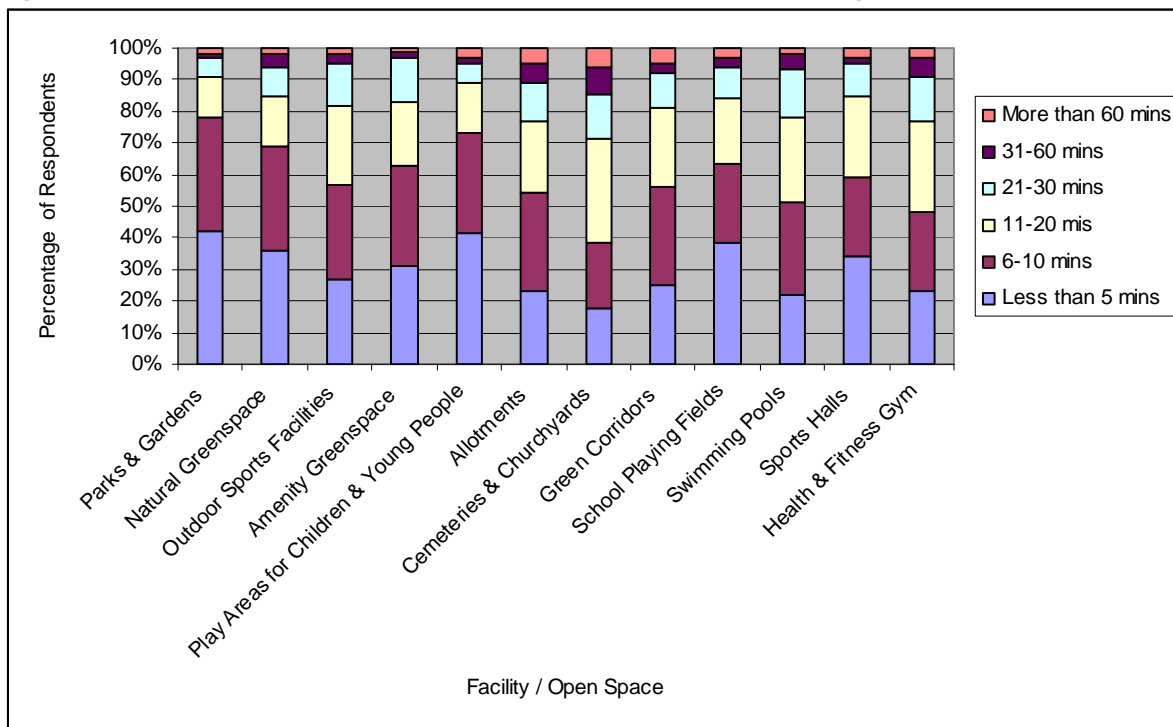
4.17   Figure 5 indicates whether or not respondents think the travel time is acceptable or not. This does not include those respondents who gave no indication or didn't know if this time was acceptable. It is clear that most local people think the travel times to open space, sport and recreation facilities within the Borough are acceptable. People think that the least acceptable travel time is the time it takes to travel to their nearest allotment, and the most acceptable time is to their nearest park or garden.

Figure 5 - Is the travel time acceptable?
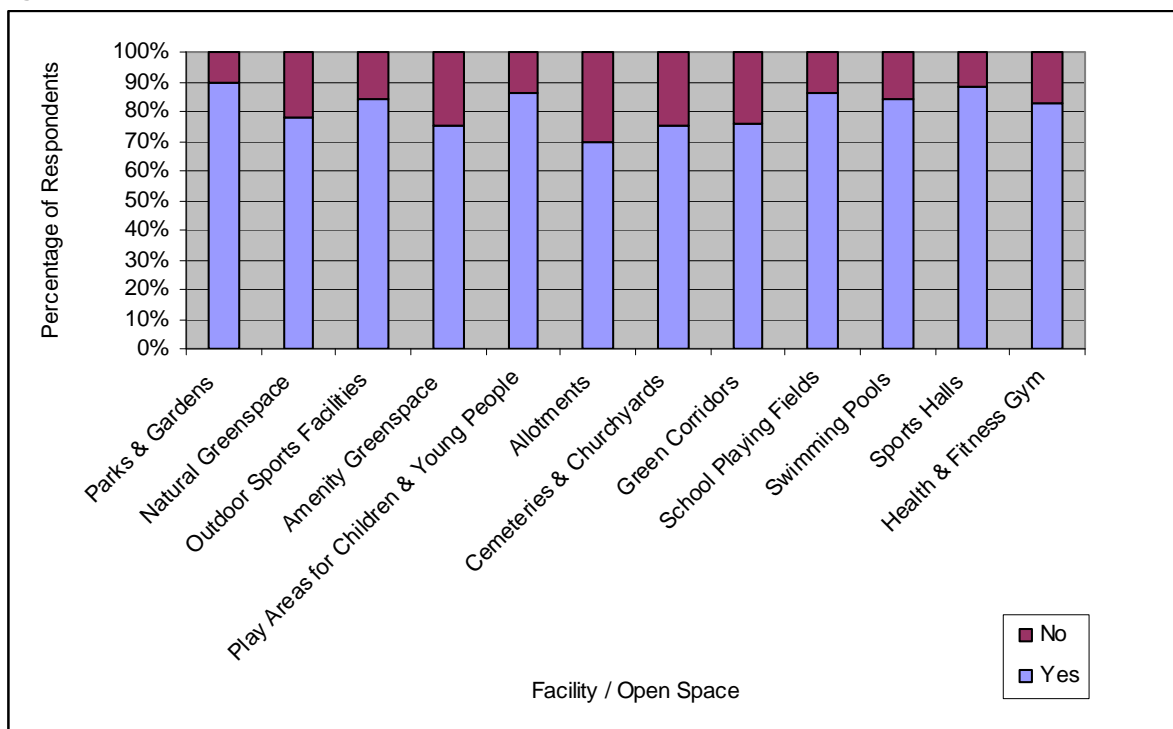
4.18   Local people identified the following with regards to the time it takes them to travel to their nearest open space, sport or recreation facility.

- **Parks and Gardens**
  - ➢ 79% of respondents state they walk to parks and gardens
  - ➢ 47% of those who do walk do so in less than 5 minutes
  - ➢ 14% of respondents state that they drive to parks and gardens
  - ➢ 11% of those who do drive do so in less than 5 minutes
  - ➢ 90% of respondents believe that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest park is acceptable

- **Natural Greenspace**
  - ➢ 36% of respondents travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest natural and natural greenspace site
  - ➢ 68% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest natural site
  - ➢ 94% travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest natural site
  - ➢ 78% of respondents believe that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest natural greenspace is acceptable

- **Outdoor Sport**
  - ➢ 28% of respondents travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest outdoor sports facility
  - ➢ 57% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest outdoor sports site
  - ➢ 95% travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest outdoor sports facility
  - ➢ 84% of respondents state that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest outdoor sports facility is acceptable

- **Amenity Greenspace**
  - ➢ 32% of respondents travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest amenity greenspace
  - ➢ 63% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest amenity greenspace
  - ➢ 97% state that they travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest amenity greenspace
  - ➢ 75% of respondents believe that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest amenity greenspace is acceptable

- **Provision for Children and Young People**
  - ➢ 41% of respondents travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest play area
  - ➢ 73% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest play area
  - ➢ 96% travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest play area
  - ➢ 86% of respondents said that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest play area is acceptable

- **Allotments**
  - ➢ 23% of respondents said that they travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest allotment site
  - ➢ 52% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest allotment
  - ➢ 89% said that they travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest allotment site
  - ➢ 70% of respondents believe that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest allotment is acceptable

- **Cemeteries and Churchyards**
  - ➢ 17% of the respondents said that they travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest cemetery or churchyard
  - ➢ 38% travel less that 10 minutes to their nearest cemetery or churchyard
  - ➢ 81% said they travel for less than 30 minutes to their nearest cemetery or churchyard
  - ➢ 75% of respondents said that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest cemetery or churchyard is acceptable

- **Green Corridors**
  - 28% of the respondents said that they travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest green corridor
  - 57% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest green corridor
  - 93% travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest green corridor
  - 76% of respondents believe that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest green corridor is acceptable

- **School Playing Fields**
  - 39% of respondents said that they travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest school playing field
  - 63% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest school playing field
  - 94% travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest school playing field
  - 86% of respondents said that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest school playing field is acceptable

- **Swimming Pools**
  - 22% of respondents said that they travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest swimming pool
  - 51% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest swimming pool
  - 93% said that they travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest swimming pool
  - 84% of respondents said that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest swimming pool is acceptable

- **Sports Halls**
  - 35% of respondents said that they travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest sports hall
  - 59% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest sports hall
  - 95% travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest sports hall
  - 88% of respondents said that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest sports hall is acceptable

- **Health and Fitness Gyms**
  - 25% of respondents said that they travel less than 5 minutes to their nearest health and fitness gym
  - 47% travel less than 10 minutes to their nearest health and fitness gym
  - 91% travel less than 30 minutes to their nearest health and fitness gym
  - 83% of respondents said that the time it takes them to travel to their nearest health and fitness gym is acceptable

4.19 Table 7 demonstrates the average or acceptable travel time of respondents to each type of open space, sport and recreation facility. Walking distance is based on an average walking speed of 3 mph.

Table 7 - Average travel time of respondents to each type of facility / open space

Open Space / Facility	Average Travel Time	Equivalent Distance Walking (metres)
Parks & Gardens	8 minutes	644
Natural Greenspace	11 minutes	885
Outdoor Sports Facilities	12 minutes	966
Amenity Greenspace	6 minutes	482

Open Space / Facility	Average Travel Time	Equivalent Distance Walking (metres)
Play Areas for Children & Young People	9 minutes	724
Allotments	13 minutes	1046
Cemeteries & Churchyards	15 minutes	1207
Green Corridors	12 minutes	966
School Playing Fields	10 minutes	805
Swimming Pools	13 minutes	1046
Sports Halls	12 minutes	966
Health & Fitness Gym	14 minutes	1127

4.20   Local residents were asked to rate the quality of facilities using the descriptions – very good, good, average, poor and very poor. Table 8 summarises the responses of those who use the facilities.

Table 8 – Perceptions of Quality of Open Space

Facility / Open Space	% of Respondents				
	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Parks & Gardens	25%	31%	32%	8%	4%
Natural Greenspace	18%	32%	34%	10%	6%
Outdoor Sports Facilities	23%	32%	27%	12%	5%
Amenity Greenspace	14%	33%	31%	16%	5%
Play Areas for Children & Young People	21%	28%	27%	15%	9%
Allotments	18%	27%	35%	10%	8%

| Facility / Open Space	% of Respondents				
	Very Good	**Good**	**Average**	**Poor**	**Very Poor**
Cemeteries & Churchyards	16%	32%	37%	8%	7%
Green Corridors	14%	29%	38%	12%	7%
School Playing Fields	28%	33%	26%	8%	5%
Swimming Pools	29%	34%	23%	6%	7%
Sports Halls	35%	32%	22%	6%	6%
Health & Fitness Gym	32%	30%	25%	6%	7%

4.21   Table 8 shows that the general opinion of people is that the quality of facilities and open space on the whole is average or better than average.

- **Sports halls are the most highly rated spaces, being considered to be "good" or "very good" by 67% of the respondents**

- **Swimming pools were rated as "good" or "very good" by 63% of the respondents**

- **Health and fitness suites were rated as being good or above by 62% of the respondents**

- **61% of respondents rate school playing fields as being good or above**

- **Parks and gardens were the next most positively rated facilities with 56% of respondents rating them as good or above**

- **Outdoor sports facilities were rated as "good" or "very good" by 55% or respondents**

- **50% or respondents rated natural greenspace as good or above**

- **Allotment, Cemeteries and churchyards, and green corridors were given the most average rating by respondents with "average" ratings of 35%, 37% and 38% respectively**

- **The most negative response was given for provision for children and young people, 24% of respondents rated these as being "poor" or "very poor"**

- **Amenity greenspace was given the next most negative rating with 21% of respondents rating these as poor or below**

4.22   Local residents were asked about how much of a problem they felt anti-social behaviour, vandalism, dog fouling, graffiti and litter are in open spaces across the. Respondents were asked if they felt these issues were a very big problem, a fairly big problem, not a very big problem or not a problem at all.

4.23   Figure 6 indicates that litter is the biggest problem for local residents with 45% of respondents saying that it is "a very big problem". Graffiti appears to be the least problematic in the Borough with 10% of residents saying that it is "not a problem at all". 35% of respondents said that anti-social behaviour and graffiti were either "not a very big problem" or "not a problem at all".

Figure 6 - Problematic issues of Open Space in the Borough
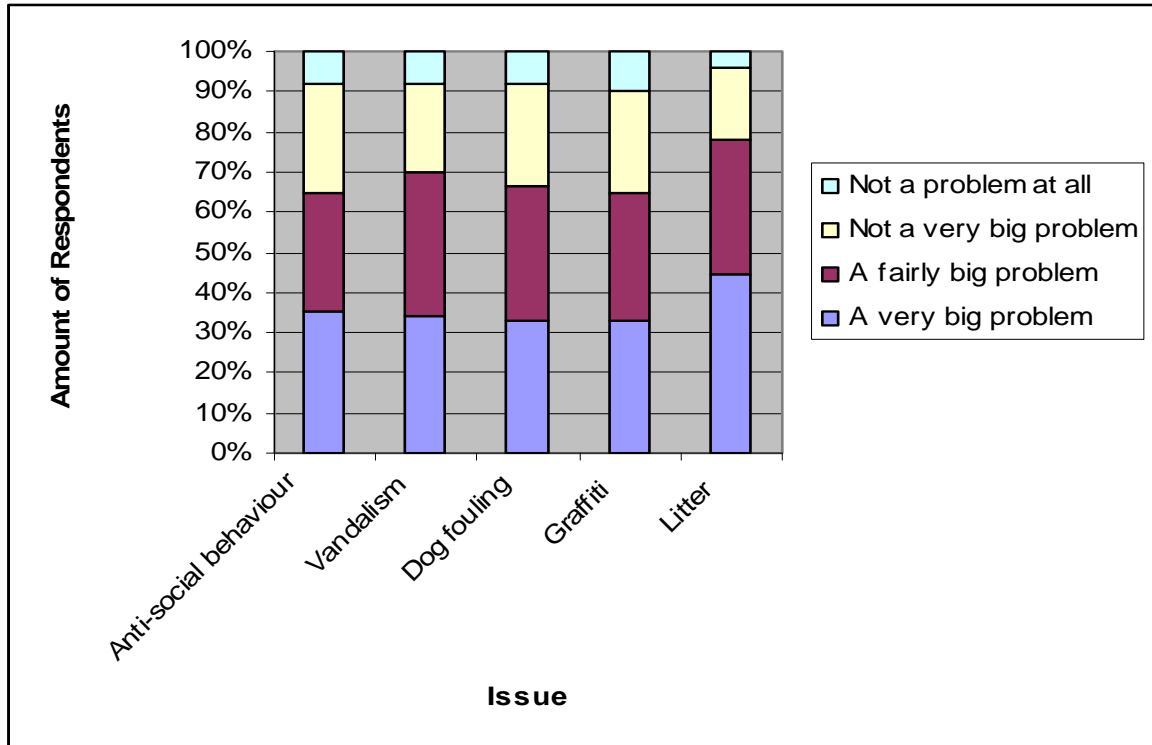
4.24   Figure 7 indicates respondents' ratings on a number of issues within the Borough. Sports facilities were rated the best, with 54% of respondents rating them as "very good" or "good". The ease of access around sites was rated second best with 53% of respondents saying that they were good or above. The range of visitor facilities and range of wildlife were rated the most negatively, with the former being rated good or above by 41% or the respondents and the latter being rated good or above by 42% of respondents.

Figure 7 - Ratings of issues in the Borough
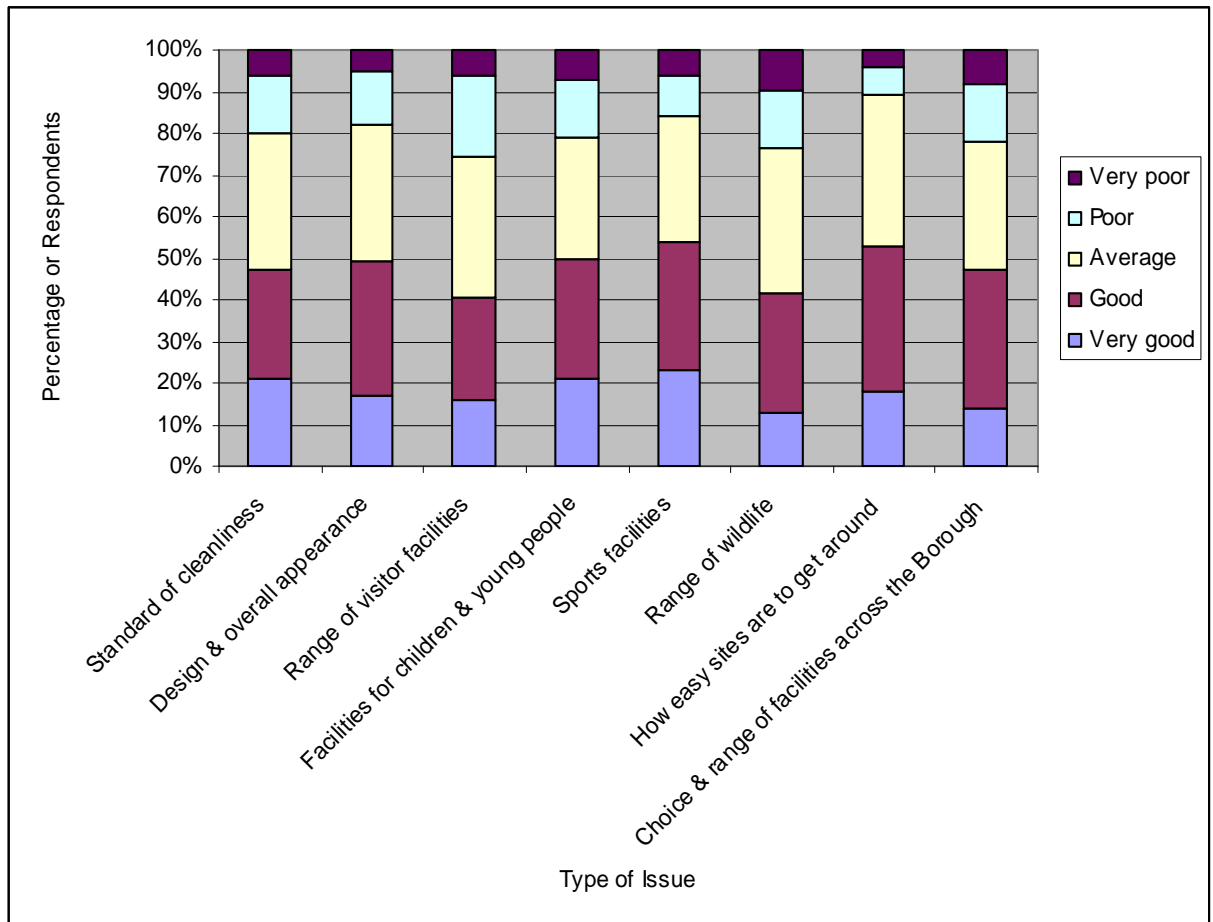
4.25 Local residents were asked about all the reasons why they visit public open space, sport and recreation facilities in the Borough. Figure 8 summarises the results and shows that the greatest response was given to using facilities in order "to get some fresh air". The use of facilities and open spaces to go for walks/exercise, to relax or think, and to meet friends were also popular reasons for visiting. To take "guided walks/talks" was the least popular use of facilities. To see birds and wildlife and to use cafés also had a low number of responses.

Figure 8 - Reasons for visiting open space
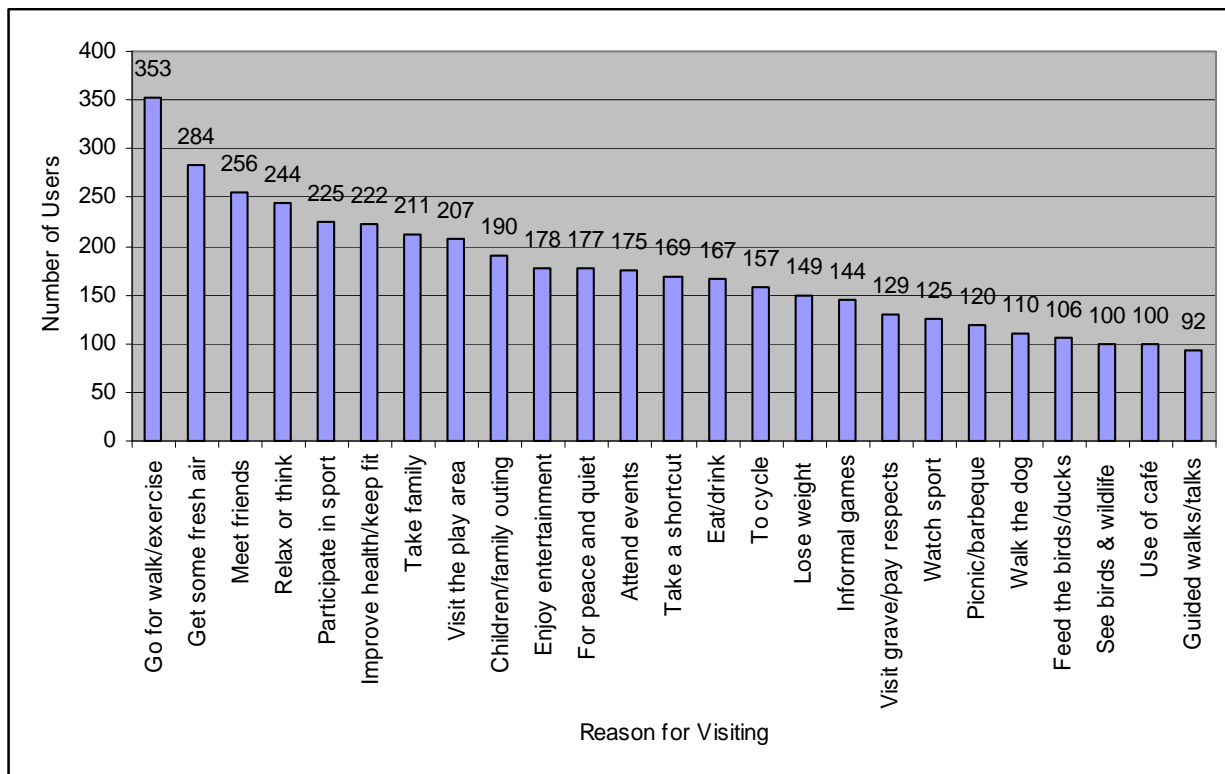
4.26 Local residents were asked if they think that there is enough publicly accessible open space in the Borough. 73% of respondents said that they do think there is enough publicly accessible open space, whilst 27% said that they don't think there is enough.

4.27 Residents were also asked whether or not they think there is enough indoor sports provision in the Borough. 68% said that they do think there is enough whilst 32% said that there is not.

4.28   Residents were asked if there was anything which prevents them from visiting facilities and public open spaces in the Borough. Figure 9 shows the most common reasons given as a barrier for use are dog fouling, lack of facilities, sites too far away, fear of anti-social behaviour and concerns about personal safety. The least common barriers which prevent local people from using facilities in the Borough are the lack of disabled access/facilities, limiting long-term illness or old age, and age/disability. It is interesting to note that the least common reasons for not visiting are related to access to facilities and open space.

Figure 9 - Reasons for not visiting facilities/open spaces
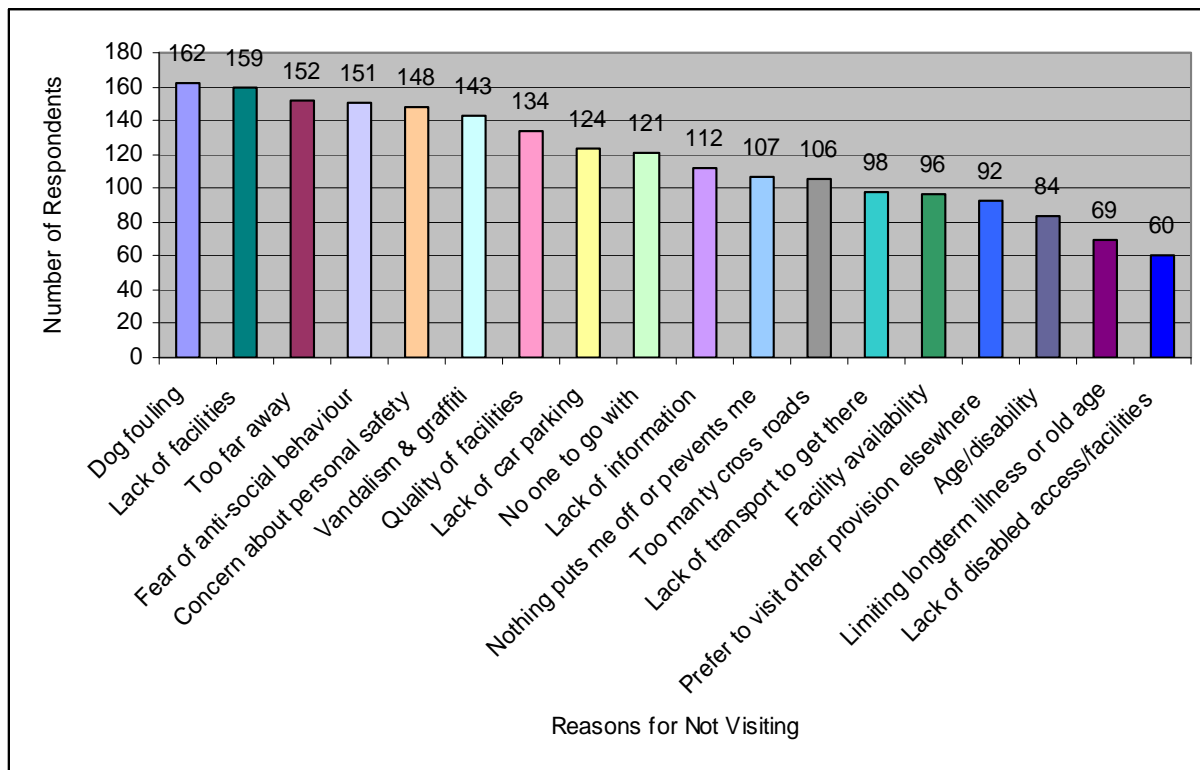
4.29   7% of respondents chose to give an "other" reason as to what puts them off visiting facilities and open spaces in the Borough. Two common reasons for not visiting were "the reduction in opening hours" and "expensive admission to sites". Additional reasons were the amount of litter, the late notification of events, and the problem that some respondents live outside the Borough.

Key Stakeholders

4.30   Consultation has been undertaken with internal consultees at the Council, regional agencies and other relevant individuals. The consultees are all people who in some way or another have an influence or involvement in the provision management, maintenance or public use of open space, sport or recreational facilities across the Borough. Key perceptions and issues derived from respondents are listed below, a list of stakeholders can be found in Appendix 2.

Key Issues

- **A full PPG17 audit and assessment is required to review the existing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for open space and improve the evidence base behind requiring the collection of developer contributions / section 106 (S106) agreements.**

- **S106 contributions received by the Council are allocated on a 'subject' basis, e.g. to urban open space, to education, to healthcare etc, however there have been recent proposals to make this more site specific.**

- **The responsibility of parks and open spaces in Walsall fall under a number of different sections/teams with limited cohesion and greater scope for collaborative working.**

- **There is currently no Service Level Agreement with the Grounds Maintenance Division.**

- **There is a need to enforce S106 contributions to assist facility improvements; however these are being relaxed to encourage development in the current economic downturn.**

- **There is real concern regarding the future of indoor facilities and the need for rationalisation.**

- **Council stock of indoor facilities is old and deteriorating. There is therefore a need to consider new facilities rather than continuing to refurbish old provision.**

- **Annual budget cuts are impacting on the ability to deliver across all departments.**

- **Changing facilities at Council owned playing pitch sites are in a very poor condition.**

- **Recent indoor sports facility analysis outlines the need to rationalise and sets the vision for indoor sports and recreation facilities in Walsall. At present there is no political will to deliver.**

- **Council facilities suffer from lack of investment; the Council tends to offer small community recreation facilities and locations are not always appropriate.**

- **There are few private sector facilities, which creates an opportunity for the Council to develop high quality public facilities, or work in partnership with e.g. Wolverhampton University to provide facilities.**

- **New investment is required in Walsall Town Centre. The town centre offer in Walsall is very important (one of key Black Country priorities, but at the moment the only facilities are the new College facilities (limited) and Gala Baths (ageing).**

- **Water space has been highlighted as an issue in Walsall; there is a significant level of provision but much of it is poor quality.**

- **There is scope to improve community access at school sites across the Borough.**

- **Walsall College has aspirations for a collaborative partnership with the Council, in order to provide key community facility, however only informal discussions have taken place to date. As part of a new facility, the College hopes to include as a minimum a 25m pool, a 4 court sports hall, changing provision and a studio.**

Priorities

- **Development of a common vision for the Council and all of its partners to work towards.**

- **Regeneration should be high on the agenda, especially if this benefits the overall community.**

- **There is a real need for a coordinated approach to management, development and delivery of parks and open space in the Borough.**

- **There is a need for a 'greenspace champion' and working group to encourage inter-departmental working, continue the work of the greenspace strategy and implement PPG17 findings.**

- **There is a need to obtain Section 106 contributions wherever possible to ensure the delivery of the quality of provision required by the local community.**

- **Priorities should include improving the quality of open space, sport and recreation facilities throughout the Borough.**

- **Links to education and improved use of indoor and outdoor facilities.**

Schools & Colleges

4.31   Questionnaires were forwarded to all schools and colleges within the Borough which resulted in 106 responses (89% response rate). The following provides an overview of the opinions provided in relation to indoor and outdoor facilities located on education sites, greater detail can be found in Appendix 2.

4.32   When questioned about secured use of indoor and outdoor facilities, 34% stated that there was community use on site.

4.33   Outdoor facilities at education sites include mini, junior and senior football pitches, rugby, cricket and synthetic turf pitches. Schools were asked to rate the quality of their own facilities. Quality varied significantly from poor to excellent with the majority assessing their facilities as good or average.

4.34   Indoor facilities on school sites include sports halls, health and fitness suite/facilities, swimming pools, dance studio and squash courts. A number of schools and colleges identified having ancillary facilities including car parking, changing facilities, showers, referees changing area, toilets and social areas.

Local Groups & Sports Clubs

4.35   Questionnaire surveys were also sent to allotment societies / community associations and sports clubs using outdoor pitches and indoor facilities. Further details can be found in Appendix 2.

4.36   Key priorities for allotment societies and community associations is the need for more allotment space across the Borough, the development of improved on-site facilities and improved marketing and promotion of allotments and their benefits.

4.37   A total of 110 sports clubs completed the questionnaire and this was made up of 13 indoor clubs and 97 outdoor clubs. The indoor sports clubs who responded comprised of 2 lifesaving, 2 netball, 3 dance/cheerleading, 1 taekwondo, 1 synchronised swimming, 1 swimming/water polo, 1 judo, 1 basketball, and 1 roller skating club. There were 79 football teams who responded, along with 9 cricket, 5 rugby, 3 hockey and 1 cricket, hockey and rugby team.

4.38   43% of the football clubs who responded said that they expect their membership numbers to grow within the next 5 years. 44% said they expect their membership to remain the same, whilst 13% said that they expect a decrease. 78% of cricket clubs expect to see an increase in membership and 22% expect to see no change at all. All of the rugby clubs said that they expect an increase in membership and all of the hockey clubs anticipate that their membership will remain the same. The only cricket, hockey and rugby club who responded said that they expect their membership to remain the same over the next 5 years.

4.39   Neither of the lifesaving clubs gave details as to their expected changes over the next 5 years. Of the remaining indoor clubs, 54% said that they expect to see an increase in membership, 45% predict that their membership will remain the same, but none of the clubs predicted a decrease in membership over the next 5 years. An increase in membership levels and participation place greater demand on provision within Walsall which must be taken into account when considering future planning levels.

4.40   Table 9 indicates the types of issues which clubs identified and the percentage of clubs who are experiencing them.

Table 9 – Percentage of clubs experiencing problems

Type of Issue	% of Indoor Clubs who Reported the Issue	% of Outdoor Clubs who Reported the Issue
Lack of internal funding	46%	56%
Lack of external funding	77%	63%
Lack of appropriate facilities	8%	49%
Access difficulties	31%	18%
Limited access to suitable facilities	15%	38%
Lack of information about local services	8%	22%
Lack of volunteers / coaches	31%	30%
Retaining / recruiting members	77%	24%

4.41   Table 9 shows that for indoor clubs the key issues are lack of external funding and retaining/recruiting members. The issues which are less of a problem for indoor clubs are the lack of appropriate facilities and the lack of information about local services. For outdoor clubs it appears that lack of internal and external funding are the biggest issues, whilst access difficulties and lack of information about local services are less problematic.

4.42   Only 2 of the indoor clubs identified other key issues which included problems with access and lack of funding. A number of outdoor clubs indicated experiencing other key issues and these mostly centred around funding and the impact which this has on grounds maintenance, upkeep of changing facilities and retaining members due to parents being unable to pay subs etc. The lack of appropriate facilities was also identified by outdoor clubs as being a key issue.

4.43   Each of the clubs were asked if they would prefer to travel further for better facilities or have facilities which are nearer but of a lower standard. Of the 12 indoor sports clubs who gave their priorities, 58% said that their priority is to have good facilities which are further away but 42% of indoor clubs said they would rather have poorer quality facilities which are nearer. Of the 87 outdoor sports clubs who gave their priorities, 49% said they would prefer to access better facilities which are further away, but 51% said they would rather used lower standard facilities which are nearer to members.

4.44   Some of the clubs chose to provide additional comments regarding their club and its need and requirements. For the indoor clubs it appears that travelling to venues is a problem, particularly with the poor economic conditions at the time as parents were unable to take their children to the clubs. A frequent comment made by outdoor sports clubs was that there is not enough funding for them to maintain changing facilities and rebuild / refurbish ones which have been vandalised.

4.45   The clubs were asked to rate the facilities which they use and give details about any facilities which they felt were poor or very poor. The majority of indoor facilities were rated average or above, but the main reason for some clubs rating facilities poor was because changing rooms and toilets needed improving. For the outdoor clubs it was clear that many of the facilities were rated poor due to the condition of the pitch. Many clubs reported that their pitch is uneven, has poor drainage, a large amount of dog fouling and litter.

5   Audit Findings

The Open Space Resource in Walsall

5.1   The audit of open space in Walsall has identified a resource of 2113.34 ha. This includes all open space with a range of access from unrestricted open public access, to sites with limited access (e.g. controlled by membership) or sites that are not accessible or by permission only. A definition of accessibility can be found in Table 3. The resource includes all land identified within the Walsall Greenspace Strategy and sites have been verified via site visits (where access allows) in order to provide a comprehensive assessment as far as possible. Table 10 provides a summary of all open space in Walsall by accessibility level.

Table 10 - Quantity of All Open Space in Walsall by Accessibility

Neighbourhood Management Area	Unrestricted Access (Ha)	Limited Access	Not Accessible	Total
Area 1	302.39	89.81	74.27	466.47
Area 2	191.51	180.36	67.65	439.52
Area 3	273.81	97.15	25.43	396.39
Area 4	164.05	228.87	31.81	424.73
Area 5	102.82	24.55	18.01	145.38
Area 6	168.61	43.31	28.93	240.85
Borough Total	1203.19	664.05	246.1	2113.34

5.2   From Table 10 it is clear to see that Areas 5 and 6 in the west have significantly less open space than other areas in the Borough. This section sets out the relevant audit findings and key issues for each of the typologies in terms of the quantity, quality and accessibility of provision. For the purpose of this study and setting standards for open space, all land classified as not accessible has been excluded from the analysis.

5.3   All identified sites have been plotted using GIS (Geographical Information System) and the total size of these sites (hectares) has been determined via this method, to provide an indication of the level of provision across the Borough and within the 6 Neighbourhood Management Areas (NMA). Quantity, quality and accessibility analysis has been undertaken on a Borough and area basis. From this information standards have been set for each of the neighbourhood areas and for the Borough as a whole.

5.4   Walsall occupies 10,395 ha of land and the breakdown by neighbourhood area is identified in Table 11.

Table 11 - Breakdown of Neighbourhood Area by size

Area	Total Hectares	% of Borough
Area 1	1,697	16%
Area 2	3,468	33%
Area 3	1,606	15%
Area 4	1,755	17%
Area 5	784	8%
Area 6	1,085	10%
Total	**10,395**	**100%**

Quantity

5.5   From the site audit and GIS mapping exercise the following provision has been identified across the administrative boundary for Walsall Council. Table 12 summarises the quantity of all accessible open space (unrestricted and limited access) and identifies the provision by type, number and quantity. It also identifies the current levels of provision per 1,000 population.

5.6   The Borough currently has 1867.24 ha of land identified as accessible open space this is provided on 429 sites and gives a current overall provision of 7.34 ha per 1,000 population.

Table 12 - Quantity of Accessible Open Space in Walsall

Typology	No. of sites	Total Area (ha)	Provision per 1,000 population (ha)
Parks and Gardens	30	275.33	**1.08**
Natural & Semi-Natural Greenspace	64	685.90	**2.70**
Outdoor Sports Facilities	49	398.42	**1.57**
Amenity Greenspace	139	185.38	**0.73**

Typology	No. of sites	Total Area (ha)	Provision per 1,000 population (ha)
Provision for Children and Young People (stand alone play areas)	7	2.61	**0.17***
Provision for Children and Young People (facilities within other typologies)	58	8.70	
Green Corridors	14	31.70	**0.12**
Allotments	41	44.40	**0.17**
Cemeteries and Churchyards	20	64.55	**0.25**
Institutional Land	65	178.95	**0.70**
Total	**429**	**1867.24**	**7.34**

* Combined provision including sites within other typologies – calculated using the children's population aged 0-19 yrs

Figure 10 - Quantity of Accessible Open Space in Walsall
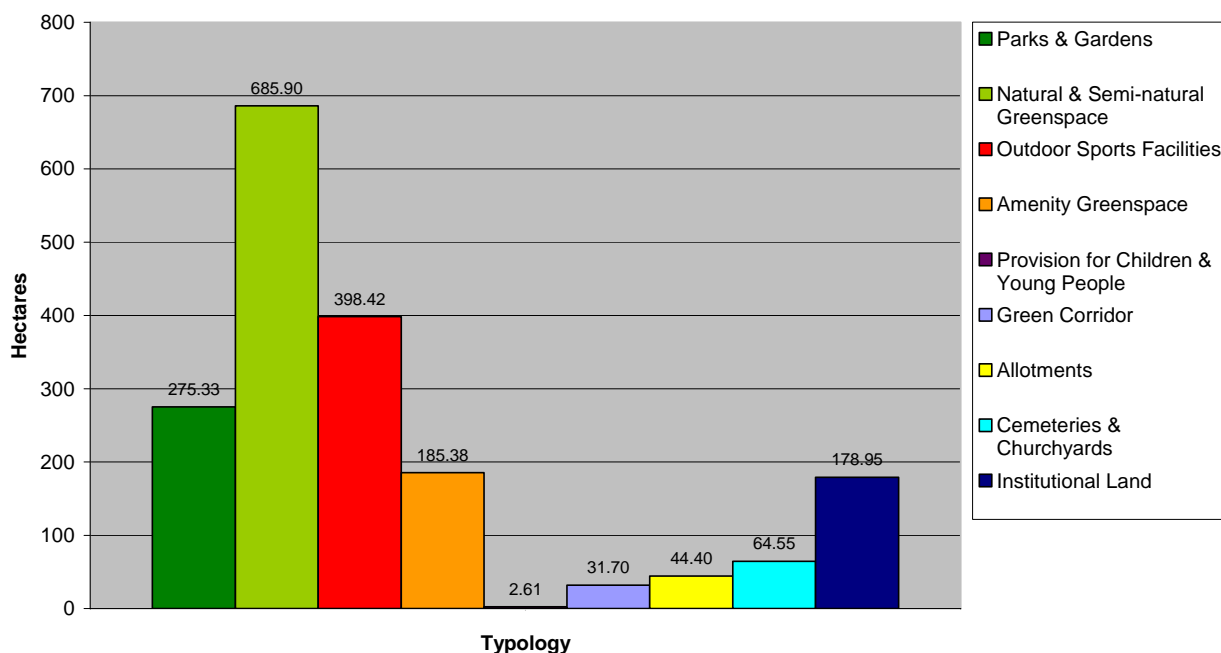
5.7 From Table 12 the spatial distribution of open space by typology varies significantly in both the number of sites and the amount of land provided. This in turn leads to a variance per 1,000 population according to the type of provision. The largest amount of provision is natural and semi-natural greenspace which occupies 685.90 ha or 37% of the total open space provision across the Borough and a provision of 2.70 ha per 1,000 population. The least provision in terms of land occupied is that of the play provision for children and young people occupying 11.31 ha or 0.17 ha per 1,000 population of children and young people (aged 0-19 years). This includes provision within other typologies.

5.8 30 Park and Garden sites occupy 275.33 ha or 1.08 ha per 1,000 population. The 41 allotment sites equate to 44.40 ha across the Borough and 14 green corridors occupy 31.70 ha or 0.12 ha per 1,000 population. The total area for the 20 identified cemeteries and churchyards equates to 64.55 ha or 0.25 ha per 1,000.

5.9 139 Amenity greenspace sites have been identified, this equates to 10% of the total area of open space sites in the Borough. These sites are provided in amongst housing areas and tend to be small but important resources at the local level as they are often the spaces nearest to where people live. Amenity greenspace occupies 185.38 ha and provides 0.73ha per 1,000 population.

5.10 The audit has identified 49 sites that have a primary purpose providing for outdoor sport these occupy 398.42 ha or 21% of the total land allocated as open space. They provide a current provision of 1.57 ha per 1,000. There are also 65 sites identified as institutional land which equates to 178.95 ha or 0.70 ha per 1,000 population.

5.11 It is important to recognise that provision for children and young people recognises an element of double counting due to the provision of fixed play, skate parks and ball courts being located within other typologies such as parks. It is also important to note that outdoor sports facilities such as grass pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens are also provided within other typologies such as parks and as such the figures quoted for outdoor sport reflect the provision of sites dedicated as stand alone sports facilities, the standards for grass pitches are reflected in the Borough's separate Playing Pitch Strategy which has been developed in accordance with Sport England guidance.

5.12   The provision identified by type in each of the areas should also be seen as the minimum from which future provision should be based. This will ensure that the character, openness and nature of the neighbourhood areas and the Borough in general is maintained and protected. The Borough wide provision per 1,000 population by typology should be utilised to ensure that future provision of open space overall and by particular typology does not fall below this threshold. The distribution and implications of current provision are discussed in more detail by typology later in this report.

Quality

5.13   The quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a "snapshot" in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit.

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent

5.14   Table 13 identifies the significant variance in the range of quality both within individual typologies and across the different classifications of open space with an overall Borough wide rating of 39% or a rating of 'below average' in accordance with the quality line above.

Table 13 - Summary of Quality across all accessible Open Space in Walsall

Typology	No. of Sites Audited	Quality Range (%)	Average Quality Score (%)
Parks and Gardens	30	16 – 72%	48%
Natural & Semi-Natural Greenspace	60	11 – 67%	32%
Outdoor Sports Facilities	40	22 – 74%	48%
Amenity Greenspace	137	7 - 81%	38%
Provision for Children and Young People (stand alone play areas)	7	36 – 65%	52%
Green Corridors	14	14 – 51%	27%
Allotments	25	17 - 57%	34%
Cemeteries and Churchyards	20	25 – 73%	49%
Institutional Land	19	20 – 67%	53%
Total	352	7 - 81%	40%

5.15   Figure 11 shows the average scores by typology when compared to the desired quality average of 61% or a rating that would mean the provision of open space across the Borough was to a 'Good' quality standard.

Figure 11 - Average Quality Rating by Typology
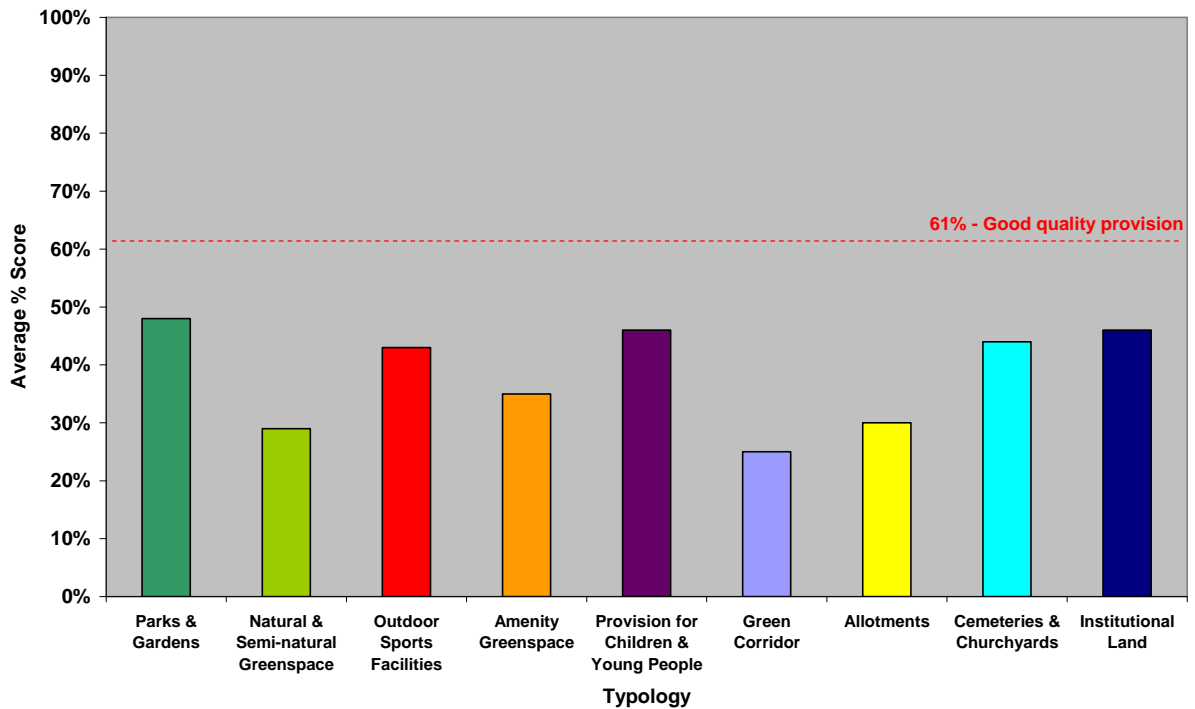
5.16   The key factor that affects the quality scores is the quality of individual infrastructure elements or the lack of basic infrastructure such as signage, benches and bins. The audit has revealed that 182 sites (55% of the sites audited) have no signage, 222 sites (67% of the sites audited) have no litter bins and 231 sites (70%) no seating. Table 14 outlines this in more detail.

Table 14 - Breakdown of Infrastructure by Typology

Typology	No. of Sites Audited	Quality Range (%)	Average Quality Score (%)	No Signage	% of total with no signage	No Litter Bins	% of total with no litter bins	No Seating	% of total with no seating
Parks & Gardens	30	16 – 72%	48%	7	23%	2	7%	3	10%
Natural & Semi-natural Greenspace	60	11 – 67%	32%	32	53%	44	73%	49	82%
Outdoor Sports Facilities	40	22 – 74%	44%	6	23%	14	54%	13	50%
Amenity Greenspace	137	7 - 81%	38%	104	76%	113	82%	112	82%
Provision for Children & Young People	7	36 – 65%	52%	2	29%	1	14%	1	14%
Green Corridor	14	14 – 51%	27%	13	93%	11	79%	14	100%
Allotments	25	6 - 57%	33%	10	38%	24	92%	26	100%
Cemeteries & Churchyards	20	25 – 73%	49%	2	10%	4	20%	4	20%
Institutional Land	19	20 – 67%	48%	6	67%	9	100%	9	100%

5.17   Quality open space is normally fit for purpose, it is welcoming, well maintained and safe (key elements of the Green Flag Award Site assessment), one of the great strengths of good quality open space provision is the nature in which sites can provide for multi-functional activity.

5.18   The quality of the open space is dependent upon the ownership and good stewardship. Within local authorities the decline in quality and function of open space is well documented and the reasons for decline are not a key element of this strategy. What is considered, are what people think and local need.

5.19   Figure 12 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'welcoming' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are welcoming are consideration of the main entrances, side entrances, signage, access paths and roads and the provision of car parking

5.20   From the average quality of the elements that are perceived to make a site welcoming Figure 12 outlines these below:

- **Main entrances where found on the whole to be 'Average', scoring an average 54%**

- **Side entrances, pathways and access points also rated as 'Average' scoring 53%**

- **Parking provision scored an average of 55% an overall rating that equates to 'Average' on the site value line**

- **Boundaries, fences, hedges and gates where found overall to be a slightly higher quality scoring an average 60%.**

- **Signage overall was lower in quality, scoring an average 34% and a rating of 'Below Average'**

Figure 12 - Average Quality Scores from a 'Welcoming' perspective
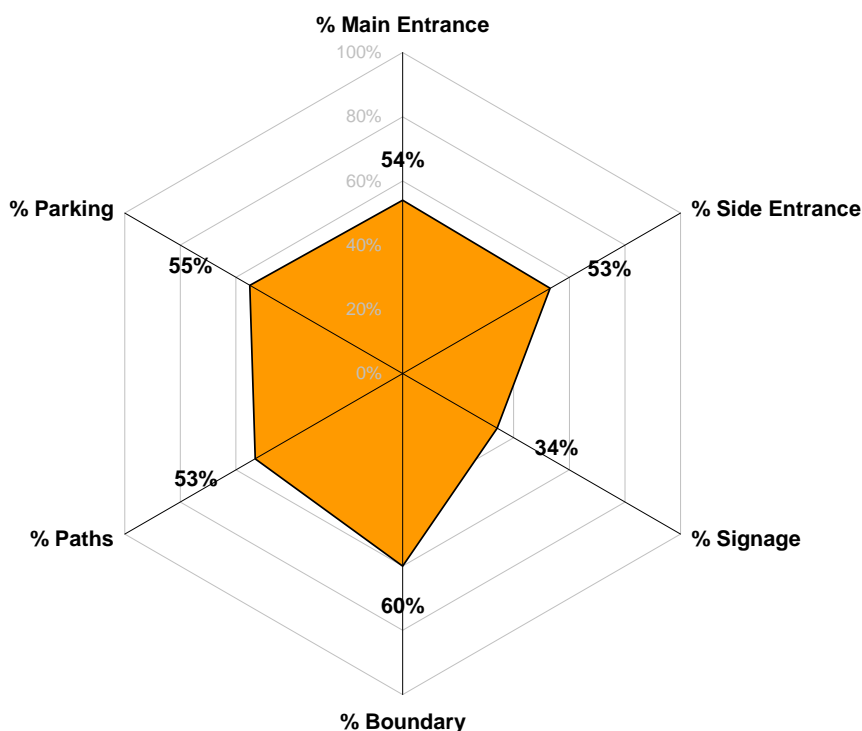
5.21   When considering whether a site is well maintained the criteria utilised to access the site values are focused on the maintenance of individual elements such as flower beds, shrub beds, young trees mature tree, grass cutting (close mown and naturalistic areas), litter bins and seating.

5.22   Figure 13 identifies the average quality of the elements that are perceived to make a site well maintained. These are outlined below:

- **Flower beds rated on average as 'Good' (72%)**

- **Shrub beds rated as 'Average' (51%)**

- **Young Trees rated as 'Poor' (30%)**

- **Mature Trees rated 'Below Average' (37%)**

- **Close mown grass rated as 'Good' (65%)**

- **Naturalistic Grass Areas rated 'Average' (54%)**

- **Bins rated as 'Average' 53% and Seating faired slightly better rating 'Average' (54%)**

Figure 13 – Average quality scores from a 'Maintenance' perspective
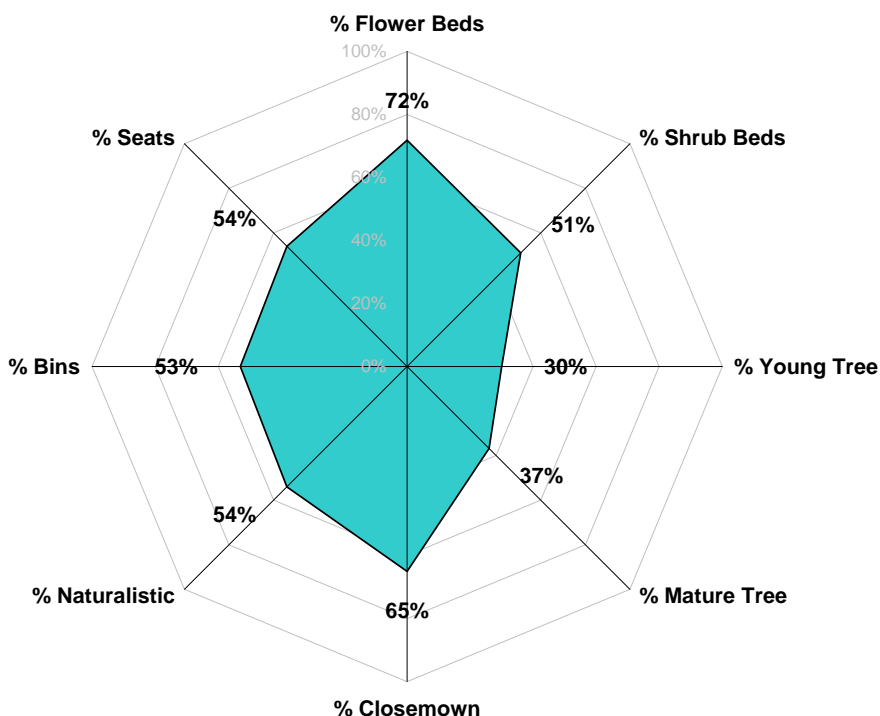
5.23   Figure 14 identifies the average quality of the elements that are perceived to make a site 'Safe'. The criteria used to assess if the sites are safe are consideration of toilets, lighting, information boards and cleanliness.

Figure 14 - Average quality scores from a 'Safe' perspective
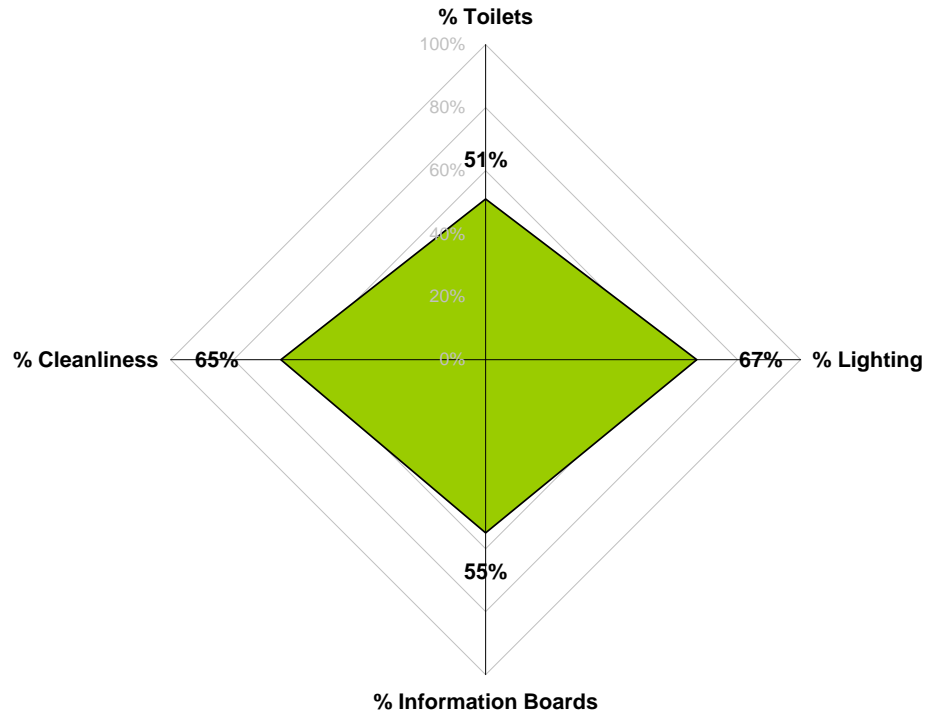
5.24   The overall audit revealed:

- **On sites where toilets are provided, toilets rated on average at 51% (Average)**

- **Lighting quality averaged 67% (Good)**

- **Information Boards rated as 'Average' (55%)**

- **Sites rated as 'good' for cleanliness overall with a score of 65%**

5.25   The following section considers each typology in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility.

Parks and Gardens

"Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events."

Quantity

5.26   Table 15 shows that Walsall Borough contains 30 accessible parks and garden sites covering 275.3 hectares and therefore an overall provision of 1.08 ha per 1,000 population.

5.27   The Borough's parks and gardens provide a wide range of facilities and are capable of providing space for a large number of formal and informal activities. All of the parks are freely accessible and open for use by all sections of the local community. Some sites include facilities for sport such as grass pitches, tennis or bowls; others provide fixed play equipment or multi-use games areas for children and young people.

5.28   These sites are managed to promote high quality amenities to residents and visitors to the Borough. A full list can be found in Appendix 1. The distribution of parks and gardens across the Borough is outlined in Table 15.

Table 15 - Parks and Gardens by Area

NEIGHBOURHOOD	SITE NAME	Hectares	Total Hectares	Number of Sites	Provision Per 1,000 popln.	% of total Sites	%of total provision
Area 1 (Population 35,939)	Bradbury Park	1.49	38.20	7	1.06	23.3%	13.9%
	High Heath Park	1.82					
	Holland Park	8.84					
	Pelsall Common	15.8					
	Rushall Playing Fields I	4.55					
	Rushall Playing Fields II	1.54					
	Shelfield Recreation Ground	4.16					
Area 2 (Population 49,579)	Anchor Meadow Playing Fields	11.24	77.47	6	1.56	20.0%	28.1%
	Blackwood Park	4.31					
	Doe Bank Park	8.38					
	Leigh's Wood	4.16					
	Oak Park	13.03					
	The Airport Playing Fields	36.35					
Area 3 (Population 51,506)	Bloxwich Memorial Gardens	0.55	53.28	5	1.03	16.7%	19.4%
	Bloxwich Park	2.17					
	King George Vth Playing Fields	18.51					
	Leamore Park	6.62					
	Reedswood Park	25.43					
Area 4 (Population 53,456)	Arboretum	28.92	54.12	5	1.01	16.7%	19.7%
	Bath Street Gardens	1.07					
	Palfrey Park	6.5					
	Pleck Park	9.53					
	Primley Avenue Park	8.1					
Area 5 (Population 25,555)	George Rose Park	9.88	25.42	5	0.99	16.7%	9.2%
	Hughes Road	4.38					
	Kings Hill Park	3.09					
	Lower Bradely Playing Fields	5.89					
	Victoria Park	2.18					
Area 6 (Population 38,438)	Brereton Road	5.38	26.84	2	0.70	6.7%	9.7%
	Willenhall Memorial Park	21.46					
Grand Total		275.33	275.33	30	1.08	100.0%	100.0%

5.29   Table 15 and Figure 15 illustrate the spatial distribution of parks and gardens by neighbourhood area, the data can be summarised as follows:

- **Overall, there is a relatively even spread of parks and gardens across Walsall, especially when compared with population by neighbourhood with virtually all neighbourhoods having around 1 hectare of parks and gardens per 1,000 population. Area 2 has slightly more than this (1.56 ha per 1,000 population) and Area 6 slightly less (0.70 ha).**

- **Area 1 has the largest proportion of parks and gardens (7 sites in total) which equates to just under a quarter (23%) of park provision in Walsall. These sites occupy 13.9% of the total area available as parks and gardens.**

- **Area 2 has the largest area of parks and garden at 77.47 ha. Almost half of this can be attributed to one site, The Airport Playing Fields (36.35 ha), the largest park within Walsall.**

- **The 5 parks and gardens in Area 5 are relatively small, with the largest, the George Rose Park, being just under 10 ha. Overall, therefore, this neighbourhood represents just under 10% of the overall land area in Walsall determined as parks and gardens.**

- **Similarly, Area 6 only represents 10% of the parks and gardens area, however this is largely because of the low number of parks in this neighbourhood (2 sites in total).**

Figure 15 - Spatial distribution of Parks & Gardens by Area
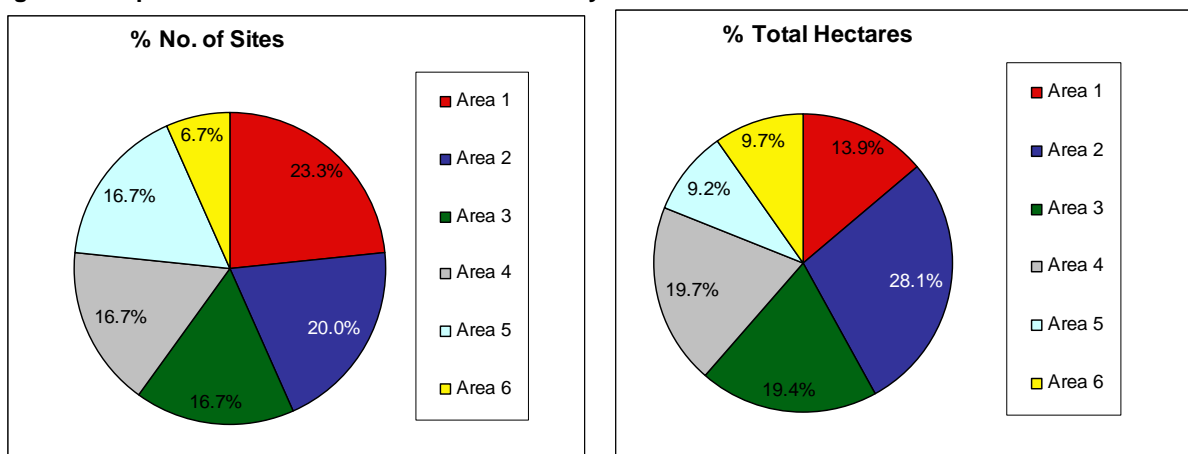
Hierarchy

5.30   The Borough has developed a hierarchy of provision for its parks and open spaces, which is set out in Table 16.

Table 16 – Hierarchy Definition

Hierarchy level	Description
Borough	Those sites whose significance should attract people from across the entire Borough. Usually large sites with a range of facilities or designated importance for history or nature conservation.
Neighbourhood	Those sites which perform a function that serves a more immediate community. Unlikely to attract people from across the Borough

Hierarchy level	Description
Local	Those sites which perform a function to a small area – typically areas of amenity green space.

5.31   Table 17 identifies the provision number and area associated with each of the tiers of the parks and gardens hierarchy.

Table 17 - Breakdown of Parks and Gardens by Hierarchy

Type	Number of sites	Ha	% of total sites	% of ha
Borough	2	65.27	**6.7%**	**23.7%**
Neighbourhood	18	179.00	**60.0%**	**65.0%**
Local	10	31.06	**33.3%**	**11.28%**
Total	**30**	**275.33**	**100%**	**100%**

5.32   Parks and gardens classified as Neighbourhood provide the greatest number of sites (60%) and the greatest percentage of area (65%). There are just two parks and gardens defined as being of Borough importance (i.e. they will attract Borough-wide audiences) yet they occupy nearly a quarter (23.7%) of the area defined as parks and gardens. The remaining third (33.3%) of parks and gardens are classified as Local.

5.33   Figure 16 identifies the spatial distribution of the parks and gardens hierarchy across the 6 neighbourhood areas.

Figure 16 - Spatial distribution of Parks and Gardens by Hierarchy and Area
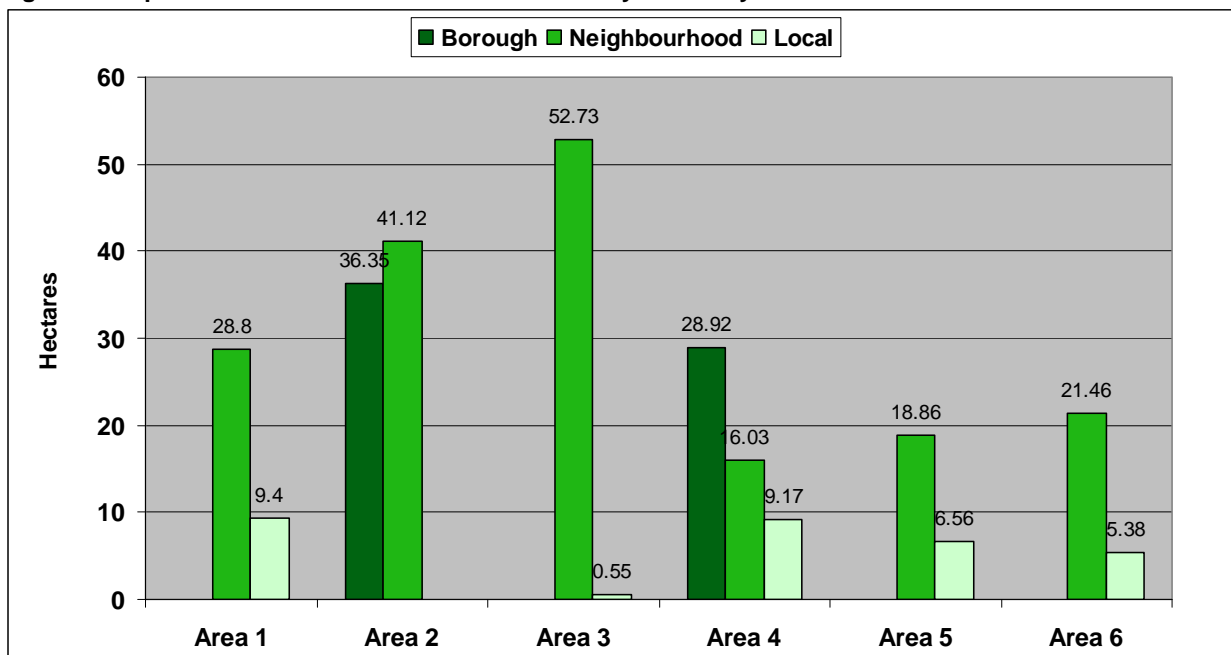
5.34   The provision is summarised below:

Borough Parks and Gardens

- **Walsall has 2 sites - The Airport Playing Fields and Arboretum – that are designated as Borough parks, equating to 65.26 ha.**

- **The provision of Borough parks and gardens equates to 0.26 ha per 1,000 population.**

- **The Airport Playing Fields is the largest site at 36.35 ha located in Area 2.**

- **The Arboretum in Area 4 is determined as the 'premier' park in the Borough. The park is subject to a three year restoration programme. Subject to funding, works will centre on the provision of a new flagship visitor centre adjacent to the centre green, the restoration of the parks historic building stock, footpaths, fencing, fixtures and significant horticultural improvements. Comprehensive landscape works are to be carried out, existing park facilities upgraded and new facilities created within the park.**

Neighbourhood Parks and Gardens

- **The Borough has 18 sites classified as Neighbourhood parks and gardens and these occupy 179 ha, 60% of the total area provision.**

- **The provision of neighbourhood parks and gardens equates to 0.7ha per 1,000 population**

- **There is large area of Neighbourhood parks and gardens in Area 2 and Area 3, equating to combined area of 93.87 ha (52% of the total provision for this hierarchy).**

- **Area 3 contains two sizeable Neighbourhood parks and gardens in the form of Reedswood Park (25.43 ha) and King George V Playing Fields (18.51 ha).**

Local Parks and Gardens

- **The Borough has 10 sites classified as Local parks and gardens, occupying 31.06 ha.**

- **The provision of Local parks and gardens is 0.12ha per 1,000 population**

- **The main concentration of provision in terms of area is Area 1 (9.4 ha) and Area 4 (9.17ha) though Area 5 (6.56ha) and Area 6 (5.38 ha) also have a reasonable representation in this tier.**

- **Area 2 has no provision in this category and Area 3 only has 0.55 ha. However, both of these neighbourhoods have strong provision in one or both of the other hierarchy tiers.**

Quality

5.35   Site audits were undertaken of the Borough's parks and garden provision, the quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a "snapshot" in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit.

5.36   The overall quality findings from the site audits are outlined below with the average quality for parks and gardens across the Borough being 48% (Average) when measured against the quality value line.

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent

5.37   However, the quality audit has demonstrated a significant amount of variation in the quality of sites within the provision of parks and gardens. The audit shows that the Borough's parks and gardens quality ranges from 16% (poor) to 72% (good). No parks and gardens featured either as very poor or excellent.

5.38   The audit noted that quality varied within the differing hierarchical tiers of parks and gardens, Figure 17 identifies the range in quality within the hierarchy of parks and gardens across the Borough.

Figure 17 - Average Quality Scores for Parks and Gardens by Hierarchy
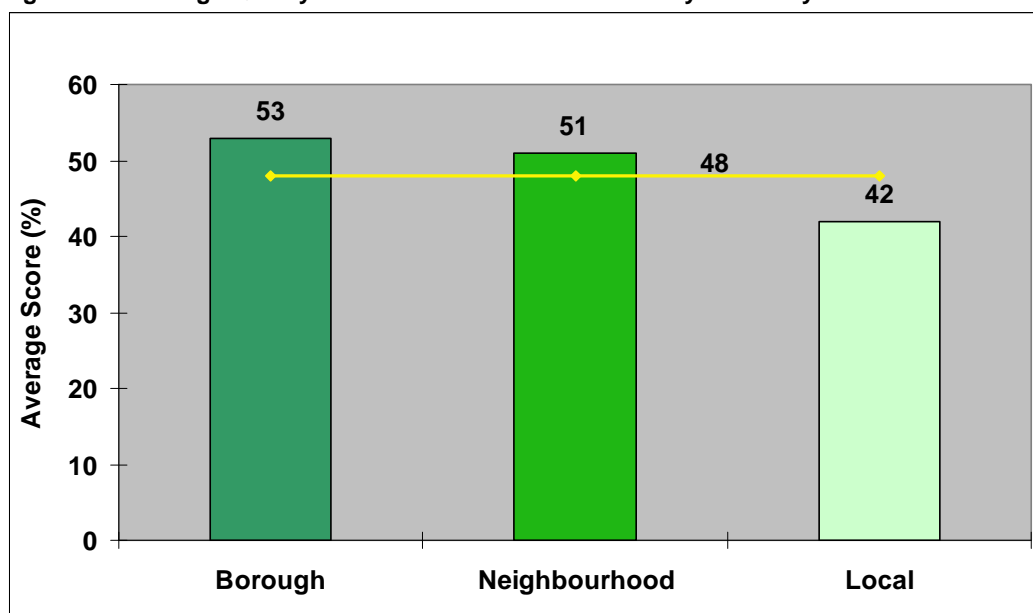
5.39   Figure 17 shows that Borough parks are averaging a higher quality standard of 53% whereas the Local parks rate much lower than the average for Walsall as a whole.

5.40   The audit has revealed that there is a significant variance in the quality of sites classified as parks and gardens with the quality range across the overall provision.   The park which rated as the highest quality is Palfrey Park (72%) and the one with the lowest quality is Hughes Road (16%).

Above Images from audit at Site ID 4025 Hughes Road (16%)

Above Images from audit at Site ID 5004 Palfrey Park (72%)

5.41   The images show the contrast in the quality of the provision within the parks and gardens sites rated lowest (Hughes Road) and highest (Palfrey Park) for quality.

5.42   The audit also noted that quality varied within the 6 neighbourhood areas, as determined by Figure 18. The figure shows that the quality variance is especially pronounced in Area 5 (16%-64%) and Area 4 (38%-72%). Areas 1, 2 and 5 have the lowest average quality scores.

Figure 18 - Quality Range in each Area
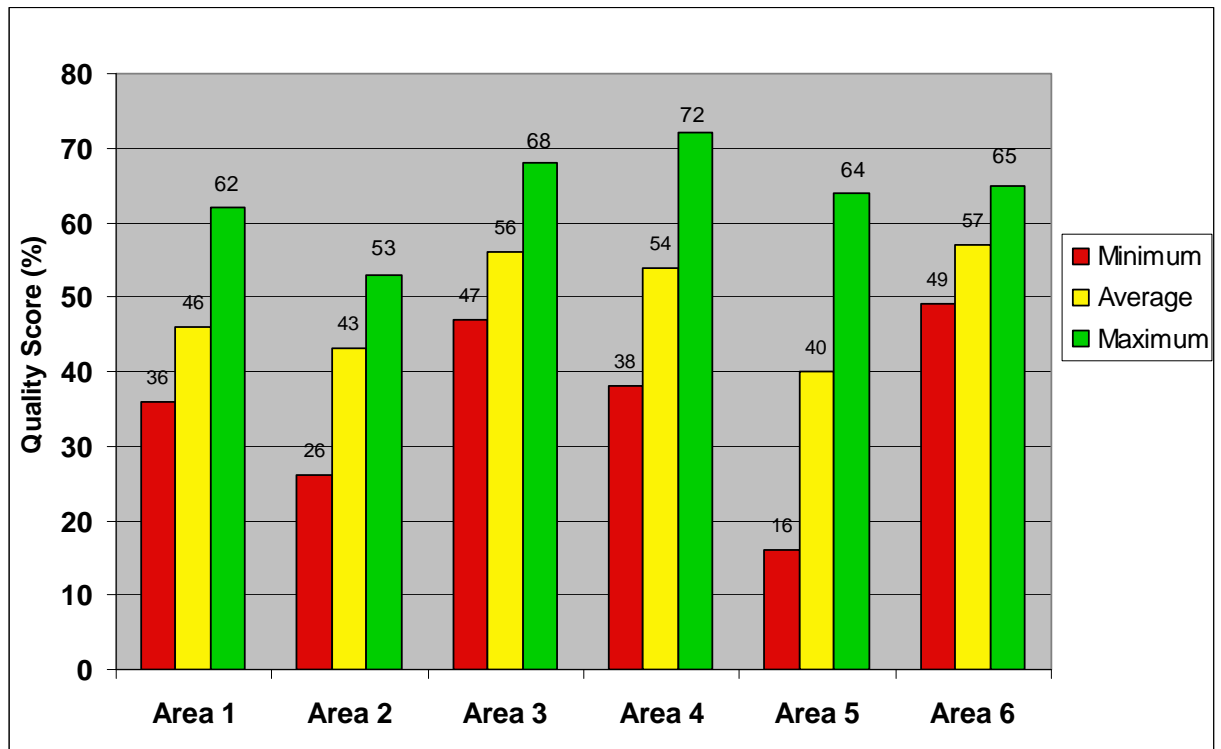
Figure 19 – Average Quality Scores by Hierarchy and Area
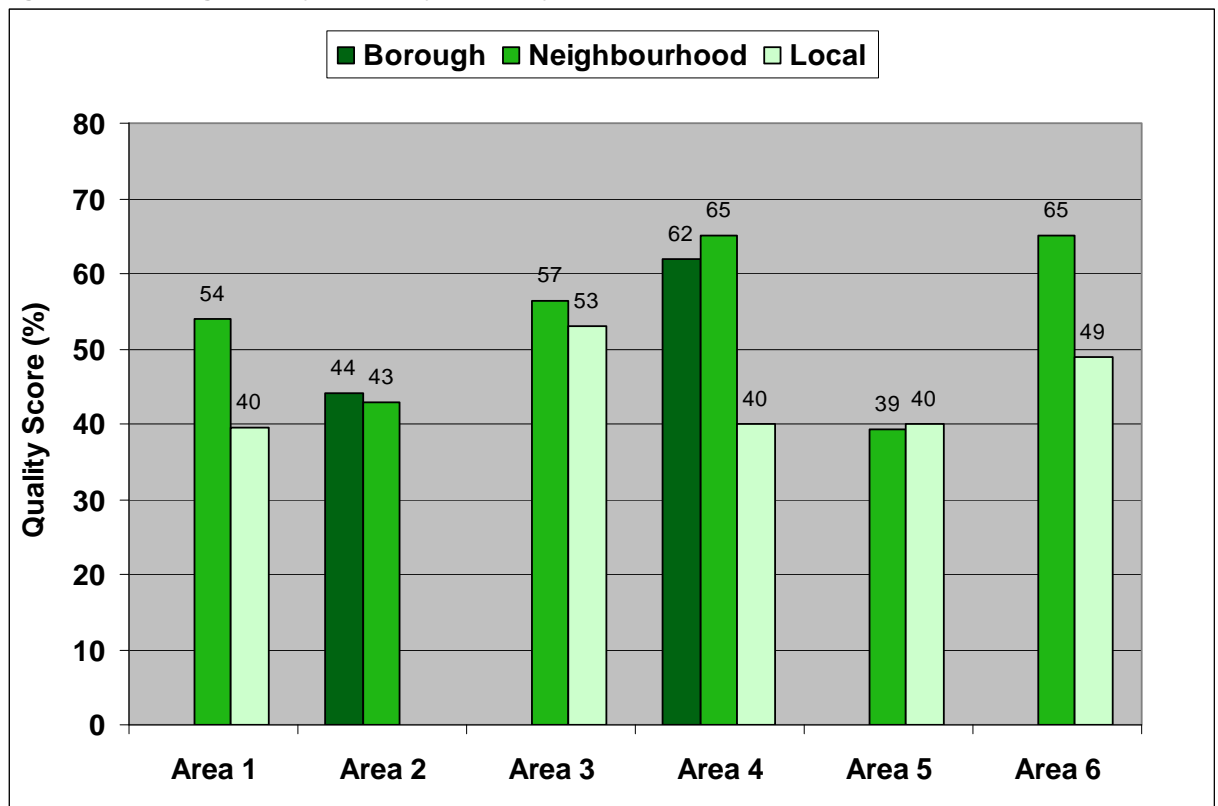
5.43   Figure 19 identifies the average quality by neighbourhood area and by hierarchy. The range is relatively consistent for Areas 2, 3 and 5. The range difference is most apparent in Area 4 where the range in quality across the differing parks and gardens tiers is 25%.

5.44   Table 18 identifies the range in quality by hierarchy across the 6 neighbourhood areas in more detail.

Table 18 - Detailed Breakdown of Quality

| Hierarchy | Neighbourhood Area | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Area 1 | | Area 2 | | Area 3 | | Area 4 | | Area 5 | | Area 6 | |
	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average
Borough	N/A	N/A	44%	44%	N/A	N/A	62%	62%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Neighbourhood	47-62%	54%	26-53%	43%	47-68%	57%	58-72%	65%	34-45%	39%	65%	65%
Local	36-43%	40%	N/A	N/A	53%	53%	38-42%	40%	16-64%	40%	49%	49%

5.45   From Table 18, sites classified as neighbourhood in Area 4 and Area 6 generally rated highest. The highest scoring local park is in Area 3.

Welcoming

5.46   Figure 20 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'welcoming' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are welcoming are consideration of the main entrances, side entrances, signage, access paths and roads and the provision of car parking.

Figure 20 - Welcoming criteria for Parks and Gardens
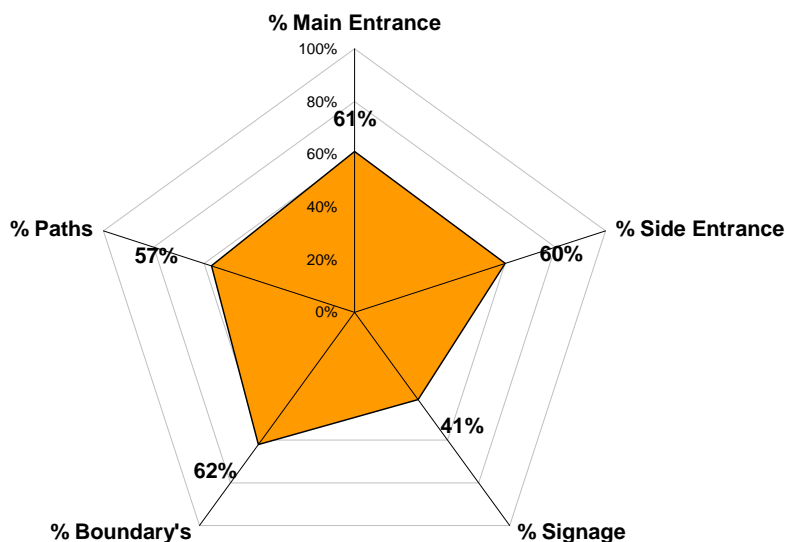
- **Boundary fences (62%) and the main entrances (61%) of parks and gardens in Walsall are generally rated as Good.**

- **The side entrances (61%) and paths (57%) are rated towards the upper end of Average.**

- **Signage, however, is generally rated as Below Average (41%)**

Well Maintained

5.47   The criteria utilised to assess 'well maintained' are focused on the maintenance of individual elements such as flower beds, shrub beds, young trees mature trees, grass cutting (close mown and naturalistic areas) litter bins and seating.

Figure 21 – 'Well Maintained' criteria for Parks and Gardens
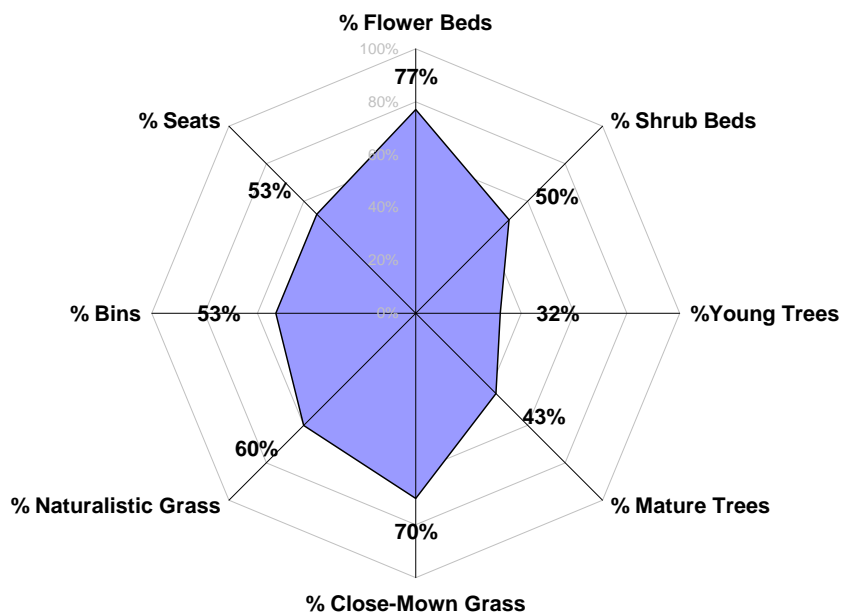
- **Flower beds rated as Excellent across all of the parks and gardens in Walsall at a rating of 77%.**

- **The audit also rated closely mown grass as Very Good (70%) in terms of maintenance.**

- **Young Trees rated lowest at Below Average (32%). Key factors that affect the score for young trees are maintenance elements such as the maintenance of tree ties and whether the mix or selection of young trees is appropriate and being managed using best practice methods.**

- **Mature Trees also rated Below Average (43%) in terms of their condition and management.**

- **The remaining criteria all scored as good, with naturalistic grass on the verge of Very Good.**

5.48   Very few parks where found to lack the provision of basic infrastructure (bins, signage and benches). What is important is that the quality of these facilities is not allowed to fall to the extent that items end up being removed through wear and tear or vandalism.

Safety

5.49   Figure 22 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Safe' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are safe are consideration of toilets, lighting, information boards and cleanliness.

Figure 22 – 'Safe' criteria for Parks and Gardens
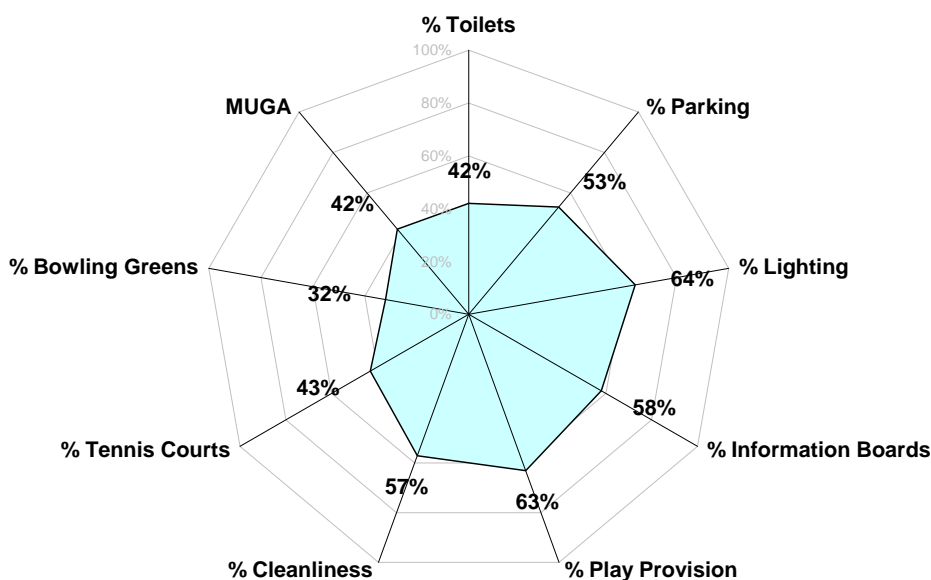
- **Lighting (64%) and play provision were recorded as Very Good across the parks and gardens provision in Walsall.**

- **Information boards (58%), cleanliness (57%) and parking (53%) were all rated as Average**

- **Bowling greens however were rated as Below Average (32%) which is verging on Poor**

- **Tennis courts (43%), toilets (42%) and MUGA (42%) also rates as Poor.**

Future Quality Thresholds

5.50   Quality greenspace is normally fit for purpose, it is welcoming, well maintained and safe (key elements of the Green Flag Award Site assessment). One of the great strengths of good quality greenspace provision is the nature in which sites can provide for multi functional activity.

5.51   The quality improvements required across the parks and gardens typology is significant and costs can be prohibitive to undertake in one go. Therefore what is proposed is to set a minimum required standard for each park and garden appropriate to their hierarchy position and to set a three year threshold to bring each to the recommended standard. Table 19 shows the number of sites by strategic group that fall within the varying ranges for quality.

Table 19 – Number of Parks and Gardens by Quality Range

Parks and Gardens	Very Poor 0-15%	Poor 16-30%	Below Average 31-45%	Average 46-60%	Good 61-75%	Excellent 76%+	Total
Borough	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Neighbourhood	-	1	5	8	4	-	18
Local	-	1	6	2	1	-	10
Total	-	2	12	10	6	-	26

5.52   From the table only 6 sites (20%) out of 30 classified as parks and gardens rated an overall quality score that equalled good or above. The majority rated as Below Average (40%) or Average (33%). Only 2 sites rated Poor overall.

5.53   In terms of acting on the assessment findings it is proposed to raise the quality standard. It is important to recognise that the funding available within the Council is finite and limited and the cost of bringing spaces to a good standard is beyond the current financial resources available for open space.

5.54   The quality thresholds are:

- **To achieve and maintain Green Flag status in the Borough Parks, bringing both up to Good/Excellent quality standard**

- **To strive for all Neighbourhood sites to be of an Average to Good quality (46-75%)**

- **For all Local sites to be of Average quality (46% or above)**

5.55   The score is the minimum that sites should be maintained to in the future. Overall, this will mean improving the quality of 14 parks and garden sites across Walsall.

Accessibility

5.56   Accessibility has been assessed using a variety of techniques including mapping exercises and consultation. The accessibility thresholds are outlined in Table 20. The consultation key findings show that:

- **86% of respondents to the public questionnaire reported that they visit parks and gardens – 16% on a daily basis, 25% on a weekly basis, 18% monthly and 34% occasionally**

- **66% of those who visit parks and gardens in Walsall walk, 28% drive, 5% cycle and 1% use public transport**

- **42% of respondents reported it takes less than 5 minutes to travel to their nearest park or garden, 36% report 6-10 minutes, 13% report 11-20 minutes and 9% over 20 minutes**

- **Local people have identified that they travel for an average of 8 minutes to gain access to parks and gardens in Walsall. This equates to 0.4 miles or 644 metres.**

Table 20 - Accessibility Analysis for Parks & Gardens

Access Catchment: Borough Sites – 1,200m Neighbourhood Sites - 600m Local Sites - 400m				
Neighbourhood Area	**Number of households in Area**	**No. of households within catchment**	**% of households within catchment area**	**% of households outside catchment area**
Area 1	15,402	8,929	58%	42%
Area 2	21,922	13,398	61%	39%
Area 3	22,094	12,475	56%	44%
Area 4	22,588	15,197	67%	33%
Area 5	10,697	5,540	52%	48%
Area 6	16,661	5,309	32%	68%
Total	**109,364**	**60,848**	**56%**	**44%**

5.57   The GIS analysis has identified that 56% or 60,848 residential households in the Borough are within the combined access catchments set for parks and gardens. Importantly 44% of households are not currently within the catchment areas. Major lines of severance were taken into consideration for Local and Neighbourhood sites including canals, railway lines and motorways.

5.58   It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as a park or garden.

Standards

Standards for Parks & Gardens

Quantity

To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 1.08 ha per 1,000 population.

Quality

To achieve and maintain Green Flag status in 6 parks across the Borough (one in each neighbourhood area)

To strive for all Borough sites to be of a 'good' quality (61% or above)

To strive for all Neighbourhood sites to be of an Average to Good quality (46-75% or above)

For all Local sites to be of Average quality (46% or above)

Accessibility

To provide access to parks and gardens and for all households in the Borough to be within:

- 1,200m of a Borough site, or

- 600m of a Neighbourhood site, or

- 400m of a Local site

Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace

> **"Natural and semi-natural areas providing access to wildlife, environmental education and awareness, biodiversity and nature conservation. The typology includes woodlands, scrubland, wetland and nature conservation areas."**

Quantity

5.59 Natural and semi-natural greenspaces provide a wide range of opportunities for people to relax in a more natural environment whilst also providing valuable habitat for wildlife. Sites include woodlands, commons, natural areas and sites designated as local nature reserves.

5.60 The Borough has 101 open spaces defined as natural and semi-natural, totalling 902.91 ha. 37 sites however are not accessible to the public. Therefore, these sites are omitted from the remainder of the analysis.

5.61 The remaining 64 sites combine to provide 685.90 ha of natural and semi-natural space, which equates to an overall standard of 2.70 ha per 1,000 population. Three-quarters (75%) of these sites are managed by Walsall Council to promote wildlife and provide residents with the opportunity to experience the wider countryside near to where they live. A full list can be found in the appendices to this report. Table 21 provides details of all accessible open space designated as natural and semi-natural greenspace in Walsall.

Table 21 – **Accessible Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace in Walsall**

NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA	TYPOLOGY	SITE NAME	Total	Total Hectares	Number of Sites	Provision Per 1,000 popln.	% of total Sites	%of total provision
Area 1 (Population 35,939)	Natural and Semi-natural	Albutts Road Open Space	5.28	269.62	18	7.50 ha	28.1%	39.3%
		Brownhills Common Nature Reserve I	36.57					
		Brownhills Common Nature Reserve II	52.69					
		Cannock Extension Canal	0.45					
		Clayhanger Common	36.10					
		Clayhanger Community Woodland	2.35					
		Clayhanger Pools	23.03					
		Coppice Lane Wood	2.79					
		Goscote Road	6.29					
		Goscote Valley	29.68					
		Lindon Drive	0.44					
		Moat Farm Pool	0.43					
		Pelsall Nest Common	16.68					
		Pelsall North Common NR	44.88					
		Ryders Hayes Open Space	1.92					
		Silver Court	0.39					
		Stubbers Green Pool	8.20					
		Swan Pool	1.45					
Area 2 (Population 49,579)	Natural and Semi-natural	Barr Beacon	25.59	101.98	13	2.06 ha	20.3%	14.9 %
		Beacon Quarry	2.51					
		Cuckoos Nook & The Dingle	12.62					
		Daw End Railway Cutting	7.19					
		Grange Farm Wood	3.00					
		Great Barr Hall Estate (part)	4.26					
		Hardwick Wood	1.28					
		Hay Head Wood	9.00					
		Hill Hook	4.21					
		Maybrook Industrial Estate Open Space	2.31					
		Northgate	0.13					
		Shire Oak Park	25.01					
		Sunny Bank Quarry	4.87					
Area 3 (Population 51,506)	Natural and Semi-natural	Baileys Pool	3.62	149.38	15	2.90 ha	23.4%	21.8%
		Beechdale Park	6.95					

NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA	TYPOLOGY	SITE NAME	Total	Total Hectares	Number of Sites	Provision Per 1,000 popln.	% of total Sites	%of total provision
		Cavendish Road Open Space	7.15					
		Goscote Valley	21.53					
		Goscote Wedge	23.88					
		Leckie Road Open Space	1.15					
		Mill Lane Local Nature Reserve	8.51					
		Newtown Pool	2.89					
		Oily Gough's Open Space	15.20					
		Pouk Hill Open Space	8.50					
		Reedswood Fishing Pool & SINC	3.51					
		Remington Place Open Space	0.62					
		Ross Farm	20.29					
		Sneyd Reservoir	8.62					
		Wood Farm	16.96					
Area 4 (Population 53,456)	Natural and Semi-natural	Lime Pits Farm	24.65	55.91	6	1.05 ha	9.4%	8.2%
		M6 Corridor	5.68					
		Gorway Wood	2.12					
		Merrions Wood Nature Reserve	10.8					
		Park Hall Pool	3.21					
		Park Lime Pits	9.45					
Area 5 (Population 25,555)	Natural and Semi-natural	Darlaston Road Industrial Estate	1.00	13.31	2	0.52 ha	3.1%	1.9%
		Moorcroft Wood Nature Reserve	12.31					
Area 6 (Population 38,438)	Natural and Semi-natural	Clothier Street School Playing Fields	0.39	95.70	10	2.49 ha	15.6%	13.9%
		Sewage Works	0.28					
		The Crescent	2.99					
		Bentley Haye	33.82					
		Fibbersley Nature Reserve	12.93					
		Pimbury Road	0.36					
		Rough Wood	31.36					
		South of Lichfield Road	4.22					
		Villers Street	4.17					
		Waddens Brook Grazing Land	5.18					
Overall Total				**685.90**	**64**	**2.70 ha**	**100%**	**100%**

5.62   From Table 21 the key findings can be summarised as

- **Area 1 has the greatest concentration of natural and semi-natural greenspace, occupying 269.62 ha (39.3%) and providing 7.50 ha per 1,000 population for the neighbourhood.**

- **Brownhill Common, at 89.26 ha (based upon two audited sites combined), is the largest single natural space both in Area 1 and across the Walsall Borough. The site is a designated Local Nature Reserve.**

- **Pelsall North Common Nature Reserve (44.88 ha) represents a further sizeable designated Local Nature Reserves in Area 1.**

- **Area 3 has 15 sites classified as natural and semi-natural greenspace totalling 149.38 ha and a provision standard of 2.90 ha per 1,000 population. The provision in Area 3 equates to just under one-quarter (23.4%) of Walsall's total natural and semi natural land.**

- **Bentley Haye and Rough Wood in Area 6 combine to form the southern section of the Rough Wood Chase Local Nature Reserve (65.18 ha). This represents just over two-thirds (68.1%) of natural and semi-natural greenspace in this neighbourhood area.**

- **Area 5 has the least concentration of provision in terms of number of sites or total area of natural greenspace. The neighbourhood has just 2 sites accounting for 13.31 ha (3.1% of the total for Walsall). It is for this reason that this neighbourhood has the least natural and semi-natural space per 1,000 of population (0.52 ha).**

- **Areas 2 and 4 have moderate provision in terms of areas of natural and semi-natural greenspace at 101.98 ha and 55.91 ha respectively. This translates to 2.06 ha per 1,000 population for Area 2 and 1.05 ha per 1,000 population for Area 4.**

Hierarchy

5.63   The Borough has developed a hierarchy of provision for its open spaces, which is set out in Table 4. Table 22 identifies the number and amount of land provided within each of the tiers of the natural and semi-natural greenspace hierarchy.

Table 22 - Breakdown of Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace provision by Hierarchy

Type	Number	Area (Ha)	% of total sites	% of area
Borough	4	105.97	6%	15.4%
Neighbourhood	12	270.56	19%	39.4%
Local	48	309.37	75%	45.1%
Total	**64**	**685.90**	**100%**	**100%**

5.64   Table 22 shows that Local natural and semi-natural greenspace provide the greatest number of sites 48 (75% of the total provision) which occupy 45.1% of the total area within this greenspace classification. Borough sites occupy just 15% of area provided as natural and semi-natural greenspace, although this is generated by just 4 sites.

5.65   Figure 23 identifies the spatial distribution of the natural and semi-natural greenspace hierarchy across the 6 neighbourhood areas.

Figure 23 – Hierarchy provision by Neighbourhood Area
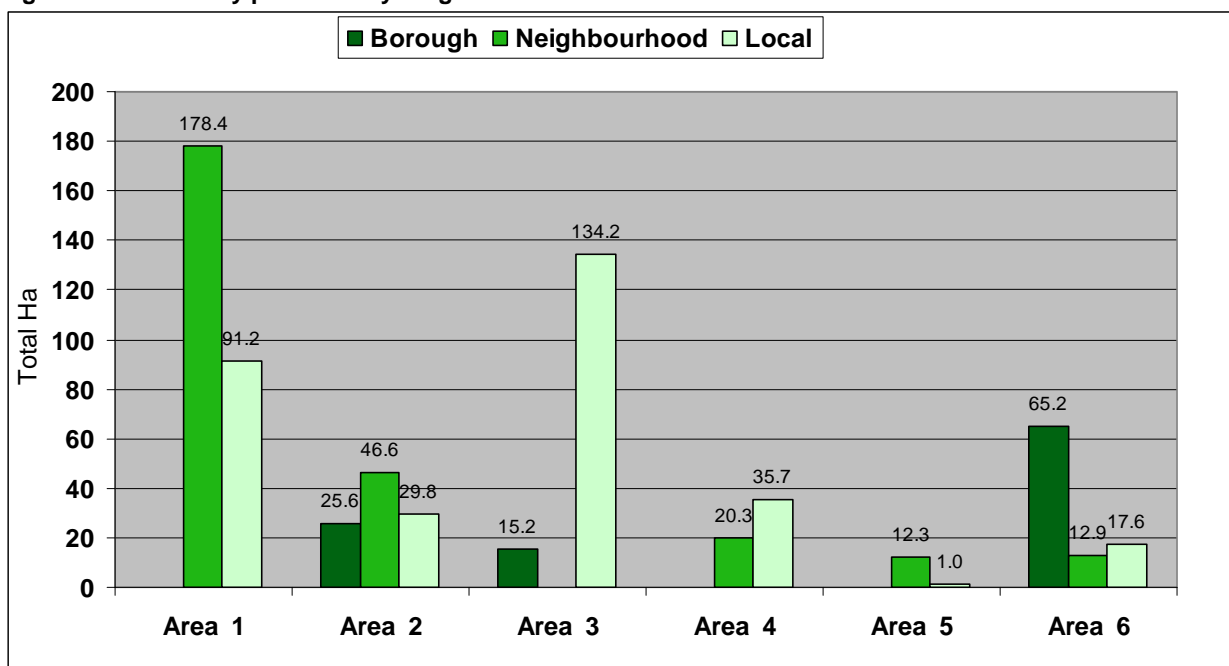
Borough Sites

- **Of the 4 sites classified as Borough sites, two are located in Area 6, 1 in Area 3 and the remaining 1 in Area 2. It is important to recognise that these sites, whilst providing an accessible greenspace for people who may live nearby, are also the sites where people travel into to an area to visit.**

- **The 2 sites in Area 6 are Rough Wood and Bentley Haye which, as mentioned previously, form the Rough Wood Chase Local Nature Reserve.**

- **The provision of Borough sites, taking the population as a whole, is 0.41 ha per 1,000 population. However, for Area 6 this increases to 1.70 ha per 1,000 population.**

Neighbourhood Sites

- **Area 1 has the largest combined area of Neighbourhood sites, with the 6 sites equating to 178.44 ha. This represents 4.97 ha for every 1,000 population for this neighbourhood area. To act as a comparison, the average for Walsall is 1.06 ha per 1,000 population.**

- **Area 3 has no provision in Neighbourhood natural and semi-natural greenspace.**

- **In comparison to Area 1, Neighbourhood provision across the other neighbourhood areas appears to be relatively small in terms of overall space with Area 2 having the next largest Neighbourhood sites at 46.63 ha.**

Local Sites

- **Three-quarters (74.7%) of the Local natural and semi-natural greenspace in Walsall is located in Area 3 (134.18 ha) and Area 1 (91.18 ha). Both of these neighbourhood areas contain sizeable individual Local sites, i.e. Area 1 has 3 sites classified as Local which are over 15 ha and similarly Area 3 has 4 Local sites over 15 ha.**

- **Provision in Areas 4 (35.66 ha), 2 (29.76 ha) and 6 (17.59 ha) is relatively minor in comparison.**

- **Area 5 only has 1.00 ha in this category.**

Quality

5.66   Site audits were undertaken to the Borough's natural and semi-natural provision, the quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a "snapshot" in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit.

5.67   The overall quality findings from the site audits are outlined below with the average quality for natural and semi-natural greenspace across the Borough being 31% or 'Below Average' (verging on Poor) when measured against the quality value line.

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	**Poor**	**Below Average**	**Average**	**Good**	**Excellent**

5.68   The quality audit has demonstrated a significant variance in the quality of sites within the provision of natural and semi-natural sites. The audit shows that the quality ranges from 11% (Very Poor) to 67% (Good).

5.69   The audit also noted that quality varied within the differing hierarchical tiers of natural and semi-natural greenspace. Figure 24 identifies the range in quality within the hierarchy of natural and semi-natural greenspace across the Borough.

Figure 24 - Average Quality of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace
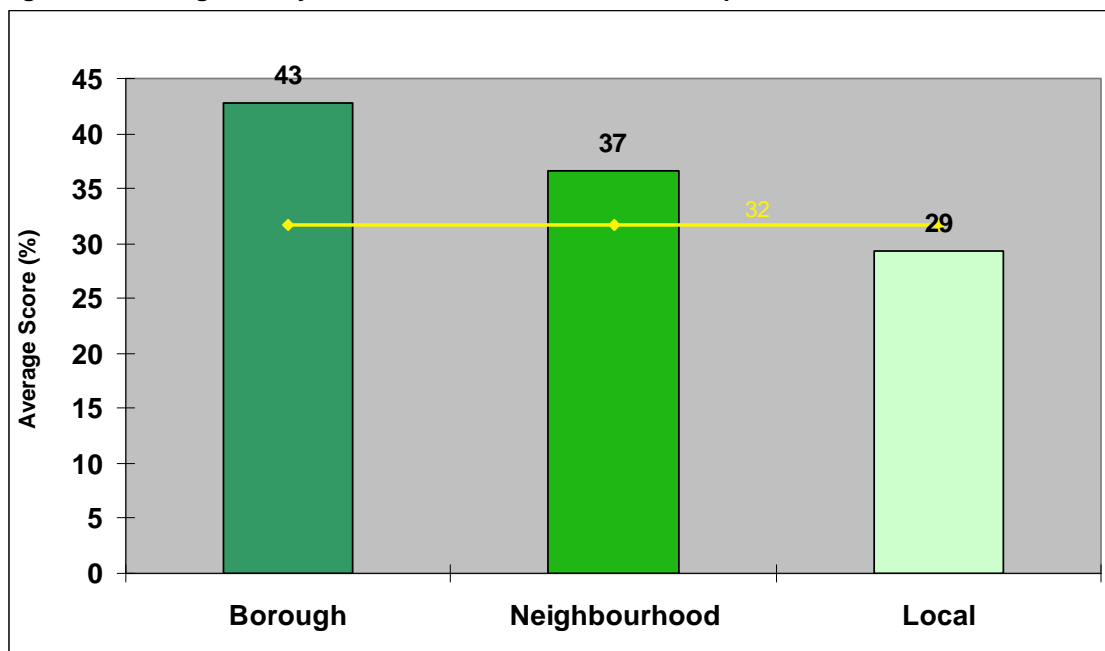
5.70   Figure 24 shows that Walsall's Borough-level accessible natural greenspace sites score well above the average at 43%, however this still represents a Below Average score. These sites are Walsall's flagship sites for both residents and visitors to access 'natural' spaces and to observe local wildlife. As such, these sites ideally need to be improved to a Good or Excellent standard to ensure that their potential is fully maximised and the experience they offer is of sufficient quality.

5.71   It is apparent that the quantity of Local sites (48) when compared to Borough (4) sites acts to skew the average quality for Walsall. However, it should still be recognised that more than half (54%) of the Local sites score less than 30% in the quality assessment.

5.72   The audit has revealed that there is a significant variance in the quality of sites classified as natural and semi-natural greenspace with the quality range across the hierarchy of provision varying from 11% and an overall rating of Very Poor (Site 3015 Lindon Drive) to 67% (Good) for Site 7028 Barr Beacon in Area 2. Figure 25 identifies the quality range by Hierarchy.

Figure 25 - Quality Range of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace
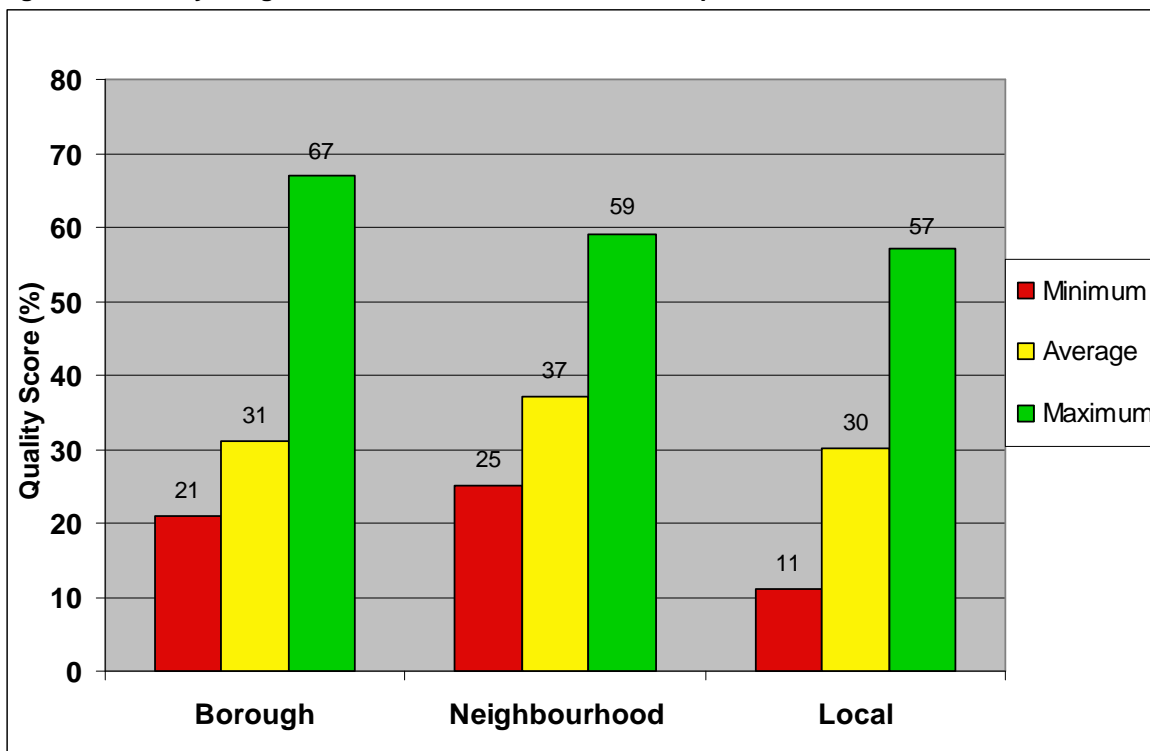
5.73   Figure 25 shows that there is significant variance in all hierarchy types of natural and semi-natural greenspace, with both Borough and Local tiers having a variance level of 46% between lowest score to the highest. The variance in range for Neighbourhood sites is still high at 34%.

Above Images from site audit to Site 3037 Maybrook Industrial Estate Open Space

Above Images from site audit to Site 3013 Shire Oak Park

5.74 The above images show the contrast in the quality of the provision within the natural and semi-natural sites rated some of the lowest and highest for quality. Factors such as maintenance quality of footpaths lack of benches and bins affected the quality ratings. The audit also noted that quality varied within the 6 neighbourhood areas. Figure 26 identifies the variance in quality by neighbourhood area.

Figure 26 - Quality Range of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace by Neighbourhood
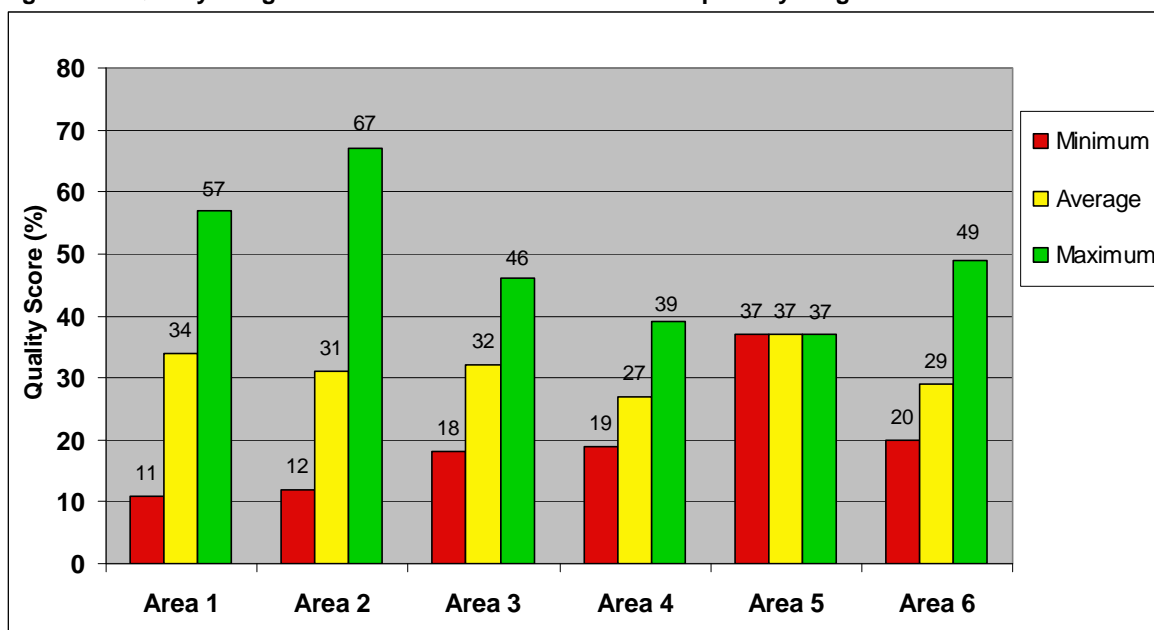
Neighbourhood Area	Quality Range	Average	Quality Rating
Area 1	11%-57%	34%	Below Average
Area 2	12%-67%	31%	Below Average
Area 3	18%-46%	32%	Below Average
Area 4	19%-39%	27%	Poor
Area 5*	37%	37%	Below Average
Area 6	20%-49%	29%	Poor
Borough Wide	11%-67%	32%	Below Average

* Based upon 1 site audit only

5.75 The figure shows a significant variance in the overall quality across all of the different neighbourhood areas, however this is more pronounced in Area 2 (55% between the lowest and highest scores) and Area 1 (46%). Area 2 in particular has sites that are both Good (Site 7028 Barr Beacon) and Poor (Site 1044 Northgate). There is less variation in areas 6 (29%), 3 (28%), and 4 (20%), however this is because the maximum score for sites is much lower.

Figure 27 - Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace Quality by Hierarchy
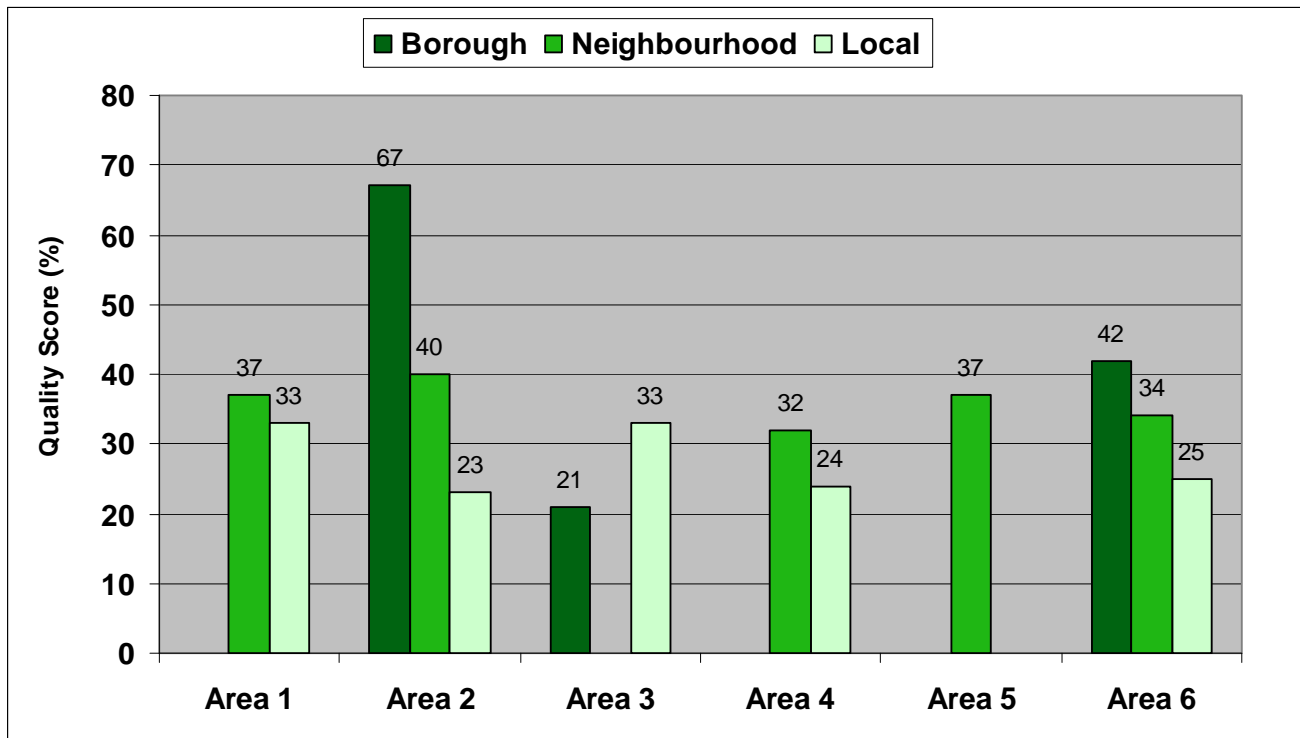
5.76   Figure 27 and Table 23 identifies the average quality by neighbourhood area and by natural and semi-natural hierarchy. The table demonstrates that, on the whole, the quality score depreciates with the hierarchical order of the spaces across each of the neighbourhood areas. The only exception to this is Area 3 where Local sites score higher (33%) than the Borough site (21%). The range in averages is greatest in Area 2 due to high score given to its Borough site, Site 7028 Barr Beacon.

Table 23 - Breakdown of Natural and Semi-Natural Site Quality

Hierarchy	Neighbourhood Area											
	Area 1		Area 2		Area 3		Area 4		Area 5		Area 6	
	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average
Borough	N/A	N/A	67%	67%	21%	21%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	34-49%	42%
Neighbourhood	27-49%	37%	29-59%	40%	N/A	N/A	25-39%	32%	37%	37%	34%	34%
Local	11-57%	33%	12-33%	23%	18%-46%	33%	19-28%	24%	N/A	N/A	20-32%	25%

Welcoming

5.77 Figure 28 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Welcoming' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are welcoming are consideration of the main entrances, side entrances, signage, and access paths and roads.

Figure 28 - Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace 'Welcoming' criteria
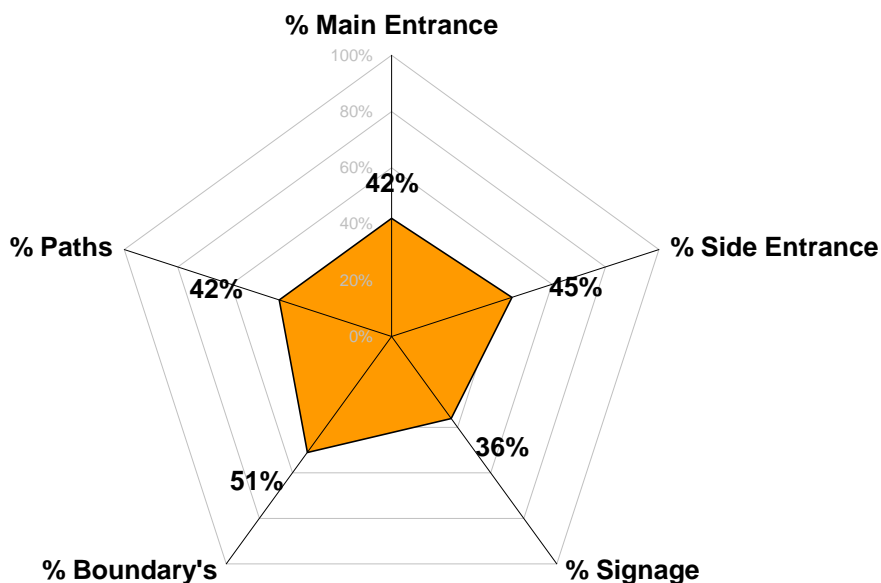
5.78 The average quality of the elements that are perceived to make a site welcoming are outlined below:

- The **Site Boundary's** scored best in terms of welcoming criteria at 51%, which is the only criteria that scored Average

- **Side Entrances** (45%), **Main Entrances** (42%) and **Paths** (42%) all scored towards the upper end of Below Average.

- **Signage** provision scored least well at 36%. This is of concern because signage represents the main mechanism with which sites can relay their specific 'natural' importance to the people that use the site and guide people around the site sensitively. Without appropriate signage, there is a danger that users could inadvertently damage aspects of the natural environment which make the site important. This is especially true for Local Nature Reserves which support unique and endangered habitats and species.

Well Maintained

5.79   In terms of being 'well maintained' the criteria utilised to assess the site value are focused on the maintenance of individual elements such as shrub beds, young trees, mature tree, grass cutting (close mown and naturalistic areas), litter bins and seating.

Figure 29 - Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace 'Maintenance' Criteria
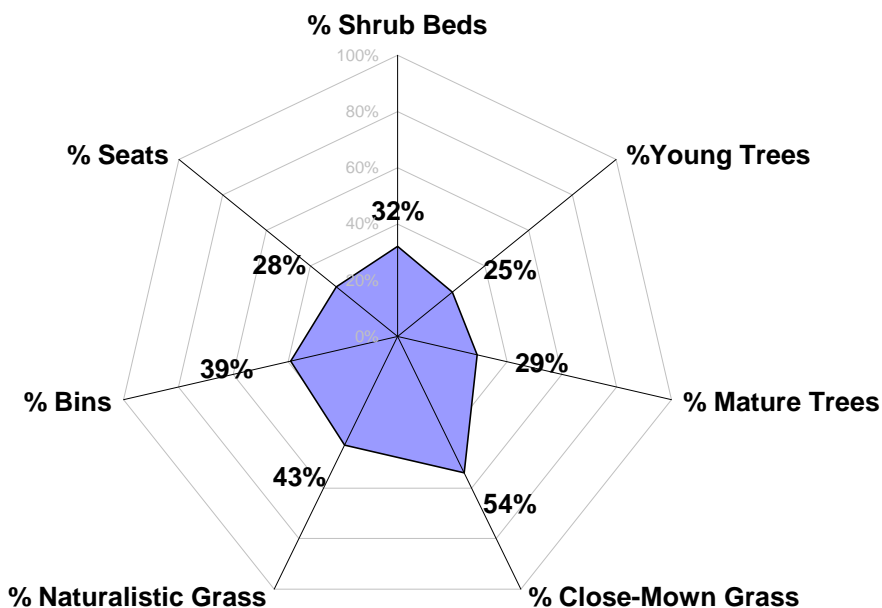
- **Close mown grass** generally rated as Average (54%) across the sites, the highest rating in terms of site maintenance.

- **Naturalistic grass** areas achieved the next highest rating at 43%, which is Below Average albeit at the upper end of the rating scale.

- In contrast, **Bins** (33%) and **Shrub Beds** (32%) are at the lower end of the rating scale for Below Average.

- **Mature Trees (29%)** and **Seating (28%)** rated as Poor, but are verging on Below Average.

- **Young Trees** (25%) are also rated as Poor in terms of being well maintained.

Safety

5.80 Figure 30 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Safe' perspective. The criteria used to assess whether the sites are safe are consideration of bins, seats, parking, lighting, information boards and cleanliness.

Figure 30 - Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace 'Safety' Criteria
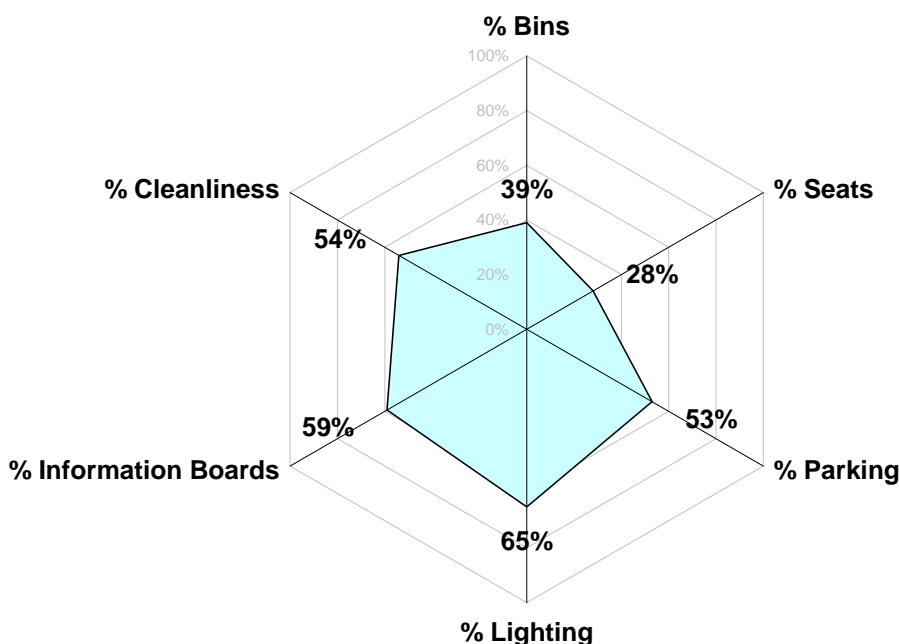
- **Lighting** (65%) rated as Good across the natural and semi-natural sites in Walsall, whilst **Information Boards** (59%) are verging on Good

- **Cleanliness** (54%) and **Parking** (53%) both rate as Average.

- However, **Bins** (39%) rate as below average whilst **Seating** rates as Poor (28%) in terms of safety.

Future Improvements

5.81 One of the great strengths of good quality natural and semi-natural greenspace provision is that they present an amenity from which people can engage with natural environments and observe nature in a way that is, by necessity, less structured or managed. However, these sites still need to be fit for purpose, welcoming, well maintained and safe (key elements of the Green Flag Award Site assessment).

5.82 The audit suggests that natural and semi-natural greenspaces in Walsall are not currently meeting all of the necessary criteria in terms of quality and as such improvements will be required across all the types or provision and across the different neighbourhood areas.

5.83 Table 24 shows the number of sites by strategic group that fall within the varying ranges for quality.

Table 24 – Number of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace Sites by Quality Range

Natural and Semi-Natural	Very Poor 0-15%	Poor 16-30%	Below Average 31-45%	Average 46-60%	Good 61-75%	Excellent 76%+	Total
Borough	-	1	1	1	1	0	4
Neighbourhood	-	4	6	2	2	0	12
Local	3	23	14	4	0	0	44
Total	3	28	21	7	3	0	60

5.84   Only 3 sites in Walsall (5%) out of 64 classified as natural and semi-natural greenspace rated an overall quality score that equalled Good. Nearly half (48%) were rated either Poor or Very Poor, with a further third rated (32%) as Below Average.

5.85   In terms of acting on the assessment findings it is evident that the quality standard needs to be raised across all types of site. In order to set targets for improvement, it is suggested that the quality thresholds be set as follows:

- **To strive for all Borough sites to be of a Good quality (61% or above)**

- **All Neighbourhood and Local sites to be of an Average quality (46% or above)**

5.86   The score is the minimum that sites should be maintained to in the future. This will require an improvement of 53 sites altogether.

Accessibility

5.87   Accessibility has been assessed using a variety of techniques including mapping exercises and consultation. The accessibility thresholds are outlined in Table 25 and the maps in Appendix 4. The consultation key findings show that:

- **60% of respondents to the public questionnaire reported that they visit natural and semi-natural greenspace – 9% on a daily basis, 13% on a weekly basis, 15% monthly and 24% occasionally**

- **63% of those who visit natural and semi-natural greenspace in Walsall walk, 28% drive, 5% cycle and 4% use public transport**

- **36% of respondents who visit natural and semi-natural greenspace reported it takes less than 5 minutes to travel to their nearest site, 33% report 6-10 minutes, 16% report 11-20 minutes and 15% over 20 minutes**

- **Local people have identified that they travel for an average of 11 minutes to gain access to natural and semi-natural greenspace in Walsall. This equates to 0.55 miles or 885 metres.**

Table 25 - Accessibility Analysis for Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace

Access Catchment: Borough Sites – 1,200m Neighbourhood Sites - 600m Local Sites - 400m				
Neighbourhood Area	**Number of households in Area**	**No. of households within catchment**	**% of households within catchment area**	**% of households outside catchment area**
Area 1	15,402	5,698	37%	63%
Area 2	21,922	8,949	41%	59%
Area 3	22,094	9,142	41%	59%
Area 4	22,588	1,982	9%	91%
Area 5	10,697	3,738	35%	65%
Area 6	16,661	13,102	79%	21%
Total	**109,364**	**42,611**	**39%**	**61%**

5.88   The GIS analysis has identified that 39% or 42,611 residential households in the Borough are within the combined access catchments set for natural and semi-natural greenspace. Importantly 61% of households are not currently within the catchment areas. Major lines of severance were taken into consideration for Local and Neighbourhood sites including canals, railway lines and motorways.

5.89   It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as natural and semi-natural greenspace.

Standards

Standards for Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace

Quantity

To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 2.70 ha per 1,000 population.

Quality

To strive for all Borough sites to be of a Good quality (61% or above)

All Neighbourhood and Local sites to be of an Average quality (46% or above)

Accessibility

To provide access to natural and semi-natural greenspace and for all households in the Borough to be within:

- 1,200m of a Borough site, or

- 600m of a Neighbourhood site, or

- 400m of a Local site

Amenity Greenspace

> **"Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas."**

Quantity

5.90   The Borough has 142 open space sites defined as amenity greenspace, totalling 190.07 ha. However, the auditing process highlighted 3 sites that were 'Not Accessible' totalling 4.69 ha. These sites are omitted from the remainder of the analysis.

5.91   The remaining 139 sites combine to provide 185.38 ha of amenity greenspace, which equates to an overall provision of 0.73 ha per 1,000 population.

5.93   Amenity greenspace provides a number of functions, but primarily the sites take the form of less formal greenspace provided mainly in residential areas. This provision enables local people to take part in casual recreation close to home. A full list of sites can be found in the appendices to this report.

5.94   The distribution of amenity greenspace by the six neighbourhood areas is outlined in Table 26, with a graphical presentation in Figure 31.

Table 26 – Amenity Greenspace Distribution

Area	Total Ha	No. of Sites	Population	Provision Ha Per 1,000	Average Site Size (Ha)	% of Total Sites	% of Total Provision (Ha)
1	27.80	13	35,939	0.77	2.32	9	15
2	8.50	6	49,579	0.17	1.42	4	5
3	40.49	42	51,506	0.79	0.96	30	22
4	44.75	25	53,456	0.84	1.79	18	24
5	35.89	24	25,555	1.40	1.50	17	19
6	27.95	29	38,438	0.73	0.96	21	15
Total	**185.38**	**139**	**254,473**	**0.73**	**1.33**	**100**	**100**

Figure 31 – Spatial Distribution of Amenity Greenspace by Area
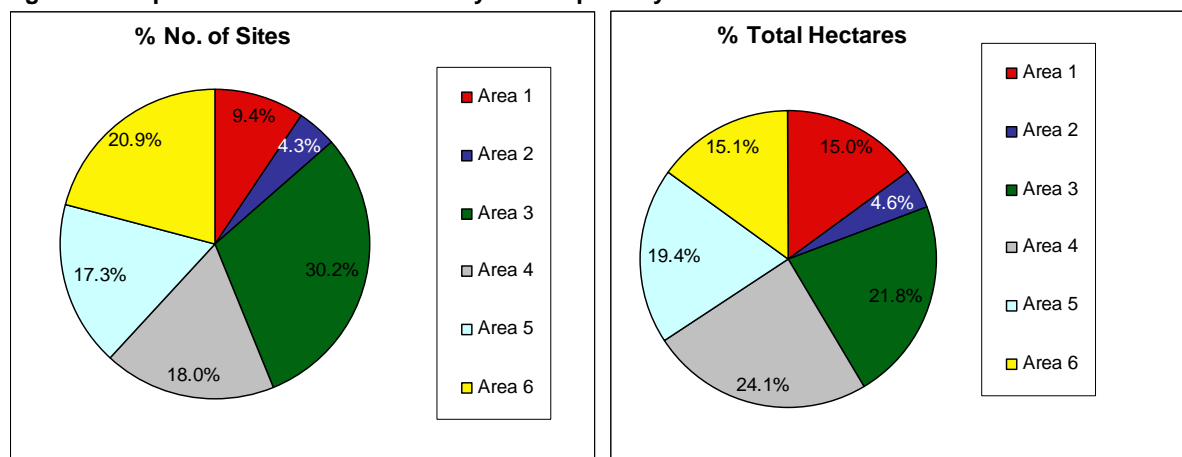
5.95 From Table 26 the key points relating to the spatial distribution of amenity greenspace by neighbourhood area can be summarised as follows:

- **Area 1 has 13 sites classified as amenity greenspace occupying 27.80ha with a provision level of 0.77 ha per 1,000 population. This is equivalent to 9% of the total number of amenity greenspace sites provided in Walsall, but in terms of total area, 15% of the total land provided as amenity greenspace.**

- **Area 2 has the fewest overall number of sites by a significant margin – only 6 sites are classified as amenity greenspace, with a provision level of just 0.17 hectares per 1,000 population.**

- **Area 3 has the greatest total number of sites – a total of 42, which represents 30% of all amenity spaces in Walsall. However, in terms of hectares, the area covered totals 40.5 hectares (22% of the overall space) and equates to a quantitative provision level per 1,000 population of 0.79, showing that site sizes on average are smaller.**

- **Area 4 has the most amenity space overall – 44.75 hectares (or 24% of all provision) across just 25 sites, showing site sizes to be generally large in comparative terms. The provision level per 1,000 population is 0.84ha/1,000, due to the area also having the largest population of all the analysis areas**

- **Area 5 has the highest level of provision per 1,000 population, due to the comparatively small population (just over 25,500) of the catchment area, which equated to 1.4 hectares of amenity space for every 1,000 people**

- **Area 6 has the second highest number of sites (29) classified as amenity space (or 21% of all sites) over a total area of just under 28 hectares. With a provision level per 1,000 of 0.73 ha, these sites take up just 15% of the total hectarage**

5.96 The average size of current provision is a valuable indicator when considering the need for future provision and setting benchmarks. Using the data collected, the average size of amenity sites considered in this audit is shown to be 1.33 ha, with sites in Areas 1 and 4 the largest on average.

5.97 Using this average size as a guide will ensure that spaces in the future serve a valuable purpose as informal spaces which are big enough to cater for recreation without causing nuisance or conflict with nearby residents.

Quality

5.98 Site audits were undertaken to 137 of the 139 accessible sites classified as amenity greenspace. 2 sites were omitted from the quality audit due to maintenance works. It is important to note that the quality score represents a "snapshot" in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit.

5.99 The overall quality findings from the site audits are outlined below.

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	**Poor**	**Below Average**	**Average**	**Good**	**Excellent**

5.100 Quality greenspace is normally fit for purpose, welcoming, well maintained and safe (key elements of the Green Flag Award Site assessment). One of the great strengths of good quality greenspace provision is the capacity of sites to provide opportunities for various activities.

5.101 Amenity greenspaces are often the sites closest to where people live and as such need to be maintained to a minimum of a good overall standard. At present the average quality across Walsall achieves a **38% overall score** and therefore falls short of the required standard, as '**Below Average**'.

5.102 In total, 35 amenity sites rated as 'Average' or above (25% of the total 139-site sample). 35 sites were scored as either 'Poor' or 'Very Poor'. Just four sites (3%) were given either a 'Good' or 'Excellent' rating.

5.103 Table 27 demonstrates on a neighbourhood area basis, the extent to which 'Average' quality amenity greenspace is provided for local people.

Table 27 – Amenity Greenspace rated as 'Average'

Area	Total audited sites	Number of sites at 46%+ (Average)	% of sites in the area achieving 46%+ (Average)
Area 1	13	4	31%
Area 2	6	3	50%
Area 3	41	10	24%
Area 4	24	7	29%
Area 5	24	5	21%
Area 6	29	6	21%
Total	**137**	**35**	**26%**

5.104 The table shows that in terms of percentages, only 26% of amenity sites across the Borough achieve 'Average' quality. Areas 5 and 6 are the poorest performers, with just 21% of sites hitting the 'Average' mark.

5.105   While the quality audit has demonstrated some variance in the quality of sites within the provision of amenity greenspace, generally, as the figures suggest, many sites are found to be of a poor quality. The lowest scores were at Anson Road (ID 4038/4067) with an overall score of 7% and 8%. The best scoring site is New Invention Community Green (Rugeley Avenue, 9008) which scored 81%.

Above - images from site audit – site 4038/4067 Anson Road

Above - images from site audit – site 9008 New Invention Community Green (Rugeley Avenue)

5.106   The above images show the contrast in the quality of the provision within amenity greenspace provision rated lowest and highest for quality. Factors such as maintenance, quality of footpaths, lack of benches and bins all affect the quality ratings. The quality audit also noted that quality varied within the six neighbourhood areas. Figure 32 identifies the variance in quality by area.

Figure 32 – Quality Range of Amenity Greenspace by Area
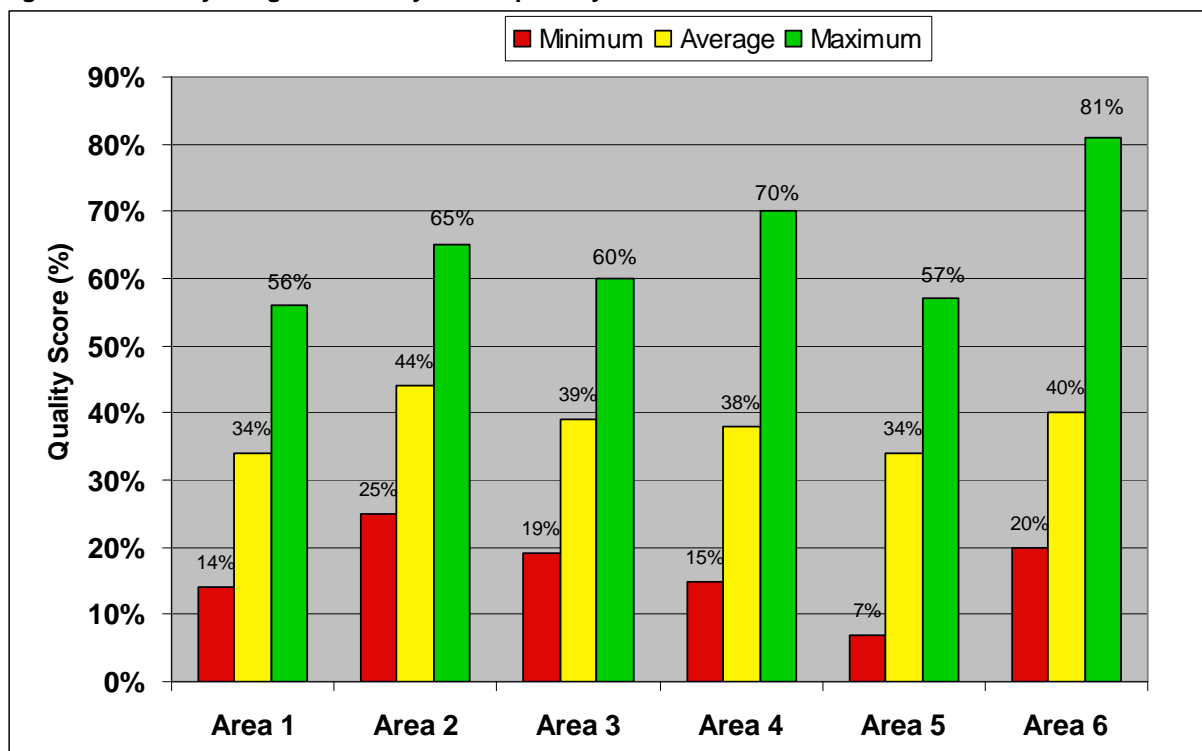
Neighbourhood Area	Range	Average	Rating
Area 1	14-56%	34%	Below Average
Area 2	25-65%	44%	Average
Area 3	19-60%	39%	Below Average
Area 4	15-70%	38%	Below Average
Area 5	7-57%	34%	Below Average
Area 6	20-81%	40%	Below Average
Total	7-81%	38%	Below Average

5.107   The figure shows that Area 6 has the greatest variance in quality range with a variance of 51% from the lowest score to the highest, and that Area 6 scored the second highest average (40%). Amenity greenspace demonstrates some variance in the overall quality across the authority area, but that generally sites are of a below average quality, with just Area 2 (which only has two sites) scoring Average. There was a generally consistent pattern in this regard.

5.108   The lowest overall average quality scores were found in Area 1 (35%). In this area, as in Areas 4, 5 and 6, it is notable that there was a significant range of results, with a 46% range from the bottom score to the top, highlighting a real variety of provision quality.

5.109   Figure 33 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Welcoming' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are welcoming are consideration of the main entrances, side entrances, signage, access paths and roads and the provision of car parking.

Figure 33 - Assessment of Amenity Greenspace using 'Welcoming' Criteria
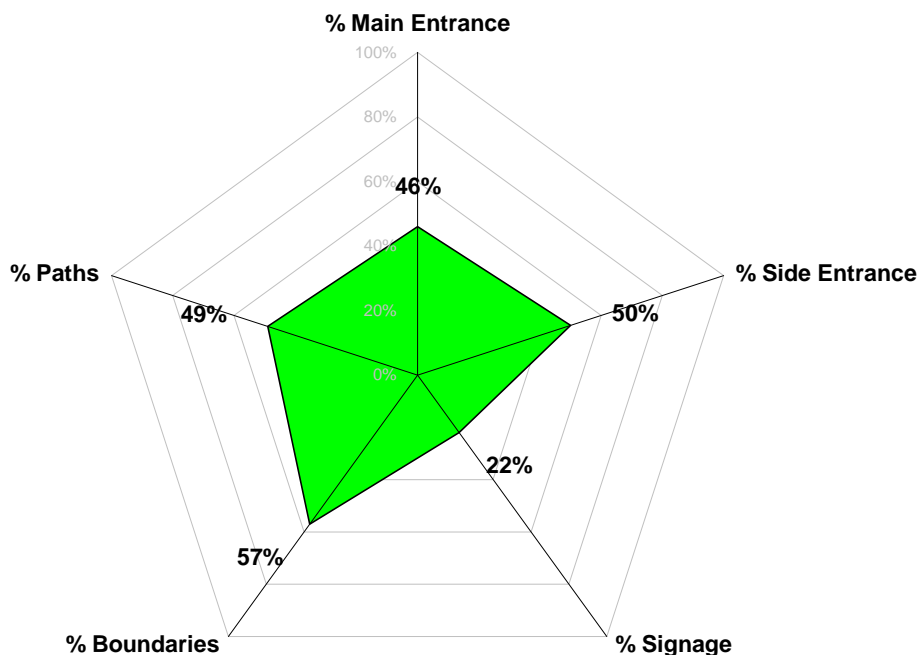
- **Main entrances** on amenity greenspace scored an average of 46% and as such fall on the boundary between the 'Below Average' and 'Average' Rating on the quality line.

- **Side entrances** rated slightly higher than main entrances, returning an overall average score of 50%, which places them in the 'Average' section of the quality matrix

- **Signage** provision was considered the poorest overall, returning just 22% on amenity greenspace sites with an overall rating that equates to 'Poor' on the site value line

- **Boundary fences hedges and gates** were found overall to be of a higher overall quality, scoring 57%, placing them towards the top end of the 'Average' scoring block

- **Roads, paths and access points** scored 49%. This, again, is an 'Average' rating.

5.110   In terms of the criteria to assess the quality of maintenance of a given area, these focus on individual elements such as flower beds, shrub beds, young trees mature tree, grass cutting (close mown and naturalistic areas) litter bins and seating. Figure 34 identifies this in more detail.

Figure 34 - Assessment of Amenity Greenspace using 'Maintenance' Criteria
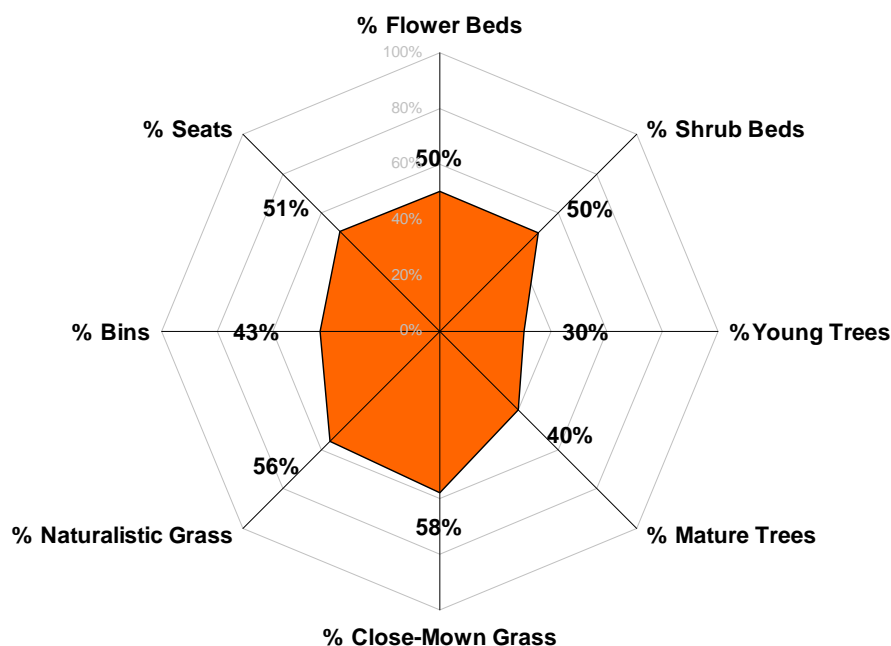
- Both **Flower Beds** and **Shrub Beds** received a 50% rating ('Average') placing them in the middle of this scoring bracket

- **Young Trees** had the lowest overall rating – just 30% which is on the divide between 'Poor' and 'Below Average' ratings on the quality line

- **Mature Trees** were scored slightly higher, returning an average of 40% which is classified as 'Average'

- **Close mown grass** rated as towards the top end of the 'Average' bracket – the best result of all criteria in the maintenance category with an average score of 58%

- **Naturalistic grass** areas were rated generally similarly to close mown areas – with an average of 56%

- **Bins** were rated as 'Below Average' with a percentage score of 43%

- **Seats** were scored as 'average' with a score of 51%

5.111   Figure 35 identifies the overall quality of sites in terms of their safety and security. The criteria used to assess if the sites are Safe include the provision of toilets, parking space, lighting, information boards and cleanliness.

Figure 35 - Assessment of Amenity Greenspace using 'Safety' Criteria
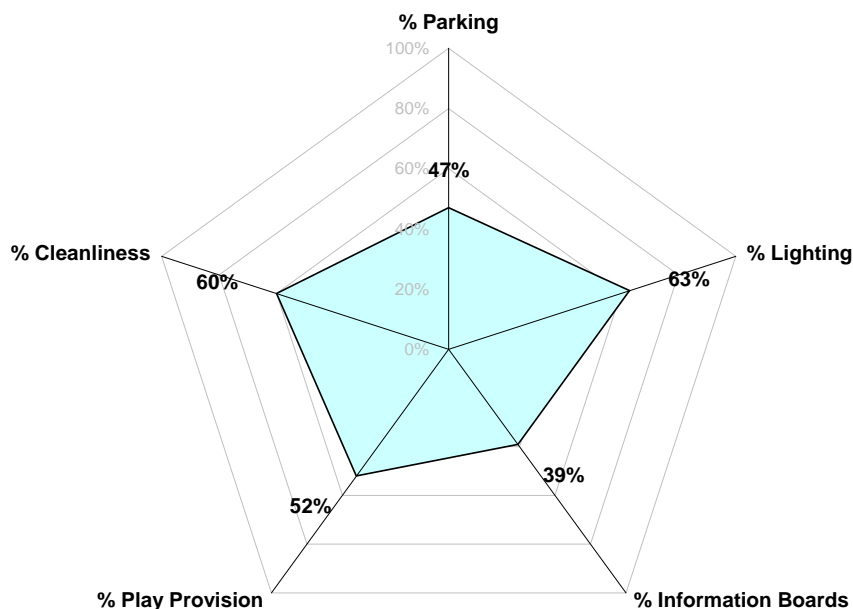
- **Parking** was given an 'Average' rating, across amenity sites which featured this facility, recording an average score of 47%

- **Lighting** was given an average score of 63% This is within the 'Good' rating of the quality line

- **Information Boards** only scored 39%, which places this on the 'Below Average' section of the quality line

- **Cleanliness** was regarded generally quite well in the context of other quality scores – with an average of 60% (just on the 'Average'/'Good' border)

Accessibility

5.112   Accessibility has been assessed using a variety of techniques including mapping exercises and consultation. The accessibility thresholds are outlined in Table 28 and the maps in Appendix 4. The consultation key findings show that:

- **63% of respondents to the public questionnaire reported that they visit amenity greenspace. Of those that do visit, 15% do so on a daily basis, 29% on a weekly basis, 30% monthly and 26% occasionally**

- **69% of those who visit amenity greenspace in Walsall walk, 20% drive, 5% cycle and 6% use public transport**

- **31% of respondents reported it takes less than 5 minutes to travel to their nearest amenity greenspace, 32% report 6-10 minutes, 20% report 11-20 minutes and 17% over 20 minutes**

- **Local people have identified that they travel for an average of 6 minutes to gain access to amenity greenspace in Walsall. This equates to 0.3 miles or 482 metres.**

- **Setting the access standard at 400 m would indicate an aspiration on the part of Walsall Council to ensure amenity greenspace provision is closer to residents than they currently expect to travel.**

Table 28 – Access Analysis of Amenity Greenspace

Access Catchment: 400m				
Neighbourhood Area	Number of households in Area	No. of households within 400m catchment	% of households within 400m catchment area	% of households outside 400m catchment area
Area 1	15,402	8,434	55%	45%
Area 2	21,922	5,016	23%	77%
Area 3	22,094	17,429	79%	21%
Area 4	22,588	13,388	59%	41%
Area 5	10,697	9,146	86%	14%
Area 6	16,661	11,854	71%	29%
Total	109,364	65,267	60%	40%

5.113   The GIS analysis has identified that 60% or 65,274 residential households in the Borough are within 400m of an amenity greenspace. Importantly 40% (44,090 households) are not within 400 m of amenity greenspace. Major lines of severance were taken into consideration for amenity greenspace sites including canals, railway lines and motorways.

5.114   It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as amenity greenspace.

Standards

Amenity Greenspace Standards

Quantity

To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.73 ha per 1,000 population.

Quality

To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.

Accessibility

To provide amenity greenspace within 400m of where people live

Green Corridors

"Walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife migration"

Quantity

5.115   The Borough has 15 open space sites defined as green corridors, totalling 39.19 ha. However, the auditing process highlighted 1 site (Ryecroft / Green Lane Cutting) that is 'Not Accessible' totalling 7.49 ha. This site is omitted from the remainder of the analysis.

5.116   The remaining 14 sites combine to provide 31.70 ha of green corridor, which equates to an overall standard of 0.12 ha per 1,000 population.

5.117   Green corridors provide a number of functions, but primarily the sites are linear corridors (such as disused railway lines) with public rights of way and are used for recreational pursuits such as walking, cycling or horse riding. This provision is also very important for the migration of wildlife, especially in urban areas. A full list of sites can be found in the appendices to this report.

5.118   The distribution of green corridors by the six neighbourhood areas is outlined in Table 29, with a graphical presentation in Figure 36.

Table 29 – Green Corridors By Neighbourhood Area

Area	Total Ha	No of Sites	Population	Provision Ha Per 1,000	% of Total Sites	% of Total Provision (Ha)
Area 1	0	0	35,939	0	0%	0%
Area 2	0.50	1	49,579	0.01	7%	2%
Area 3	5.06	2	51,506	0.10	14%	16%
Area 4	4.98	2	53,456	0.09	14%	16%
Area 5	10.15	4	25,555	0.40	29%	32%
Area 6	11.01	5	38,438	0.29	36%	35%
Total	31.70	14	254,473	0.12	100	100

Figure 36 – Spatial Distribution of Green Corridors by Area
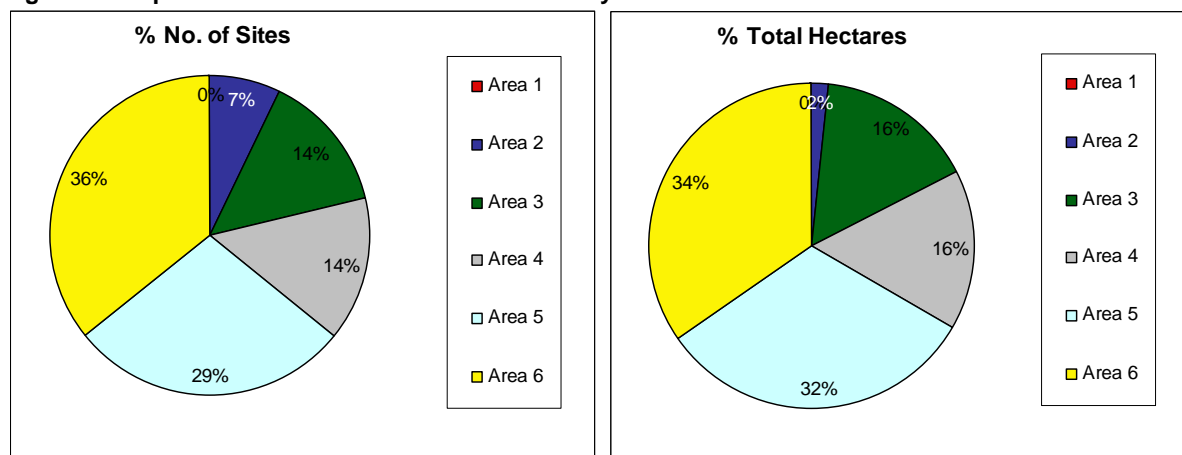
5.119   From Table 29 the key points relating to the spatial distribution of green corridors by neighbourhood area can be summarised as follows:

- **Area 1 has no sites designated as green corridors.**

- **Area 2 has 1 small site classified as a green corridor occupying 0.50 ha with a provision level of 0.01 ha per 1,000 population. This is equivalent to 2% of the total land provided as green corridor.**

- **Area 3 has 2 sites classified as green corridors (or 14% of all sites) with a total combined area of 5.06 hectares. This equates to a provision level per 1,000 of 0.10 ha, these sites take up just 16% of the total area.**

- **Area 4 also has 2 sites classified as green corridors with a total combined area of 4.98 hectares. This equates to a provision level of 0.09 ha per 1,000 population.**

- **Area 5 has 10.15 ha of green corridors and the highest level of provision per 1,000 population, due to the comparatively small population of the catchment area, which equates to 0.40 hectares of green corridor for every 1,000 people.**

- **Area 6 has the largest area of green corridor (11.01 ha) in Walsall with 5 sites in total. Quantitative provision equates to 0.29 ha per 1,000 population.**

Quality

5.120   Site audits were undertaken to all 14 accessible green corridor sites. The quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a "snapshot" in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit.

5.121   The overall quality findings from the site audits are outlined below.

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	**Poor**	**Below Average**	**Average**	**Good**	**Excellent**

5.122   Quality greenspace is normally fit for purpose, welcoming, well maintained and safe (key elements of the Green Flag Award Site assessment). One of the great strengths of good quality greenspace provision is the capacity of sites to provide opportunities for various activities.

5.123   At present the average quality across Walsall achieves a **27% overall score**, this rates as **'Poor'** when compared to the quality value line and therefore falls short of the required standard.

5.124   In total, 1 green corridor site rated as 'Very Poor', 10 sites were scored as 'Poor', 1 site as 'Below Average' and 2 sites were given an 'Average' rating. Table 30 demonstrates on a neighbourhood area basis, the quality ratings for green corridor sites.

Table 30 – Green Corridors Quality Rating

Neighbourhood Area	No. of Sites Audited	Quality Range (%)	Average Quality Score (%)
Area 1	0	-	-
Area 2	1	24%	24%
Area 3	2	26– 51%	39%
Area 4	2	16 - 18%	17%
Area 5	4	14 - 25%	21%
Area 6	5	17 - 46%	31%
Total	14	14 - 51%	27%

5.125   While the quality audit has demonstrated some variance in the quality of sites within the provision of green corridors, generally, as the figures suggest, many sites are found to be of a poor quality. The lowest scores were at Bentley Railway Linear Walkway (ID 4062) with an overall score of 14%. The best scoring site is Turnberry Road Green Corridor (ID 2058) which scored 51%.

Above - images from site audit – site 9075 Waddens Brook Linear Open Space

Above - images from site audit – site 2058 Turnberry Road Green Corridor

5.126   The above images show the contrast in quality within the green corridor provision rated some of the lowest and highest for quality. Factors such as maintenance, quality of footpaths, lack of signage, benches and bins affect the quality ratings. The quality audit also noted that quality varied within the six neighbourhood areas.

5.127   Figure 37 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Welcoming' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are welcoming are consideration of the main entrances, side entrances, signage, access paths and roads and the provision of car parking.

Figure 37 - Assessment of Green Corridors using 'Welcoming' Criteria
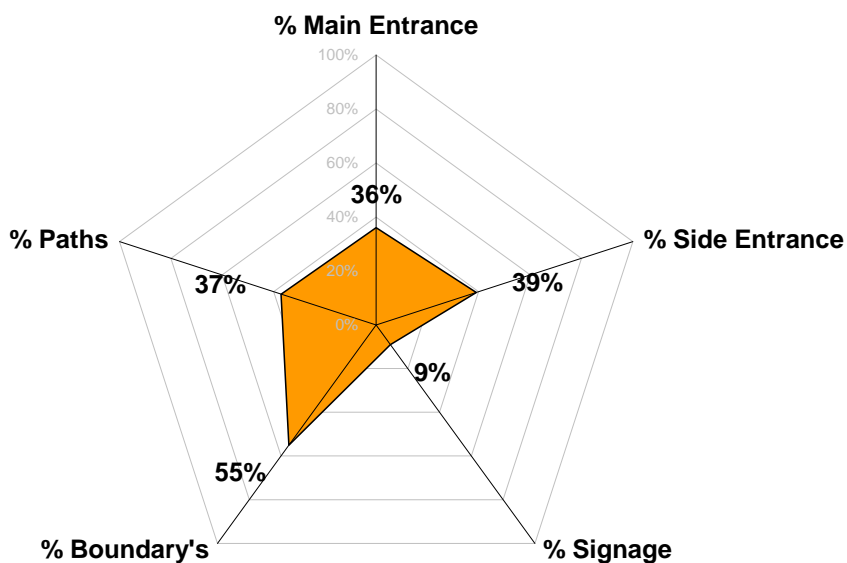
- **Main entrances** for green corridors scored an average of 36% and as such fall into the 'Below Average' Rating on the quality line.

- **Side entrances** rated slightly higher than main entrances, returning an overall average score of 39%, which places them in the 'Below Average' section of the quality matrix

- **Signage** provision was considered the poorest overall, returning just 9% at green corridor sites with an overall rating that equates to 'Very Poor' on the site value line

- **Boundary fences hedges and gates** were found overall to be of a higher overall quality, scoring 55%, placing them towards the top end of the 'Average' scoring block

- **Roads, paths and access points** scored 37%. This is a 'Below Average' rating.

5.128   In terms of the criteria to assess the quality of maintenance of a given area, these focus on individual elements such as shrub beds, young trees, mature tree, grass cutting (close mown and naturalistic areas) and litter bins. Figure 38 identifies this in more detail.

Figure 38 - Assessment of Green Corridors using 'Maintenance' Criteria
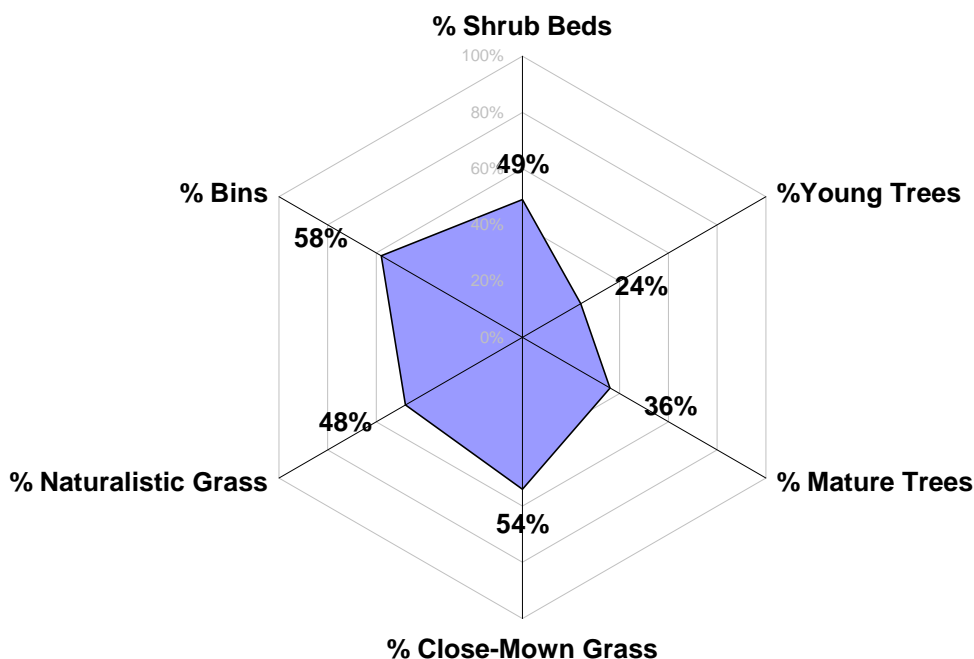
- **Shrub Beds** received a 49% rating ('Average') placing them in the middle of this scoring bracket

- **Young Trees** had the lowest overall rating – just 24% which rates as 'Poor'

- **Mature Trees** were scored slightly higher, returning an average of 36% which is classified as 'Below Average'

- **Close mown grass** rated as 54% 'Average'

- **Naturalistic grass** were rated an average of 48%

- **Bins** were rated as 'Average' with a percentage score of 58%

Accessibility

5.129   Accessibility has been assessed using a variety of techniques including mapping exercises and consultation. The accessibility thresholds are outlined in Table 31 and the maps in Appendix 4. The consultation key findings show that:

- **60% of respondents to the public questionnaire reported that they visit green corridors. Of those that do visit 12% do so on a daily basis, 27% on a weekly basis, 23% monthly and 37% occasionally**

- **To access sites, 70% of those who visit green corridors in Walsall walk, 19% drive, 7% cycle and 4% use public transport**

- **25% of respondents reported it takes less than 5 minutes to travel to their nearest green corridor, 31% report 6-10 minutes, 25% report 11-20 minutes and 44% over 20 minutes**

- **Local people have identified that they travel for an average of 12 minutes to gain access to green corridors in Walsall. This equates to 0.6 miles or 966 metres.**

Table 31 – Access Analysis of Green Corridors

Access Catchment: 1,000m				
Neighbourhood Area	**Number of households in Area**	**No. of households within 1,000m catchment**	**% of households within 1,000m catchment area**	**% of households outside 1,000m catchment area**
Area 1	15,402	813	5%	95%
Area 2	21,922	4,097	19%	81%
Area 3	22,094	9,999	45%	55%
Area 4	22,588	6,268	28%	72%
Area 5	10,697	8,201	77%	23%
Area 6	16,661	9,999	60%	40%
Total	**109,364**	**39,377**	**36%**	**64%**

5.130   The GIS analysis has identified that 36% or 39,377 residential households in the Borough are within 1,000m of a green corridor. Importantly 64% are not within 1,000 m of a green corridor.

5.131   It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as a green corridor.

Standards

Green Corridor Standards

Quantity

To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.12 ha per 1,000 population.

Quality

To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.

Accessibility

To provide green corridors within 1,000m of where people live

Outdoor Sports Facilities

> **"Sites specifically intended to meet demand for formal participation in sport including pitch sports, tennis, bowls and athletics or countryside and water sports"**

5.132   This section considers the wide range of outdoor sports provision across the Borough. It includes specific sites developed within the hierarchy to focus resources and to promote sport and recreation. A more detailed assessment of grass pitch provision can be found in the playing pitch strategy which sits alongside this document.

Quantity

5.133   This section considers those facilities classified as outdoor sports facilities as advocated by PPG17 and the associated guidance. The quantity audit has revealed the following provision in accordance of outdoor sport in the Borough and on an area basis. These are shown in Table 32.

5.134   The audit has identified 49 sites that have been classified as outdoor sport, these occupy 398.42 ha and provide 1.57 ha per 1,000 population.

Table 32 – Outdoor Sport Provision across the Borough

Area	Population	No of sites	Total	Provision per 1,000	% of Number	% of Total Ha
Area 1	39,939	7	18.66	0.47	14%	5%
Area 2	49,579	12	122.87	2.48	24%	31%
Area 3	51,506	4	48.12	0.93	8%	12%
Area 4	53,456	13	172.00	3.22	28%	43%
Area 5	25,555	6	23.35	0.91	12%	6%
Area 6	38,438	7	13.42	0.35	14%	3%
Total	254,473	49	398.42	1.57	100%	100%

Figure 39 – Spatial Distribution of sites classified as Outdoor Sports Facilities
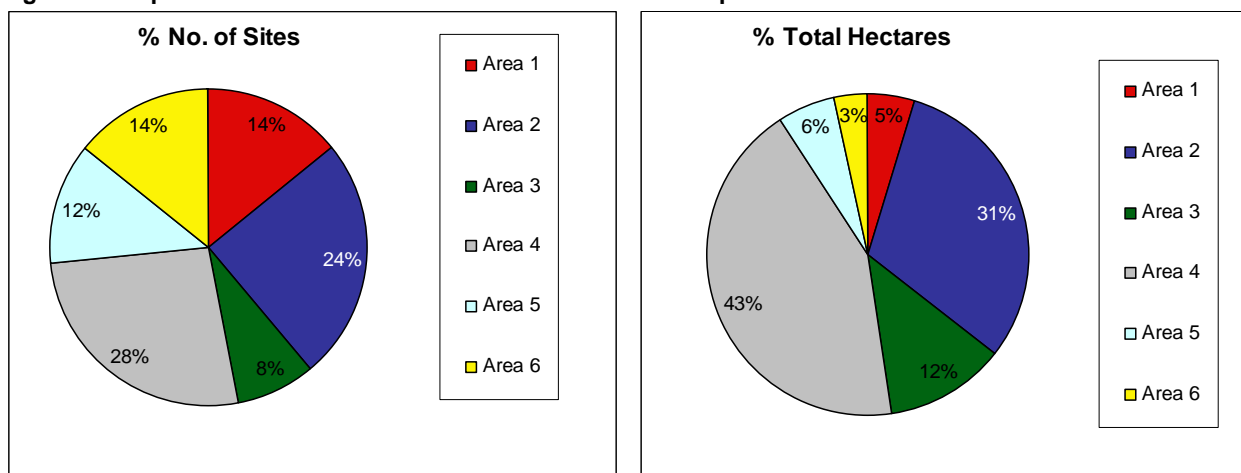
5.134 From Figure 39 the distribution of sites provided for outdoor sport across the Borough is uneven both in terms of the number of sites and the amount of land provided. It is important to note that this section considers the facilities that are not within other typologies such as a grass pitch in a park or school it only recognises those sites designed as standalone facilities.

5.135 Table 32 demonstrates the marked variation in the amount of land designated as outdoor sport by area across the Borough. The figures include golf courses in the Borough, a total of 5 sites equating to 240.99 ha. These figures have been excluded for the purpose of setting standards. By excluding golf courses **the overall provision equates to 157.43 ha or 0.62 ha per 1,000 population**. A further 53 sites have been identified as containing outdoor sports facilities within other typologies.

Quality

5.136 The quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a 'snapshot' in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit. The key criteria for outdoor sport include:

- **Entrance areas**

- **Presence and quality of signage and information**

- **Presence and quality of parking and lighting**

- **The quality of key furniture including seats and bins**

- **The quality of grassed areas**

- **Cleanliness**

- **The quality of specific facilities including pitches, bowling greens and tennis courts**

5.137   All quality assessments are measured against the quality value line to provide a comparator between sites.

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent

5.138   The audit of provision has revealed that the quality of sports grounds varies significantly, the average quality of Council provision is 48% (Average). The audit has also revealed that quality varies across provision and quality varies by area.

5.139   Quality inspections have been undertaken via a site visit to 40 of the 49 sites. The quality assessment is based on a number of key criteria encompassing the quality aspects of the Green Flag Award. For sports pitches these are considered in more detail in the Council's separate Playing Pitch Strategy. Further information can be found in the Appendices.

5.140   Table 33 identifies the quality findings for sports grounds across the Borough.

Table 33 – Quality of Outdoor Sports Provision

Area	Quality range	Average Quality Score	Variance	Quality Rating
Area 1	53% - 60%	57%	7%	Average
Area 2	38% - 66%	52%	28%	Average
Area 3	24% - 52%	38%	28%	Below Average
Area 4	22% - 63%	48%	41%	Average
Area 5	28% - 64%	42%	36%	Below Average
Area 6	24% - 74%	45%	50%	Below Average
Borough Wide	22% - 74%	48%	52%	Average

5.141   The quality of formal outdoor sports facilities in Walsall can be summarised as follows:

- **Quality of sites varies significantly from 22% (poor) to 74% (good)**

- **The average quality rating of formal outdoor sport sites in the Borough is 48% rating as 'average' on the quality line**

- **Area 1 has the highest average quality score of 57%.**

- **Area 1 also has the smallest variance with all sites falling in the 'average' rating.**

- **Area 3 has the lowest average score of 38% rating as 'below average'**

- **Area 6 has the greatest variance between sites of 50% with quality scores ranging from 22 to 74%**

Accessibility

5.135   Accessibility has been assessed using a variety of techniques including mapping exercises and consultation. The accessibility thresholds are outlined in Table 34 and the maps in Appendix 4. The consultation key findings show that:

- **72% of respondents to the public questionnaire reported that they visit outdoor sports facilities. Of those that do visit 23% do so on a daily basis, 40% on a weekly basis, 17% monthly and 21% occasionally**

- **To access sites, 64% of those who visit outdoor sports facilities in Walsall walk, 27% drive, 3% cycle and 6% use public transport**

- **27% of respondents reported it takes less than 5 minutes to travel to their nearest outdoor sports facility, 30% report 6-10 minutes, 25% report 11-20 minutes and 18% over 20 minutes**

- **Local people have identified that they travel for an average of 12 minutes to gain access to outdoor sports facilities in Walsall. This equates to 0.6 miles or 966 metres.**

Table 34 – Access Analysis of sites containing sports provision

Access Catchment: 1,000m				
Area	**Number of households in Area**	**No. of households within 1,000m catchment**	**% of households within 1,000m catchment area**	**% of households outside 1,000m catchment area**
Area 1	15,402	15,001	97%	3%
Area 2	21,922	21,881	100%	0%
Area 3	22,094	21,051	95%	5%
Area 4	22,588	22,130	98%	2%
Area 5	10,697	10,696	100%	0%
Area 6	16,661	16,633	100%	0%
Total	**109,364**	**107,392**	**98%**	**2%**

5.118   The GIS analysis has identified that 98% or 107,932 households in the Borough are within 1,000m of a site containing sports provision. Only 2% are not within 1,000 m of an outdoor sports facility.

5.119   It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the facilities that have good changing, accessible facilities and are reasonable priced for use, as such they may travel further a field to use facilities than the one nearest to where they live.

Standards

5.120   A quantity standard derived from sites in use would be 0.62 hectares per 1,000 population. The demand for outdoor sports facilities needs to be considered in conjunction with the Borough's Playing Pitch Strategy. This demonstrates the need for pitches more accurately based on demand and future population, it also recognises the pitch facilities within other typologies such as parks. The standards have been set using the current provision as the baseline to guide the development of standards for the future.

Formal Outdoor Sport Standards

Quantity

To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.62 ha per 1,000 population.

Quality

To strive for all formal outdoor sport sites to be of an 'average' quality (46% or above)

Accessibility

To provide an accessible outdoor sports facility within 1,000m of where people live

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Provision for Children and Young People

> **"Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, multi-use games areas (MUGA), and skateboard parks"**

5.136 Provision for children and young people consists of equipped play areas and specialist provision for young people, including skateparks and multi-use games areas (MUGAs). The provision of facilities for children and young people is important in facilitating opportunities for play and physical activity and the development of movement and social skills. A variety of types of open space can provide children and young people with these opportunities, but the audit uses the principle of 'primary purpose', so provision for children and young people focuses on equipped play areas.

5.137 The Council produced its Play Strategy in 2007. The strategy and its actions, supports key documents and their priorities, such as the Council's Corporate Vision and a significant number of other documents from partner organisations.

5.138 The strategy realises the need to work in partnership and maximise opportunities of external funding. The Walsall Play Partnership will not only be the drive for communication, cooperation and delivery but also monitoring and evaluation of the Council's work.

5.139 It is recognised that 'play' is greater than the element of fixed, equipped play dealt with in the play strategy. Play can also encompass open space, sport, organised activity schemes and even 'Home Zones' in residential developments. These are covered by other Council strategies and policy.

Quantity

5.140 The audit undertaken has revealed that there are 65 sites that have provision for children and young people, occupying 11.31 hectares. The provision is split between sites that are specifically provided for children and young people (i.e. stand alone play areas) and provision within other typologies e.g. parks. The total number of play areas classified as 'stand-alone sites' is 7, with the remaining 58 play areas located on sites classified within other typologies.

5.141 The quantity standards for children and young people are based on the population of children aged 0-19 years. Table 35 provides a summary of provision for children and young people within Walsall, and Appendix 1 contains the sites identified as provision for children and young people. The provision is as follows:

- **58 play areas within other typologies (8.70 hectares)**

- **7 stand alone play areas (2.61 hectares)**

5.142 It is important to note that the 8.70 ha of land occupied by play areas within other typologies has already been calculated within the typologies they occupy. This is taken into consideration when calculating the standards for children and young people.

Table 35 – Provision for Children & Young People

Neighbourhood Area	Children's Population aged 0-19 years	Site Type	No. of Sites	Total Ha	Hectares per 1,000 C&YP's Population
Area 1	8,609	Within other typology	12	2.49	0.29
		Stand alone	0		
Area 2	11,203	Within other typology	11	2.37	0.21
		Stand alone	1		
Area 3	14,631	Within other typology	8	1.66	0.11
		Stand alone	2		
Area 4	15,474	Within other typology	12	2.32	0.15
		Stand alone	1		
Area 5	7,371	Within other typology	9	0.72	0.10
		Stand alone	1		
Area 6	9,772	Within other typology	6	1.75	0.18
		Stand alone	2		
Total	**67,060**	Within other typology	**58**	**11.31**	**0.17**
		Stand alone	**7**		
		Total	**65**		

5.143   The identified provision for children and young people in total covers **11.31 ha** across the Borough. From Table 35 a number of observations can be made:

- **Throughout Walsall there is 0.17 hectares of provision per 1,000 population of children and young people**

- **Area 5 has the least provision per 1,000 population with 0.10 ha / 1,000 population**

- **Area 1 has the most provision with 0.29 ha / 1,000 population and Area 4 has the most number of play sites.**

- **It must be noted that the quality and accessibility of provision is more important than the amount of provision, given the small amount of area the sites generally cover**

5.144 Table 36 summarises the type of provision in each area. The figure summarises the number of pieces of play equipment in each area. A piece of equipment would be a slide, roundabout, group of swings etc., and this also includes MUGAs and equipment in skate parks.

Table 36 – Summary of provision by area

Area	Children's Population aged 0-19 years	No. of equipped play areas	No. of MUGA	No. of skate parks	Total no. of pieces of play equipment	No. of pieces of play equipment per 1,000 children
Area 1	8,609	12	2	1	73	8
Area 2	11,203	12	3	2	80	7
Area 3	14,631	10	4	3	56	4
Area 4	15,474	13	4	0	82	5
Area 5	7,371	10	3	1	64	9
Area 6	9,772	8	3	1	47	5
Total	67,060	65	19	8	402	6

5.145 Of the 65 sites containing equipment for children's play, the following provision could be found:

- **65 equipped play areas**

- **19 MUGAs (multi-use games areas)**

- **8 skate parks**

- **A total of 402 pieces of play equipment**

- **Across the Borough there are 6 pieces of play equipment per 1,000 children and young people**

- **In Areas 1 and 5 each child is served by a similar amount of play equipment (9 pieces per 1,000). Area 3 has the least pieces of play equipment per 1,000 children with only 4 per 1,000.**

Quality: Equipped Play Areas

5.146 Quality Inspections have been undertaken via a site visit to all 65 sites with play equipment. The quality assessment proforma for play areas has been based on the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) "Play Value Assessment" and looks at a variety of criteria including the overall appearance of the site, the ambience and the type of equipment by age range.

5.147 The quality inspections consider the following:

- **Balancing**
- **Jumping**
- **Climbing**
- **Rotating**
- **Crawling**
- **Sliding**
- **Gliding**
- **Rocking**
- **Group Swinging**
- **Agility Bridges**
- **Single Swinging**
- **Viewing Platform**
- **Ball Play**
- **Wheeled Play**

5.148 In summary the criteria have been used to rate quality and value of local play facilities. Appendix 3 contains the quality rating for the provision of children and young people.

5.149 It is important to note that play provision is not simply providing equipment; it is also about the environment that equipment is situated in. The audit considers elements that best practice play areas have been found to promote. These include diversity in textures, use of wildflowers and landscaping. In supporting the generation of a sense of place it considers whether the play area is locally related to reflect some local significance. This could be, for example, if the site is near the seaside, then the play area's design could reflect this through themed equipment designed around the sea.

5.150 Site scores not only consider the condition of the equipment they also consider the play value of the entire designated play area. This includes consideration for the different types of activity that the play area allows including:

- **Overall site features** including access gates, whether the area is pollution and noise free, presence of shade, access for the disabled, appropriate signage, locally related features and seating

- **Equipment** for **Toddlers, Juniors** and **Teenagers** have been assessed as discrete elements within the overall play value assessment

5.151 The audit allows compilation of a quality score (presented as a percentage) to reflect variances in the quality of facilities across the Borough. The score can be rated against a value line that reflects the overall quality of the site. The value line is outlined below.

Quality Line – Provision for Children & Young People

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent

5.152 As part of the ROSPA audit individual play elements have been scored by age group (toddlers, juniors, and teenagers). These have been compared against the ROSPA value line set out below.

Toddler, Junior and Teenage Play

<25%	25%-40%	41%- 50%	51%-65%	66% +
Poor	**Below Average**	**Average**	**Good**	**Excellent**

5.153   The quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a 'snapshot' in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the visit. A summary of the quality assessment ratings for each site are shown in Table 37.

5.154   The images below show the contrast in the quality of provision for children and young people showing two of the lowest and highest scoring sites for quality.

Above Images from audit to Site ID 6006 Westgate

Above Images from audit to Site ID 5004 Palfrey Park

5.155   As part of the public consultation local residents were asked to rate the quality of each typology. 49% of respondents considered provision for children and young people to be above average (very good or good), 27% average and 24% below average (poor or very poor).

Table 37 – Quality of Equipped Play Areas

Area	No. of Sites	Average Quality Score and Range (%)	Average Toddler Score and Range (%)	Average Junior Score and Range (%)	Average Teenager Score and Range (%)
Area 1	12	45% 19 – 62%	20% 13 – 32%	19% 2 – 51%	41% 25 – 56%

Area	No. of Sites	Average Quality Score and Range (%)	Average Toddler Score and Range (%)	Average Junior Score and Range (%)	Average Teenager Score and Range (%)
Area 2	12	48% 26 – 65%	20% 8 – 32%	22% 8 – 32%	33% 21 – 50%
Area 3	10	50% 24 – 68%	21% 13 – 29%	17% 8 – 31%	15% 8 – 31%
Area 4	13	53% 36 – 72%	17% 3 – 42%	21% 2 – 49%	19% 8 – 27%
Area 5	10	38% 16 – 49%	19% 3 – 39%	18% 5 – 32%	35% 33 – 37%
Area 6	8	44% 33 – 65%	27% 13 – 42%	28% 10 – 56%	29% 17 – 40%
Total	**65**	**47%** **16 – 72%**	**20%** **3 – 42%**	**21%** **2 – 56%**	**27%** **8 – 56%**

5.156 Key findings relating to the overall quality of children's play areas include:

- **The average rating of sites across the Borough is 47% - this rates as 'average' when compared to the quality value line**

- **The average for toddler provision is 20% or poor**

- **The average for junior provision is 21% or poor**

- **The average for teenage provision is 27% or below average**

- **Across the Borough the overall quality of sites varied considerably from 16% (poor) to 72% (good)**

- **The toddler scores range from 3% to 42%**

- **The junior scores range from 2% to 56%**

- **The teenager scores range from 8% to 56%**

Accessibility

5.157 Accessibility has been assessed using a variety of techniques including mapping exercises and consultation. The accessibility thresholds are outlined in Table 38 and the maps in Appendix 4. The consultation key findings show that:

- **69% of respondents to the public questionnaire reported that they visit provision for children and young people. 18% of those who visit do so on a daily basis, 31% on a weekly basis, 28% monthly and 23% occasionally.**

- **80% of those who visit provision for children and young people walk, 16% drive, 3% use public transport and 5% cycle.**

- **42% of respondents who visit reported it takes less than 5 minutes to travel to a play area, 32% report 6-10 minutes, 16% report 11-20 minutes and 11% over 20 minutes.**

- **Local people have identified that they travel for an average of 9 minutes to gain access to sites for children and young people in Walsall. This equates to 0.45 miles or 724 metres.**

- **Setting the access standard at 600 m would indicate an aspiration on the part of Walsall Council to ensure provision for children and young people is closer to residents than they currently expect to travel.**

Table 38 - Accessibility Analysis for all sites containing Provision for Children and Young People

Access Catchment: 600m				
Neighbourhood Area	**Number of households in Area**	**No. of households within 600m catchment**	**% of households within 600m catchment area**	**% of households outside 600m catchment area**
Area 1	15,402	12,000	78%	22%
Area 2	21,922	13,848	63%	37%
Area 3	22,094	11,649	53%	47%
Area 4	22,588	15,046	67%	33%
Area 5	10,697	9,786	91%	9%
Area 6	16,661	11,496	69%	31%
Total	**109,364**	**73,825**	**68%**	**32%**

5.158 The GIS analysis has identified that 68% or 73,828 residential households in the Borough are within the access catchment set for provision for children and young people. Importantly 32% of households are not currently within the catchment areas. Major lines of severance were taken into consideration for all sites containing provision for children and young people including canals, railway lines and motorways.

Standards

Standards - Provision for Children & Young People

Quantity

To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.17 ha per 1,000 children's population (aged 0-19 years)

Quality

To strive for all play sites to be of an 'average' play quality (46% and above)

Accessibility

To provide access for all households in the Borough to be within 600m of provision for children and young people

Allotments

> **"Opportunities for those people who wish to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion"**

5.159   This section considers the provision of both public and private allotments across the Borough. Allotments provide a key type of provision within the overall portfolio of open space facilities. The accessibility of open space varies greatly dependent upon the type of provision, and it is by their very nature that allotments are only accessible with restrictions in that you must be a tenant or plot holder.

5.160   From the consultation undertaken, the value of allotments is significant, providing facilities for physical activity in addition to the promotion of healthy eating and educational value. The provision of allotments is a statutory function for local authorities under a number of legislative acts including the 1950 Allotment Act.

5.161   Allotments, like other open space, can provide a number of wider community benefits and achieve a number of sustainability targets, in addition to their primary purpose of growing produce. These include:

- **Conservation** - Allotments can be an important genetic resource for the conservation of rare species

- **Recycling** - Allotments holders are encouraged to recycle and offer the potential for community composting sites

- **Transport** - Home grown food means there is less transport (less 'food miles') and less packaging

- **Employment and Training** - New skills and opportunities whether promotional, managerial or cultivation

- **Education** - Links with schools, special needs and adult learning. Close contact with wildlife can lead to a lifelong interest

- **Leisure** - Promoting local tourism - arts, crafts and volunteering

- **Sustainable neighbourhoods** - revitalising allotments and neighbourhoods

- **Community Development** - Co-operation across ethnic, age and other demographic barriers. Allotment societies often play a wider role in community schemes, becoming involved with local schools as well as programmes for the mentally and physically ill or disabled, and providing people from different cultural backgrounds with the opportunity to meet and share experiences

- **Health** - Increased consumption of fresh foods and more exercise and relief from stress, and therapy for those with mental health problems

- Providing opportunity for **social inclusion** and cohesion

- Creating opportunities for people to participate in **recreation**

Quantity

5.162 The audit undertaken has revealed that there are 41 sites occupying 44.40 hectares and providing 0.17 ha per 1,000 population. Table 39 identifies the overall provision in the Borough and by area.

Table 39 - Allotment Provision across the Borough

Area	Population	No. of Sites	Total Ha	Ha Per 1,000	%of Number of Sites	% of Total Hectares
Area 1	39,939	3	3.11	0.08	7%	7%
Area 2	49,579	2	1.37	0.03	5%	3%
Area 3	51,506	7	8.23	0.16	17%	19%
Area 4	53,456	15	24.13	0.45	37%	54%
Area 5	25,555	9	4.17	0.16	22%	9%
Area 6	38,438	5	3.39	0.09	12%	8%
Total	**254,473**	**41**	**44.40**	**0.17**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 40 - Allotment Provision across the Borough
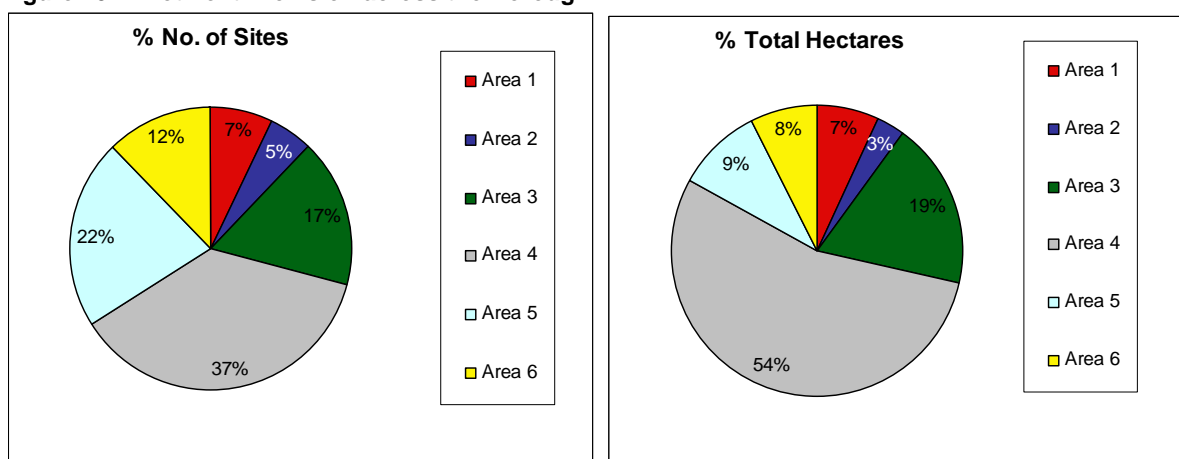
5.163 From Figure 40 the distribution of allotment provision across the Borough is uneven both in terms of the number of sites and the amount of land provided as allotment sites. This can be summarised as follows

- **Area 4** has the greatest provision with 15 sites, and 24.13 ha which equates to 0.45 ha per 1,000 population, this is well above the Borough average of 0.17 ha per 1,000

- **Area 2** has the least provision with only two sites of 1.37 ha which equates to 0.03 ha per 1,000.

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- **Areas 1, 5 and 6** have a similar amount of provision in terms of total hectares however due to the varying population levels in each area the provision per 1,000 varies from 0.08 ha in Area 1 to 0.16 in Area 5.

- **Area 3** has a level of provision per 1,000 population of 0.16 ha. This is similar to the overall Borough average of 0.17 ha per 1,000.

5.164   When considering the level and extent of allotment provision it is important to identify the level of demand, this is achieved by identifying the number of plots available and then considering the number of people on the waiting list. 14 allotment sites are directly managed by the Council, a further 24 sites are managed by Local Management Associations (LMA). The information in Table 40 has been provided in consultation with the Council and LMA's.

Table 40 – Summary of Allotment Demand

Area	Population	Total no. of Allotment Plots	Plots Per 1,000	No. on Waiting List
Area 1	39,939	156	3.91	32
Area 2	49,579	75	1.51	37
Area 3	51,506	271	5.26	61
Area 4	53,456	655	12.25	39
Area 5	25,555	207	8.10	55
Area 6	38,438	57	1.48	88
Total	**254,473**	**1,421**	**5.58**	**312**

5.165   It is clear from Table 40 that there is further demand for allotments in Walsall. Before any further provision is considered the reuse and filling of vacant or unmanaged plots needs to be considered to reduce waiting lists.

5.166   To meet demand it is also important that vacant plots are turned around quickly and where possible larger plots divided in half to allow new tenants access and reduce waiting list numbers. It is also important that current disused sites are brought back into operational use.

Quality

5.167   The quality audit provides an indicative rating of quality out of 100%. It is important to note that the quality score represents a 'snapshot' in time and records the quality of the site at the time of the audit.

5.168   Sites were assessed against a range of key criteria including:

- **Entrance areas**

- **The presence of water supply**

- **Whether the site is served by toilets**

- **Secure fencing around the site**

- **Signage to identify management, usage arrangements, special events and the availability of plots**

- **The presence of facilities such as composting bins, a shop and car parking**

5.169   Site audits were undertaken at 26 sites in the Borough, the remaining 15 sites were locked or inaccessible at the time of auditing and were not fully assessed for quality. Quality ranged from 6% to 57% across the 26 audited sites. The overall quality findings from the site audits are outlined below with the average quality for allotments across the Borough being 33% or 'below average' when measured against the quality value line.

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	**Poor**	**Below Average**	**Average**	**Good**	**Excellent**

5.170   None of the allotment provision has been rated to be good in terms of quality, this is concerning especially as demand seems to be consistent with people waiting for plots and also having to pay an annual rental fee.

Images from Site ID 5015-17 Delves Green Road Allotments

Images from Site ID 3011 Beechtree Road Allotments

5.171   The quality audit has revealed a significant variance in the quality of allotments across the 6 neighbourhood areas in the Borough, this is demonstrated in Table 41.

Table 41 - Allotment Quality Rating

Area	Quality range	Average Quality Score	Quality Rating
Area 1	40% - 47%	43%	Below Average
Area 2	21% – 57%	39%	Below Average
Area 3	21% - 41%	32%	Below Average
Area 4	17% - 39%	27%	Poor
Area 5	22% - 42%	31%	Below Average
Area 6	30% - 45%	38%	Below Average
Borough Wide	**17% - 57%**	**34%**	**Below Average**

5.172   From Table 41 the quality of allotments in Walsall can be summarised as follows:

- In **Area 1** the overall average of allotment quality is 43%, the highest average quality score in all 6 areas.

- **Area 2** has an overall average of 39% (below average on the quality line rating) but the highest scoring site of Beechtree Road Allotments (57%)

- **Areas 3 and 5** score very similar and both have a variance of 20% across the range of quality scores.

- Despite having the most sites and the largest area of allotments, the average quality score for **Area 4** also rates poorly at 27%.

- **Area 6** allotments are maintained and provided to an overall average rating of 38% which along with Area 1 is higher in quality than the average across the Borough (33%).

5.173   The allocated scores reflect the quality of the infrastructure of the sites within this typology at a point in time. It is recommended that the Council should aspire to deliver 'Average' quality services and facilities.

5.174   When considering the quality of sites in this typology, best practice dictates that these sites are tremendously beneficial to people and their well being. As such they should, as a minimum, provide a running water supply, signage, and a toilet facility.

5.175   Generally minor improvements to the infrastructure of sites within this typology would make significant differences. Tidy perimeters, including appropriate security measures such as gates and fencing improvements, signage and notice boards, waste management, and quicker re-letting of vacant plots would all change the overall impression.

5.176   Figure 41 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Welcoming' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are welcoming are consideration of the main entrances, side entrances, signage, boundary fences, access paths and roads.

Figure 41 - Quality of Allotment sites from a 'Welcoming' perspective
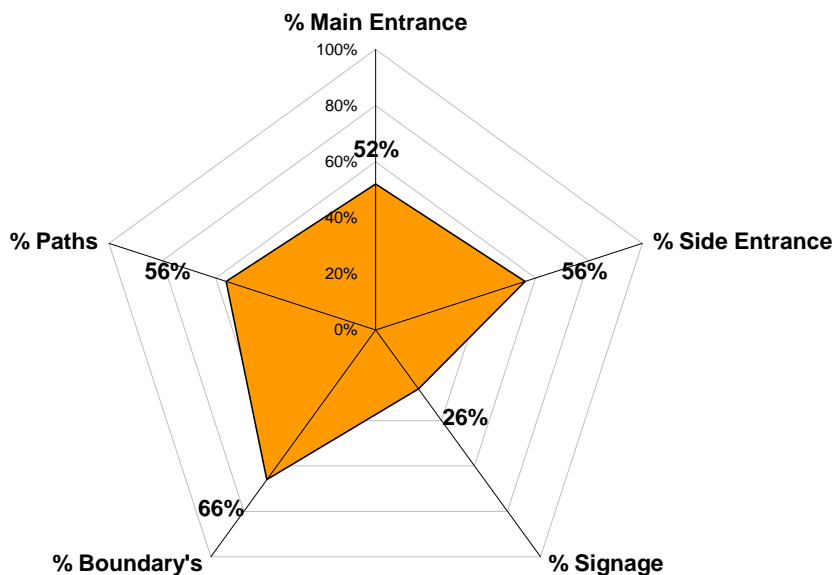
- **Main entrances** on allotment sites scored an average 52% and rated as **average** quality

- **Side Entrances** rated as 56%, **average** for quality

- **Signage** provision scored 26% on allotment sites with an overall rating that equates to **poor**

- **Boundary** fences hedges and gates where found overall to be a higher quality scoring 66% rating as **good**

- **Roads, paths and access points** averaged 56% and rated overall as **average**

5.177 The criteria utilised to assess the site value are focused on the maintenance of individual elements such as, shrub beds, young trees, mature tree, grass cutting (close mown and naturalistic areas) and litter bins. Figure 42 identifies this in more detail.

Figure 42 - Quality of Allotment sites from a 'Maintenance' perspective
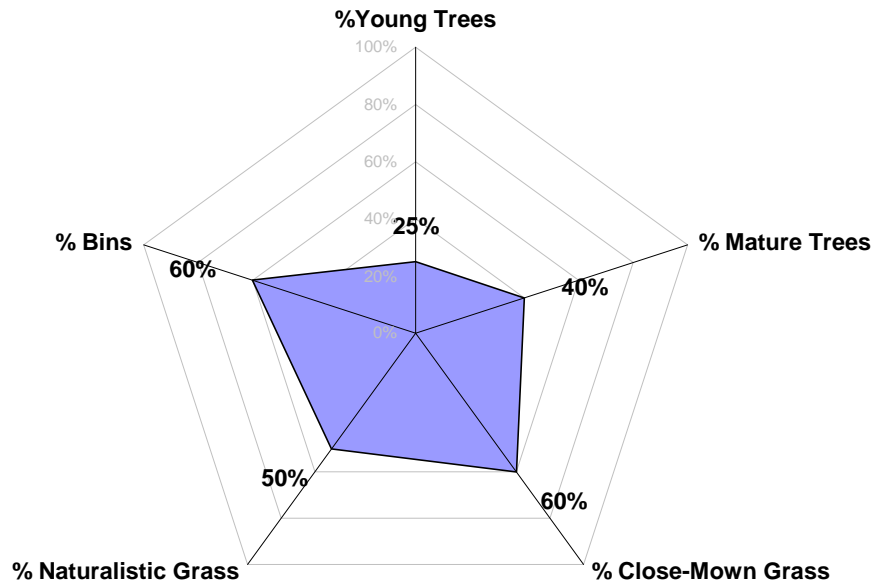
- **Young Trees** rated overall as **poor** at 25%

- **Mature Trees** rated an average quality of 40% which is **below average**

- **Close mown grass** rated as **average** overall at 60%

- **Naturalistic grass** areas rated as being **average** at 50% average quality score

- **Bins** rated 60% or **average**

5.178 Figure 43 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Safe' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are 'Safe' are consideration of toilets, parking, information boards and cleanliness.

Figure 43 - Quality of Allotment sites from a 'Safe' perspective
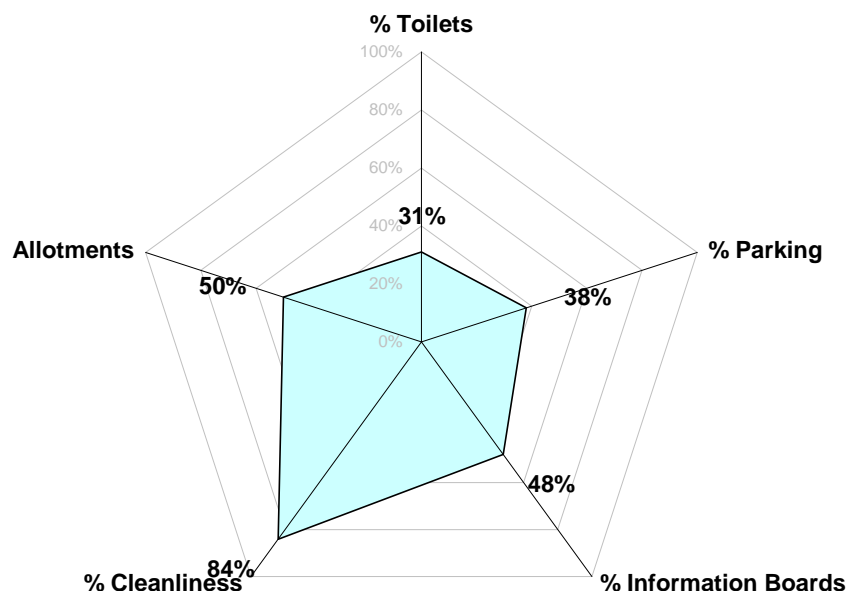
- Where **Toilets** were provided toilets and the toilet facility rated overall as **below average** (31%)

- **Parking** rated as **below average** at 38%

- **Information Boards** rated an average score of 48% rating as **average**

- **Cleanliness,** sites rated as **excellent** for cleanliness overall at an average rating of 84%

- Overall **Allotments** were rated as **average** (50%) for on site facilities.

Accessibility

5.179 Accessibility has been assessed using a variety of techniques including mapping exercises and consultation. The accessibility thresholds are outlined in Table 42 and the maps in Appendix 4. The consultation key findings show that:

- **32% of respondents to the public questionnaire reported that they use allotments – 4% on a daily basis, 7% on a weekly basis, 7% on a monthly basis and 14% occasionally.**

- **62% of those who use allotments walk, 27% drive, 5% cycle and 5% use public transport.**

- **23% of respondents reported it takes less than 5 minutes to travel to their nearest allotment, 31% report 6-10 minutes, 23% report 11-20 minutes and 24% over 20 minutes.**

- **Local people have identified that they travel for an average of 13 minutes to gain access to allotment sites in Walsall. This equates to 0.65 miles or 1046 metres.**

- **Setting the access standard at 1000 m would indicate an aspiration on the part of Walsall Council to ensure allotment provision is closer to residents than they currently expect to travel.**

Table 42 - Accessibility Analysis for all Allotments

Access Catchment: 1,000m				
Neighbourhood Area	**Number of households in Area**	**No. of households within 1,000m catchment**	**% of households within 1,000m catchment area**	**% of households outside 1,000m catchment area**
Area 1	15,402	6,798	44%	56%
Area 2	21,922	7,475	34%	66%
Area 3	22,094	19,282	87%	13%
Area 4	22,588	19,175	85%	15%
Area 5	10,697	10,215	95%	5%
Area 6	16,661	14,478	87%	13%
Total	**109,364**	**77,423**	**71%**	**29%**

5.180   The GIS analysis has identified that 71% or 77,422 residential households in the Borough are within 1,000m of an allotment site. Importantly 29% are not within 1,000m of an allotment site.

5.181   It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the allotments that have a good reputation; this means they may travel to a site that is further than the one nearest to home.

Standards

5.182   A quantity standard derived from sites in use would be 0.17 hectares per 1,000 population. The demand for allotments nationally is growing as people are seeking more healthy active lifestyles. Therefore it is suggested to sustain this standard until the Council and LMA's develop a strategy to utilise and fill vacant or unmanaged plots and disused sites are brought back into operational use where possible. The standards have been set using the current provision as the baseline to guide the development of standards for the future.

Allotment Standards

Quantity

To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.17 ha per 1,000 population

Quality

To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.

Accessibility

To provide an accessible allotment plot within 1,000m of where people live

Cemeteries and Churchyards

> **"The primary purpose is for the burial of the dead and for quiet contemplation, but also for the promotion of wildlife conservation, biodiversity and to provide a link to the past. Also includes closed burial grounds used for informal recreation"**

5.183 Cemeteries and closed churchyards can provide a valuable contribution to the portfolio of open space provision within an area. For many people, these spaces provide a place for quiet contemplation in addition to their primary purpose as a final resting place. They often have wildlife conservation and biodiversity value. In the context of this study, it is important to acknowledge that cemeteries are not created with the intention of providing informal or passive recreation opportunities.

5.184 Cemeteries can make a significant contribution to the provision of green space sometimes providing a sanctuary for wildlife in urban areas otherwise devoid of green space. Although many have restricted access, they still provide a useful resource for the local community. A wide variety of habitats can often be found supporting the other open space types, such as areas of semi-natural and natural green space. Within urban areas, cemeteries are often among the few areas of greenspace where the local community is able to have some contact with the natural world. Within rural communities they often provide a strong link to the past.

Quantity

5.185 There are 20 sites identified as cemeteries and churchyards in Walsall, covering a total area of 64.55 hectares of provision across the authority area. This is equivalent to a level per 1,000 population of 0.25 hectares. The distribution of these sites on an area basis is highlighted in Table 43.

Table 43 – Cemeteries and Churchyards

Neighbourhood Area	Total Ha	No. of Sites	Population	Provision Ha Per 1,000	Average Site Size (Ha)	% of Total Sites	% of Total Provision (Ha)
Area 1	2.94	3	39,939	0.07	0.98	15%	5%
Area 2	11.21	4	49,579	0.22	2.80	20%	17%
Area 3	22.16	3	51,506	0.43	7.39	15%	34%
Area 4	8.6	3	53,456	0.16	2.87	15%	13%
Area 5	9.45	3	25,555	0.37	3.15	15%	15%
Area 6	10.19	4	38,438	0.27	2.55	20%	16%
Total	64.55	20	254,473	0.25	1.33	100%	100%

Figure 44 – Spatial Distribution of Cemeteries by Neighbourhood Area
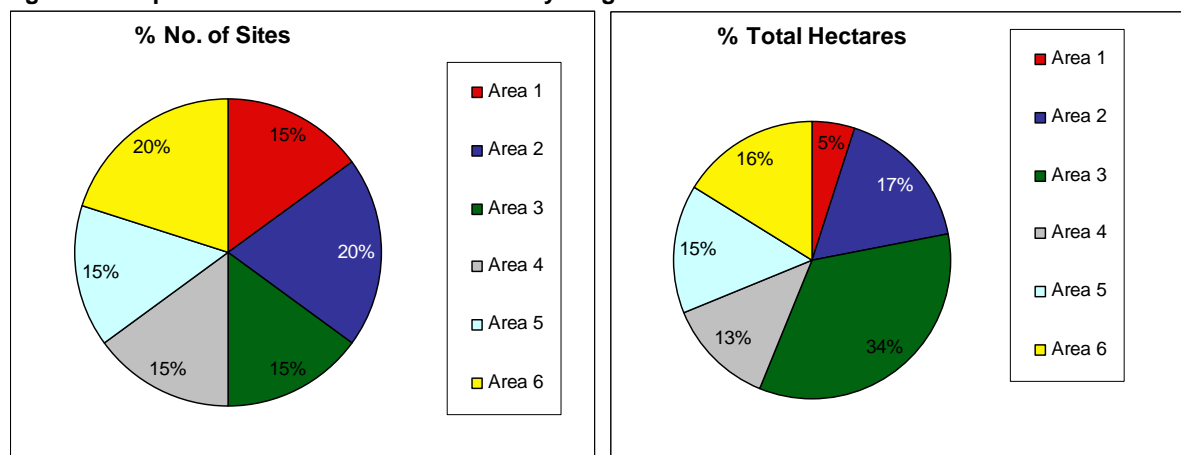
5.186   From Figure 44 the key points relating to the spatial distribution of cemeteries by neighbourhood area can be summarised as follows:

- **Area 1 has three sites which are classified as cemeteries or churchyards representing 15% of all sites in Walsall, however, due to the relatively small size of sites (average 0.98ha), this is equivalent to just 5% of the overall area and a provision level per 1,000 population of 0.07 ha**

- **Area 2 has four sites (20% of all sites), occupying a total area of 11.21 hectares, this is 17% of the total space occupied by this typology**

- **Area 3 also has three sites, but the size of these (which includes the Ryecroft Cemetery at 14.6 ha) gives an overall area of 22.2 ha – 34% of the total space in Walsall – with an average site size of 7.4 ha and a provision level per 1,000 of 0.43ha**

- **Area 4 has 8.6 hectares across three sites. With an average site size of 2.9ha, this is equivalent to 0.16 ha per 1,000, and a total 13% of all provision**

- **Area 5 also has three sites (15% of total sites) which total 9.45ha (average site size 3.15 ha). This is also equivalent to 15% of the total space as cemeteries/churchyards**

- **Area 6 has four sites (total area 10.2 ha) giving a provision level per 1,000 of 0.27 ha and an average site size of 2.55 ha**

Quality

5.187   There are no national or local standards for the quality of cemeteries. Increasingly though, a number of local authorities have entered cemeteries for the Green Flag Award.

5.188   Quality inspections have been undertaken via a site visit and completion of a scored proforma. The quality was broadly based on the scoring system used for other accessible types of open space. The key criteria include:

- **Main entrance safety and cleanliness**

- **Signage**

- **Upkeep and safety of graves**

- **Quality of roads and pathways**

- **Provision of bins and seats**

Quality Line

0% - 15%	16% - 30%	31% - 45%	46% - 60%	61% - 75%	76% +
Very Poor	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent

5.189   Site visits where undertaken to all 20 identified cemeteries and churchyards across the six analysis areas within the authority. It is important to consider wider facilities that could be developed further at some of the sites. These would include recycling facilities for visitors to dispose of flowers, etc. The key findings of the quality assessments undertaken are provided in Table 44.

Table 44 - Summary of Quality Assessment Findings

Neighbourhood Area	Quality Range	Average Quality	Variance	Quality Rating
Area 1	34% - 55%	45%	21%	Below Average
Area 2	33% - 56%	44%	23%	Below Average
Area 3	47% - 68%	59%	21%	Average
Area 4	39% - 56%	45%	17%	Below Average
Area 5	29% - 70%	54%	41%	Average
Area 6	25% - 73%	46%	48%	Average
Total	**25% - 73%**	**49%**	**48%**	**Average**

5.190   The results of the quality assessments show a significant variance in the quality of cemeteries and churchyards.

- **Overall, the range of quality across all sites is nearly 50% with an average quality of 49% ('Average' on the quality line). There are five sites which fall in the 'Good' category (more than 61% score)**

- **In Area 1 the quality of cemeteries on average was found to be 'Below Average', although only marginally.**

- **There are no areas which have any particular issues in terms of quality when compared with the authority as a whole, although the lowest scoring area on average was Area 2**

- **Area 3 scored the best in terms of average quality scores, with a score of 59% - at the upper end of the 'Average' bracket on the quality line. The lowest scoring site in this area still returned 47%**

- **Area 6 shows the biggest variety, featuring both the lowest and highest scoring sites**

5.191 The allocated scores reflect the quality of the infrastructure of the sites within this typology at a point in time. The importance of cemeteries as places to remember the dead and to allow people to sit and reflect and to grieve should not be underestimated, as such they need to be maintained and managed to an excellent standard.

5.192 The quality audit has demonstrated some variance in the quality of sites within the provision of cemeteries and churchyards. The lowest score was at St Giles Church (ID 9068) with an overall score of 25%. The best scoring site is Willenhall Lawn Cemetery (ID 9072) which scored 73%.

Above - images from site audit – site 9068 St Giles Church

Above - images from site audit – site 9072 Willenhall Lawn Cemetery

5.193 Generally improvements to the infrastructure of sites within this typology would make significant difference to visitors through improved overall appearance, maintenance of benches and bins, and the provision of recycling or compost areas for visitors to dispose of flowers.

5.194 Figure 45 identifies the overall quality of sites from a 'Welcoming' perspective. The criteria used to assess if the sites are welcoming include the main entrances, side entrances, signage, access paths and roads.

Figure 45 - Quality rating from a 'Welcoming' perspective
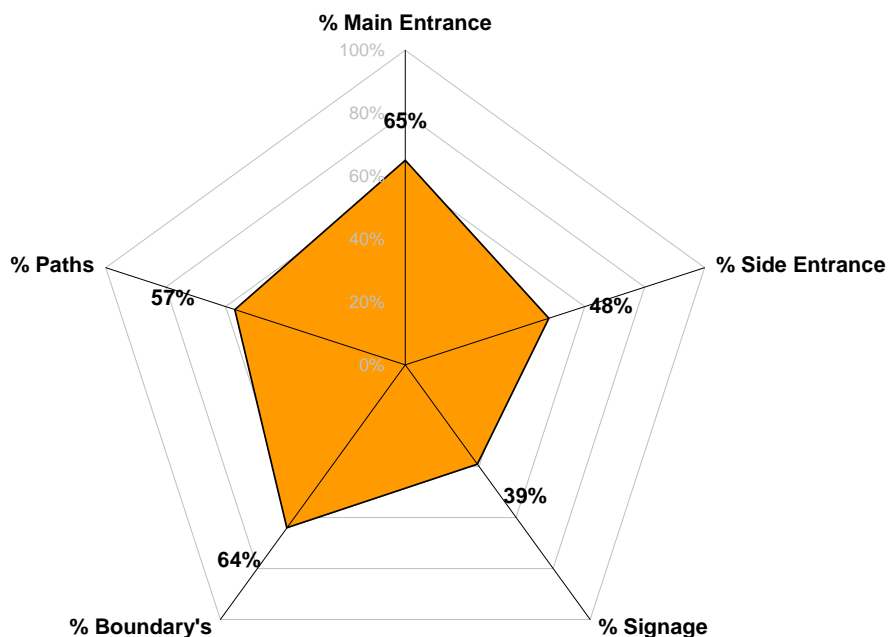
- **Main entrances** on sites within this typology scored an average 65% and as rated as '**Good'** quality overall

- **Side Entrances** were given a lower overall rating, returning an average of 48% which places them in the 'Average' section of the quality assessment line.

- **Signage** provision was the lowest scoring criteria in relation to the 'welcoming' qualities of sites, with an average of 39% or 'Below Average'

- **Boundary** fences, hedges and gates where found overall to be **'Good'** with a 64% rating

- **Roads, paths and access points** averaged 57% and rated overall as '**Average'**.

5.195   In terms of being 'well maintained', site assessments focused upon several distinct elements to ascertain their overall contribution to the level of maintenance across the site. These elements include shrub beds, young trees mature tree, grass cutting (close mown and naturalistic areas) litter bins and seating. Figure 46 identifies this in more detail.

Figure 46 - Quality rating from a 'Maintenance' perspective
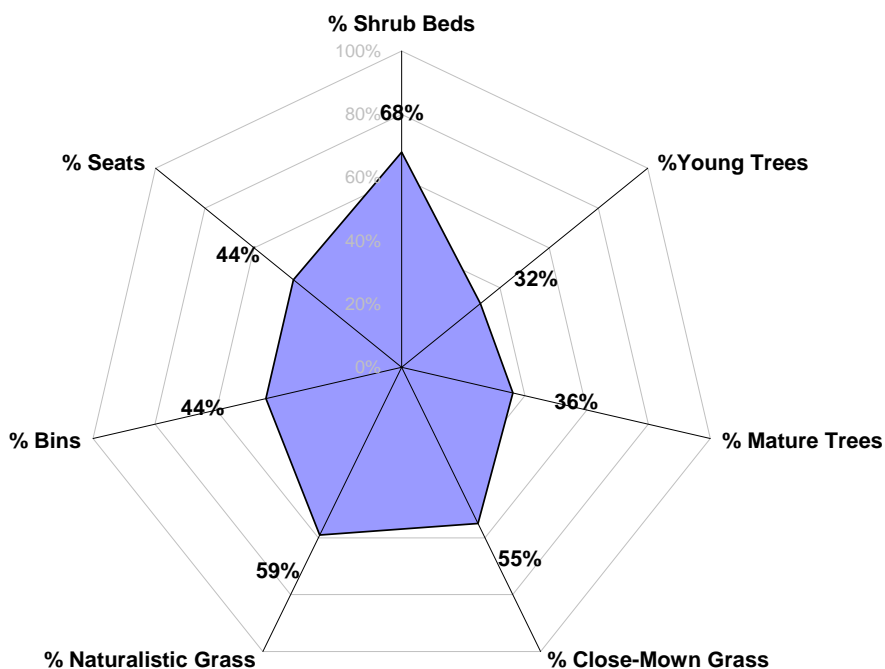
- **Shrub beds** rated an average of 68% (the highest scoring element evaluated) and therefore were found to be of '**Good'** quality

- With regard to **Young Trees** and **Mature** Trees the maintenance and condition overall was found to be of a poorer quality, rating at 32% and 36% respectively, both scores falling within the 'Below Average' section of the quality line

- **Close mown grass** rated as **Average** overall at 55%

- **Naturalistic grass** areas also rated as **Average** with a quality score across all sites of 59%

- **Bins** were rated as **Below Average** (44% quality score) across those sites that provided bins for visitors.

- **Seats** also scored an overall average quality score of 44% giving a rating of **Below Average**

5.196   Figure 47 identifies the overall quality of sites from a perspective of Safety and Security. The criteria used to assess if the sites are Safe include the provision and quality of toilets, lighting, information boards and general cleanliness.

Figure 47 - Quality rating from a 'Safety' perspective
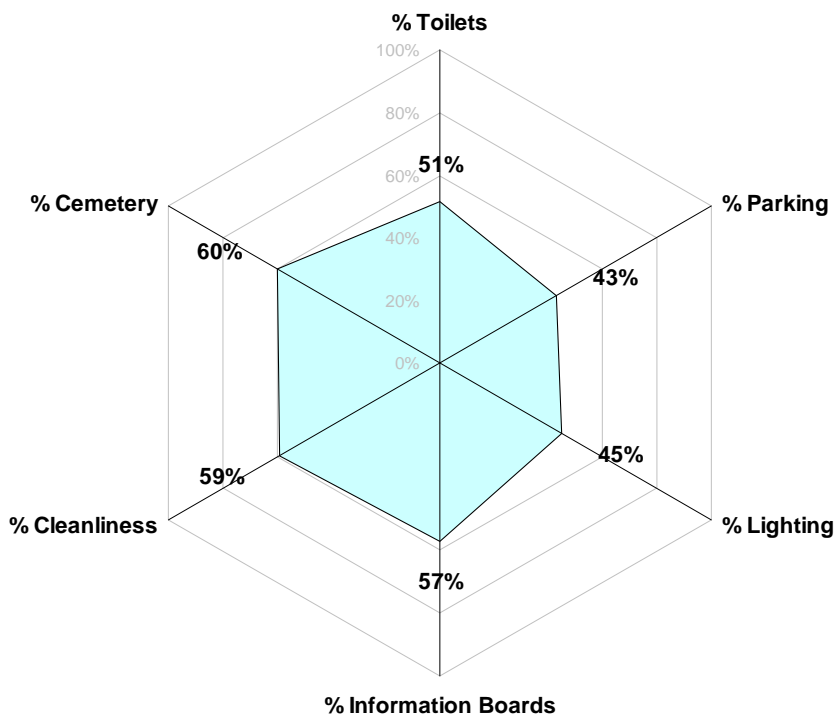
- **Toilets** were rated overall as **Average** (51%)

- **Lighting** was identified on 2 sites and was rated as being of **Below Average** quality (45%)

- **Information Boards** rated an average score of 57%, **Average**

- **Cleanliness** was given an average score of 59%, placing it in the **Average** category on the quality line.

- **Parking** was rated as **Below Average** on sites that have parking provided, returning an average score of 43% (8 sites where found to have a parking provision)

Accessibility

5.197   There is no appropriate accessibility standard for cemeteries and churchyards, although it is important to take into consideration the needs of the elderly or more infirm members of local communities and to consider access to public transport when planning new sites. It is also important to give consideration to travel distance and ensuring that sites can be easily accessible for local people.

Standards

Quantity

5.198   No assessment has been undertaken to survey the adequacy of cemetery provision and availability of plots to meet demand. This is in keeping with other local authority PPG17 audits where research has shown that no reference is made to calculating future demand.

> **Standard**
>
> **No quantitative standard set.**

Quality

5.199   The quality of cemeteries is of paramount importance as they are places where people come to grieve and remember lost loved ones. In a caring society these sites should be maintained to the highest possible standards with provision of a well-cared for space which allows quiet contemplation.

> **Standard**
>
> **The proposed standard for Cemeteries and Churchyards is 61% or above, or to a 'good' standard**

Accessibility

5.200   There is no appropriate accessibility standard for cemeteries and churchyards, although it is important to take into consideration the needs of the elderly or more infirm members of local communities and to consider access to public transport when planning new sites. It is also important to give consideration to travel distance and ensuring that sites can be easily accessible for local people who wish to pay their respects.

> **Standard**
>
> **No accessibility standard set.**

Institutional Land

> **"Educational land or land owned by other institutions such as hospitals and government agencies"**

5.201 Institutional land in Walsall primarily constitutes educational land owned and managed by schools or the local authority. Almost all of the provision has some restrictions to access to ensure security of the site and those who use it. All institutional sites with open space/playing fields larger than 0.2 ha have been included in the assessment. No standards have been set for this typology; although where sites have community use for outdoor sports, they have been included in the standards set in the accompanying Playing Pitch Strategy.

Quantity

5.202 The Borough has 66 open spaces defined as institutional land, totalling 179.80 ha. 1 site is not accessible to the public and this site has been omitted from the remainder of the analysis.

5.203 The remaining 65 sites combine to provide 178.95 ha of institutional land, which equates to 0.70 ha per 1,000 population. The distribution of these sites on an area basis is highlighted in Table 45.

Table 45 – Institutional Land

Neighbourhood Area	Total Ha	No. of Sites	Population	Provision Ha Per 1,000
Area 1	31.87	12	35,939	0.89
Area 2	47.18	18	49,579	0.95
Area 3	44.06	14	51,506	0.86
Area 4	27.82	6	53,456	0.52
Area 5	5.55	5	25,555	0.22
Area 6	22.47	10	38,438	0.58
Total	178.95	65	254,473	0.70

Quality

5.204 Quality assessments were undertaken at sites with community use. Further information can be found in the outdoor sport and indoor sport sections of this report and the accompanying Playing Pitch Strategy.

Accessibility

5.205   There is no appropriate accessibility standard for institutional land, although it is important to take into consideration the growing importance of community use and community access to sports facilities at educational sites.

Indoor Sports Facilities

> **"Provision of facilities (sports halls, swimming pools, health and fitness) for participation in indoor sport and leisure activities"**

Introduction

5.206   The assessment of indoor facility provision has been developed as part of the overall PPG 17 audit and assessment for the Borough, which is based on the 6 new neighbourhood management areas (Areas 1-6). The East/West split in the Borough has also been taken into account in this assessment, given that the East of the Borough is less deprived than the West.

5.207   The assessment looks at the nature and level of current provision in terms of quality, quantity and accessibility, and what the needs are for the future. In analysing future need, given the nature of indoor sport and leisure facilities, a range of other relevant factors have been taken into account, to ensure that all options and opportunities for future provision are appropriately reflected in the assessment recommendations. Of particular importance in this respect are the local partnership opportunities for provision.

5.208   In terms of overall sport and leisure facility provision in the Borough, there is a wide range of existing provision, although a significant number of facilities are ageing and of poor quality.

5.209   Participation rates in sport (3 x 30 minutes per week) in the Borough are low at 14.7% against a national average of 16.6% (Sport England Active People Survey, December 2009). There has however been an increase in participation against KPI1, which measures participation in walking and cycling alongside 3 x 30m of sport per week.

5.210   This change is positive in terms of increased participation in the Borough, and therefore the benefits in terms of community health and quality of life. This increase also contributes to the targets for adult participation set out in Walsall's Local Area Agreement (LAA) 2008-2011.

5.211   The reasons for such a significant increase in KPI1 participation to over 20% in the Borough are likely to relate to a number of recent interventions and investment in sport and recreation by Sport England and Walsall Council. This includes the Free Swimming Initiative (FSI) for U17s and over 60s, and various Community Investment Fund (CIF) bids, including the development of two Community Sports Hubs at Brownhills and Alumwell.

5.212   The impact of increased levels of participation is likely to be a greater demand for facility provision, and critically, good quality provision. It should be fit for purpose, particularly at a local level.

The Vision for Future Leisure Centre Provision in Walsall

5.213   Walsall Council has identified the following Vision for future provision of leisure centres in Walsall:

> **"Provide a range of high quality, well designed and up-to-date sports, leisure, recreation and cultural facilities, and associated support services, which will support improvements in health inequalities and the quality of life across the Borough"**

5.214   Given that Walsall Council's objective is to improve the quality of life, lifelong learning and well-being of all residents, any proposals that are taken forward from the current strategic review of leisure centre provision will be titled as Health & Well-being Lifestyle centres.

The Context for Current Provision

Usage Profile and Operating Costs

5.215   The following table shows the current usage and operational costs of existing WMBC facilities:

Table 46 - WMBC Leisure Centres' Comparison

Leisure Centre Comparison 2008/9	Bloxwich	Darlaston	Gala Baths	Oak Park	Willenhall	Bentley
Employees	£461,183	£324,398	£394,067	£437,196	£320,400	£53,644
Premises	£222,086	£241,936	£233,452	£204,850	£125,770	£22,723
Supplies & Services	£79,298	£79,670	£71,437	£83,960	£38,696	£11,260
CSS & FRS17	£79,035	£69,441	£177,697	£103,683	£123,348	£8,985
Cost Of Capital (depreciation & Impairment of assets)	£1,081,975	£8,003,041	£4,785,664	£5,800	£2,614,930	£7,010
Total Expenditure	£1,923,578	£8,718,485	£5,662,318	£835,488	£3,223,144	£103,623
Total Expenditure (excl Cost of capital, CSS & FRS17)	£762,568	£646,003	£698,957	£726,005	£484,866	£87,628
Income	-£364,202	-£331,647	-£355,273	-£472,412	-£160,636	-£33,488
Net Expenditure	£1,559,376	£8,386,838	£5,307,045	£363,076	£3,062,508	£70,135
Net Expenditure (excl Capital)	£398,366	£314,356	£343,683	£253,593	£324,229	£54,140
Attendances 2008/9	187,752	147,038	164,751	266,798	80,784	22,971
Subsidy per user	£8.31	£57.04	£32.21	£1.36	£37.91	£3.05
Subsidy per user (excl Cost of capital, CSS & FRS17))	**£2.12**	**£2.14**	**£2.09**	**£0.95**	**£4.01**	**£2.36**
Average subsidy per user (excl Capital)	£2.28	£2.28	£2.28	£2.28	£2.28	£2.28
Subsidy per user variance from average	-£0.16	-£0.14	-£0.19	-£1.33	£1.74	£0.08

** Impairment of an asset is a one off in year charge, this occurs when the value of the asset decreases**

(Source WMBC Leisure Services February 2010)

5.216   The figure above demonstrates the issues with existing Walsall Council sport and leisure facilities. The usage is relatively low, the operating costs are high, due to the age and condition of the buildings, and this means that there is a high subsidy per user (highlighted in bold).

Condition Surveys

5.217   Condition surveys on all Walsall Council facilities were completed in the past three years, this work demonstrated the potential for re-development of some existing sites, but that overall costs would be in the region of £20m - £30m. Gala Baths would require at least £10m - £12m for refurbishment and redevelopment alone. The Council acknowledges the need to update this condition survey data (Cabinet Briefing Paper February 2010), and the potential development options for each site.

Usage Profile

5.218   It is important to highlight that at the moment many people using the sports facilities, and particularly the swimming pools, in Walsall, come from outside the Borough, for example from Birmingham, Sandwell, South Staffs, and Wolverhampton. This usage is likely to be affected in the future by the provision of new facilities, more local to the communities currently travelling to Walsall.

Facilities in Adjacent Local Authorities

5.219   Wolverhampton City Council opened a £12.5m Swimming & Aquatics Centre three years ago and are about to commence construction of another £12.5m such facility in Bilston. Both centres will be two miles (to the West and South) of Willenhall town centre.

5.220   There are firm proposals for new pools in Sandwell at West Bromwich and Tipton, a new 50m pool in Birmingham, plus the re-opening of replacement facilities as follows: Stechford Cascades Pool, and Harborne Pool. The development and provision of new facilities is likely to reduce current levels of demand for water space in Walsall. It may also be that new facilities close to the Borough attract existing swimmers out of Walsall, given that the new facilities will be of a higher quality than existing public sector pools in Walsall. If this does happen, demand for water space in Walsall will reduce.

Quantity

Current Leisure Provision and Providers

5.221   There is a wide range of existing sport and leisure facility provision across the Borough provided via the commercial, education, public and voluntary sectors. The following information identifies the provision by the various providers, further detail of indoor community sports and leisure facilities can be found in Appendix 6.

Existing Indoor Facility Provision and Providers

5.222   Walsall Council currently directly operates five leisure centres and a sports pavilion through their Sports and Leisure Service. These facilities are listed in Table 47.

Table 47 - Existing Walsall Council Indoor Facility Provision

Facility Name	Facility Description	Ownership
Bloxwich Leisure Centre (the 'youngest' leisure centre at 10 years old)	• 20m x 4 lane swimming pool • 3 badminton court sports hall • 33 station Fitness Suite	Local Authority
Darlaston Swimming Pool (art deco pool hall, now used as a function hall, 80 years old)	• 25m x 6 lane swimming pool • 13m x 7.5m learner pool • 22 station Fitness Suite	Local Authority
Gala Baths	• 33.3yd x 6 lane swimming pool • 23m x 11m learner pool • 30 station Fitness Suite	Local Authority
Oak Park Leisure Centre	• 25m x 6 lane swimming pool • 17m x 7m learner pool • 4 badminton court sports hall • 44 station Fitness Suite	Local Authority
Willenhall Leisure Centre	• 25m x 6 lane swimming pool • 4 badminton court sports hall • 16 station Fitness Suite	Local Authority
Bentley Leisure Pavilion (predominantly an outdoor sports association)	• 4 station Fitness Suite	Local Authority

5.223   There are 5 swimming pools provided as part of this portfolio alone. The above facilities are ageing, and some are very large buildings. The buildings are not designed as modern day leisure facilities; factors such as accessibility, user flow, and the numbers of staff required to operate the facilities to meet health and safety requirements make them relatively expensive and inefficient to operate.

5.224   The facilities would benefit from investment; however, the scale of the buildings, the level of capital required, and the lack of available funding make such investment difficult to achieve. The condition and quality of the buildings has a negative impact on user numbers, which impacts on the revenue generated. The buildings are becoming a drain on resources as capital expenditure is increasingly being utilised to keep the buildings ticking over through regular and costly repair.

5.225   In addition to the facilities provided directly by Walsall Council, there are a number of school sports facilities in Walsall. These currently include a further twenty-two swimming pools. These facilities are of a similar age, condition and quality as the Council's facilities. **Current demand for school swimming is estimated (by Walsall Council) to require the equivalent of 6 swimming pools (4 lane x 25m).**

5.226   Other indoor sports facility provision in the Borough is listed in Table 48.

Table 48 - Other Existing Facility Provision in Walsall

Site Name	Ownership	Management	Access Policy	Health and Fitness (number of stations)	Swimming Pool				Sports Hall 1 (number of courts)	Sports Hall 2 (number of courts)
					Length	Width	Depth	Area		
EDUCATION										
Aldridge School	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association	4	15	7	1.4	105	4	
Alumwell Business and Enterprise School	Education	Local Authority (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association		25	7	2	175	8	
Barr Beacon Language College	Education	College (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association		25	10	1.8	250	4	
Blue Coat CofE School	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association						4	2
Brownhills Community Technology College	Education	Community Organisation	Sports Club / Community Association		25	12.5	2	313	4	1
Frank F Harrison	Education	Community Organisation	Sports Club / Community Association	20	25	7	2.5	175	4	
Grace Academy (Darlaston Science College)	Education								4	
Joseph Leckie Community Technology College	Education	Local Authority (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association		25	7	1.8	175	4	
Park Hall Community School	Education	Private Contractor (PPI/PFI)	Sports Club / Community Association						4	1
Pool Hayes Arts and Community	Education	Community Organisation	Pay and Play		16.5	7.4	1.8	122.1	1	
Queen Mary's Grammar	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association	9	20	9	2.6	180	4	
Queen Mary's High	Education	School (in house)							4	1
Shelfield Academy	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association	29					4	1
Shire Oak School	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association	28					4	
Sneyd Community	Education	Community Organisation	Sports Club / Community Association		25	8.5	1.8	213	6	
St Francis of Assisi	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association						4	
St Thomas More Catholic	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association	10						
The Streetly School	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association	20	17	7	1.8	119	4	
Willenhall School Sports College	Education	School (in house)	Sports Club / Community Association	17	25	7	1.8	175	4	
HE/FE										
Walsall College	Education	FE College	Pay and Play and Registered Membership	35					1	
Wolverhampton University	Education	School/College/University (in house)	Pay and Play	35	20	10	3	200	12	
COMMERCIAL										
Arena Gym	Commercial	Commercial	Pay and Play	14						
Barons Courts Hotel	Commercial	Commercial	Registered Membership Use	9	10	5	1.7	50		
Body Zone	Commercial	Commercial	Registered Membership Use	5						
Colossus Gym	Commercial	Commercial	Pay and Play	45						
Fairlawns	Commercial	Commercial	Registered Membership Use	40	18	8	1.4	144		
Fitbods	Commercial	Commercial	Registered Membership Use	28						
Fitness Express	Commercial			20						
Fitness First	Commercial	Commercial	Registered Membership Use	100						
Fosters Fitness Centre	Commercial	Commercial	Pay and Play	51						
Owens Gym	Commercial	Commercial	Pay and Play	40						
Sprintz	Commercial	Commercial	Pay and Play	60						
Tehila Fitness	Commercial	Commercial	Pay and Play	40						
Village Hotel	Commercial	Commercial	Registered Membership Use	123	25	15	1.2	375		
OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITY										
Beechdale LLC	Local Authority									
Blakenall Community Centre	Local Authority	Other	Pay and Play	10					2	
Collingwood Community Centre	Local Authority	Community Organisation (charity)	Sports Club / Community Association							
EDC	Local Authority	Local Authority	Pay and Play		20	8		160		
Forest Arts Centre	Local Authority	Community Organisation	Pay and Play						5	
Manor Farm Community Centre	Local Authority	Community Organisation	Pay and Play	16					4	
Moxley People's Centre	Local Authority	Other (charity)	Sports Club / Community Association						1	
Walsall Airport	Local Authority	Local Authority	Sports Club / Community Association							
Willenhall Chart	Local Authority	Trust	Pay and Play	14					2	

Site Name	Ownership	Management	Access Policy	Health and Fitness (number of stations)	Swimming Pool				Sports Hall 1 (number of courts)	Sports Hall 2 (number of courts)
					Length	Width	Depth	Area		
OTHER										
Palfrey CA	Community Association	Community Organisation	Sports Club / Community Association	13					4	
Streetly CA	Community Association		Pay and Play						5	

Quality

5.227   Site visits were undertaken to all identified indoor sport and leisure facilities (See Appendix 6 for further details), to undertake a visual assessment of their quality. The majority of the facilities in the Borough are ageing and of a poor, or average, condition and quality.

5.228   The provision rated highest in the Borough in terms of quality, for pools, halls and fitness suites, are the commercial facilities; quality scores for each facility audited are detailed in Appendix 6.

5.229   In terms of the Council's own facilities, the following assessment results are recorded:

Table 49 - Quality Assessment Ratings WMBC Facilities

Facility	Fit For Purpose Rating (out of 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is very good)	Overall Quality	Specific Quality Issues
Bloxwich	3	Average	Poolside changing poor
Darlasaton	4	Average - Good	
Willenhall	2	Poor	Very small facility, poor changing access
Gala	3	Average	
Oak Park	3	Average	Very small spectator area

5.230   'Fit for purpose' refers to whether the facility design is appropriate to meet modern day user needs.

5.231   The above summary highlights that the existing Council facilities are generally of an average/poor condition; this quality impacts on the number of facility users and the costs of operating the facilities. In short, the Council is operating average/poor quality facilities which means that they attract fewer users than they should do; this is borne out by the relatively low participation rates in the Borough.

Accessibility

5.232   The location of existing indoor facilities in the Borough is shown on the suite of maps in Appendix 4.

Swimming Pools

5.233   There are currently a total of twenty-seven swimming pools of various sizes in the Borough, comprising the Council's five pools, twelve pools on secondary school sites and ten on primary sites.

5.234   The current level of swimming pool provision in the Borough has been mapped and can be found in Appendix 4; it is clear that there is significant water space across the area, and there is a particularly high number of facilities to the north, north west and south west of the Borough. The only area without significant provision of water space is the south east.

5.235   The quality of all existing swimming pools in the central (parts of new neighbourhood Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4) and extreme south west (new Area 5) areas of the Borough is best described as average and in some instances the quality is poor. Good quality facilities are predominantly available in the north (Area 1), and south of the Borough.

5.236   This means that although access to swimming pools is good (based on a 20 minute walk time) across Walsall, with the exception of an area in the south east and part of the north west (where there is access to other facilities over the boundary), the access is mainly to poor or average quality facilities.

5.237   A further point to stress is that the M6 runs through the south west (new Area 5) of the Borough, and presents a significant barrier in terms of accessibility. Catchment areas for facilities based in this area need to be carefully considered, as people are unlikely to cross the motorway to access provision on a regular basis. The barrier presented by the M6 means that in the extreme south west of the Borough there is only 1 good quality swimming pool provided.

5.238   A further factor to consider is that Walsall Council commenced the Government's "free swim" initiative on 1 January 2009 and is delivering the under 17 and over 60's programmes. The commitment of the Council to this scheme reflects its overall prioritisation of health and well-being, and its recognition of the need to get more residents physically active more often.

5.239   Given that recreational swimming is, alongside walking and cycling, an activity identified nationally as important for increasing regular participation to benefit health, the poor quality of many facilities is a key challenge to address. Good quality provision is an important factor in encouraging increased participation; current low participation rates, and significant health challenges in the Borough make both facility quality and accessibility key priorities for the future.

Sports Halls

5.240   The maps in Appendix 4 demonstrate the current level of sports hall provision in the Borough; it is clear that there is significant indoor hall space across the area, and there is a particularly high number of facilities in the central (parts of new neighbourhood Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4), and southern areas (new Area 4) of the Borough. The only areas without significant provision of sports halls are the north west and south east.

5.241   The quality of all existing sports halls in the central (parts of new neighbourhood Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4) and north areas (new Area 1) of the Borough are poor or average; good quality facilities are predominantly available in the south east (Area 2) and west (Area 6) of the Borough. This means that although access to sports halls is good (based on a 20 minute walk time) across Walsall, with the exception of the south east and an area in the north west (where there is access to other facilities over the boundary), the access is mainly to poor or average quality facilities.

5.242   Many of the existing sports halls, like the swimming pools are on school sites; given that school access during the day limits the extent of community access to mainly evenings and weekends, the poor quality of existing provision is likely to have an impact on participation levels.

5.243   Similar to the situation relating to swimming pools, the M6 in the south west of the Borough presents a significant barrier in terms of accessibility. Catchment areas for facilities based in this area need to be carefully considered, as people are unlikely to cross the motorway to access provision on a regular basis. The barrier presented by the M6 means that in the extreme south west of the Borough there are currently no good quality indoor sports halls provided.

Fitness Suites

5.244   The maps in Appendix 4 demonstrate the current level of fitness suite provision in the Borough; it is clear that there are a significant number of facilities in Walsall, particularly in the central (parts of new neighbourhood Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4) and southern (Area 4) areas of the Borough. Commercial facilities are only located in the south west and north east. There are three main areas lacking in fitness suite provision – the north (Area 1), north west (Area 3) and south east (Area 2) of the Borough.

5.245   The quality of existing fitness suite facilities west of the Borough is poor or average in all areas except where there is a concentration of commercial facilities, i.e. the south west and north east of the Borough. This means that although access to fitness suites is good (based on a 20 minute walk) across Walsall, with the exception of the south east and an area in the north west (where there is access to other facilities over the boundary), the access is mainly to poor or average quality facilities.

5.246   Good quality provision is mainly of a commercial nature; given that access to such facilities will require some form of membership, and that this can be a relatively high cost, accessibility to fitness suites, based on affordability may be a barrier to participation in some of the more socio-economically deprived areas of Walsall.

5.247   As with access to swimming pools and sports halls, the M6 in the south west of the Borough presents a significant accessibility barrier. Catchment areas for facilities based in this area need to be carefully considered, as people are unlikely to cross the motorway to access provision on a regular basis.

Consultation Feedback

5.248   Extensive consultation was undertaken as part of the PPG17 audit and assessment. The following represents a summary of comments regarding indoor facilities

- **Council facilities suffer from lack of investment; the Council tends to offer small community recreation facilities and locations are not always appropriate**

- **There are few private sector facilities, which creates an opportunity for the Council to develop high quality public facilities, or work in partnership with, e.g. Wolverhampton University to provide facilities**

- **New investment is required in Walsall town centre. The town centre offer in Walsall is very important (one of key Black Country priorities), but at the moment the only facilities are the new College facilities (limited) and Gala Baths (ageing).**

- **Water space has been highlighted as an issue in Walsall; there is a significant level of provision and much of it is poor quality**

- **Walsall College has aspirations for a collaborative partnership with Council, in order to provide a key community facility, however only informal discussions have taken place to date. As part of a new facility, the College hopes to include as a minimum a 25m pool, 4 court sports hall, changing provision and studio.**

5.249   Key themes emerging from the consultation include the fact that existing facilities are ageing and generally of poor quality. This highlights the need for fewer, better facilities, strategically located. It is also clear that there is significant opportunity at local level to develop partnerships for provision, particularly through education. Details of consultees, plus a summary of all consultation feedback is included in the appendices.

Indoor Facility Supply and Demand Modelling

5.250   An indicative analysis of the supply and demand of swimming pools, sports halls and fitness suites in the Borough, has been undertaken to illustrate the challenges faced by the Council in achieving the future Vision for provision.

5.251   A detailed assessment of supply, i.e. existing facilities provided, against demand, i.e. numbers of people living in the Borough, now and in the future, and their participation rates, has been undertaken as part of this analysis.

5.252   The assumptions underpinning this model reflect national participation findings (Sport England Active People Survey December 2009) for adults and juniors. This is based on numbers of weekly visits and that 65% of all use of facilities is at peak time. It is also based on up to date facility supply data, and also population figures from ONS mid-year estimates 2007. It is important to highlight however that the in-house model used for this analysis does not include a spatial dimension. It is therefore only able to provide a starting point for further analysis which should ideally be progressed through a number of Facility Planning Model (FPM) runs. A number of very specific FPM runs have been undertaken to date in relation to Willenhall Leisure Centre, but as yet these have not been made available to inform this assessment. We understand however that these runs provide additional data in relation to the current usage of facilities at local level.

Swimming Pools

5.253   Using the above assumptions (See Appendix 6) there is a need in Walsall for **1,248sqm** of water space; this is equivalent to 5.9 swimming pools of 4 lane x 25m size (based on 212sqm being a pool unit). Even if all pool use was at peak time (highly unlikely as peak time relates only to evenings, early mornings and lunchtimes, plus some hours at a weekend, i.e. it excludes the majority of day time use) there would only be a need for 1,949m^2; this equates to 9.2 swimming pools of 4 lane x 25m size (based on 212sq m being a pool unit).

5.254   Supply and demand analysis modelled simply on demand from the general population equates to 4,000 m^2. This analysis simply relates numbers of people to sqm of water space; it does not factor in levels of participation, which are actually critical to inform revenue estimates, and long term operational sustainability. Even this supply/demand modelling however demonstrates that there is currently an over supply of water space in the Borough.

5.255   Currently there is **4,791 m^2** of water space in the Borough that is accessible for community use for at least some of the time.

5.256   Based on the supply and demand modelling undertaken, it is clear that there is currently a significant oversupply of water space in the Borough. Using the analysis above relating demand and participation to supply, there is an over supply of water space of **3,543 m^2** (4,791 m^2 – 1,248 =**3,543 m^2** this is the equivalent of 16.7 swimming pools of 4 lane x 25m size).

5.257   Using the Active Places Power tool (Sport England website), it is clear that Walsall currently has a significantly higher level of swimming pool provision per 1000 population at 21.75sqm, compared to the England average of 18.1 sqm per 1000 population, and the West Midlands average of 16.31 sqm (based on all waterspace).

N.B It is important to note the following in relation to all Active Places Power information Guidance Notes Facilities Per 1000 Population

- **Based on capacity of facilities by Output Areas (and aggregated up where necessary)**

- **Only looks at facilities within local authority areas, it does not look across borders**

- **The calculation performed is: Unit ÷ population x 1000**

- **Unit defined by Facility Type**

- **Population based on 2001 Census**

5.258   This situation reflects previous strategic analysis which demonstrates that swimmers from outside Walsall regularly use facilities in the Borough. Walsall is effectively providing facilities for residents of Birmingham and the surrounding Black Country because other local authority areas have fewer pools.

5.259   It is important to highlight that the above analysis is not spatial and provides a starting point for future levels of pool provision in the Borough. It also relates to community need, which we would suggest needs to be augmented by the estimated level of demand for school swimming, i.e. 6 pools. Taking this Walsall Council estimate into account, we would suggest that the actual surplus of water space actually equates to around 10.7 pools. **In other words future swimming pool supply needs to address both community and curriculum demand, which, based on the supply modelling used for this report, which does not have a spatial dimension, equates to 11.9 pools 4 lane x 25m.**

Sports Halls

5.260   Using the above assumption (See Appendix 6) there is a need in Walsall for just over **24 sports halls** (4 badminton court size), the equivalent of 97 courts.

5.261   Currently there are **134 badminton courts** in the Borough which are accessible for community use for at least some of the time.

5.262   Based on the supply and demand modelling undertaken, it is clear that there is currently a **significant oversupply of sports hall** provision in the Borough. Using the analysis above relating demand and participation to supply, there is an over supply of sports hall space **of 37 courts, or just over 9 sports halls (of 4 badminton court size).**

5.263   Using the Active Places Power tool (Sport England website), however, it is clear that Walsall currently has a lower level of sports hall provision per 1000 population at 77.31sqm, compared to the England average of 79.95 sqm per 1000 population, and the West Midlands average of 78.31 sqm.

Fitness Suites

5.264   Appendix 6 sets out the assessment of supply and demand for fitness suites in the Borough, together with the assumptions informing the analysis.   In the absence of any national model for assessing supply and demand for fitness stations, Strategic Leisure has developed the model referred to above. (Please note that more refinement to this model in terms of frequency of participation at different ages is currently being developed).

5.265   The assessment of current supply and demand shows that there is currently an overall surplus in the number of fitness stations provided against demand i.e. **851 stations** provided against a demand for **655 stations**. This equates to a surplus of **+196 stations**.

5.266   When analysing supply and demand it is important to take into account both public and commercial sector provision, given that for others this may be unaffordable. In Walsall, **the overall demand is for 655 fitness stations**; of these there is theoretically (based on local demographic breakdown) demand for

- **271 stations provided through the public sector, and**

- **384 stations provided by the commercial sector.**

5.267   Using the above modelling there is currently an over supply of fitness stations overall (+196 stations), based on the assumptions made in the model; however, based on the demographic assumptions behind the model there appears to be potential for more of the current supply to be provided on a more commercial basis.

5.268   Using the Active Places Power tool (Sport England), it is clear that Walsall currently has a lower level of fitness station provision per 1000 population at 3.93 stations, compared to the England average of 5.51 stations per 1000 population, and the West Midlands average of 4.77 stations per 1000 population.

Summary of Supply and Demand for Swimming Pools, Sports Halls, and Fitness Suites

5.269   Based on the above supply and demand analysis, there is

- **An over supply of swimming pools (surplus equivalent to 16.7 25m x 4 lane swimming pools, or 3,543 sqm of water space)**

5.270   It is important to highlight that the above analysis is not spatial and provides a starting point for future levels of pool provision in the Borough. It also relates to community need, which we would suggest needs to be augmented by the estimated level of demand for school swimming i.e. 6 pools. Taking this Walsall Council estimate into account, we would suggest that the actual surplus of water space actually equates to around 10.7 pools. **In other words future swimming pool supply needs to address both community and curriculum demand, which equates to 11.9 pools 4 lane x 25m.**

- **An over supply of sports halls equivalent to 37 badminton courts, or 9 halls of 4 badminton court size**

- **And an over supply of fitness stations (196 stations in total)**

Other Indoor Facilities

Gymnastics

5.271   Gymnastics is provided as an activity at a number of leisure centres and community centres across Walsall. There is 1 independent gymnastics club in the Borough – Walsall Gymnastics Club – which has its own premises and fixed gymnastics equipment.

5.272   Gymnastics classes/activities are provided at: Alumwell Community Association, Barr Beacon Community Association, Frank F Harrison Community Association, Furzebank Community Association, Manor Farm Community Association, Park Hall Community Association, and Oak Park Leisure Centre.

Indoor Bowls

5.273   There is no purpose built indoor bowls centre in Walsall. However, indoor bowling is provided at almost all the community associations across the Borough, plus at Bloxwich, Oak Park and Willenhall Leisure Centres.

5.274   The nearest indoor bowling centres are at Stirchley, Birmingham, and in Tamworth.

Indoor Tennis Courts

5.275   There is no indoor tennis centre in Walsall itself; the nearest indoor tennis courts are at Billesley Indoor Centre, Birmingham. Walsall Tennis Club has 5 outdoor, floodlit tennis courts; it is also possible to play tennis in some existing indoor sports halls e.g. Wolverhampton University (Walsall campus)

Squash Courts

5.276   There are 18 squash courts in Walsall, but no specific squash centre, and no glass backed courts. The existing courts are:

Table 50 - Existing Squash Courts in Walsall

Facility	Number of Courts
Alumwell Business and Enterprise College	1
Brownhills Community Technical College	2
Manor Farm Community Association	2
Oak Park Sports Centre	2
Park Hall Community School	1
Pool Hall	3
Queen Mary's School for Boys	2
Sneyd Community Association	2
Streetly Community Association	3
TOTAL	**18**

Summary of Quantitative, Qualitative and Accessibility Analysis

5.277 Based on the parameters of PPG17, the following conclusions can be drawn in relation to current indoor facility provision in Walsall:

Quantity

5.278 Based on the above supply and demand analysis, there is

- **An over supply of swimming pools (surplus equivalent to 16.7 25m x 4 lane swimming pools, or 3,543 sqm of water space)**

5.279 It is important to highlight that the above analysis is not spatial and provides a starting point for future levels of pool provision in the Borough. It also relates to community need, which we would suggest needs to be augmented by the estimated level of demand for school swimming i.e. 6 pools. Taking this Walsall Council estimate into account, we would suggest that the actual surplus of water space actually equates to around 10.7 pools. **In other words future swimming pool supply needs to address both community and curriculum demand, which equates to 11.9 pools 4 lane x 25m.**

- **An over supply of sports halls equivalent to 38 badminton courts, or 9 halls of 4 badminton court size**

- **And an over supply of fitness stations (196 stations in total)**

5.280   There is virtually no specialist indoor provision for sports that require facilities other than an indoor court, or pool. Whilst this is an issue in the Borough, its impact may be mitigated slightly by the geography of the local area, which does mean that there is relatively good access (public and private transport) to nearby cities and areas, where specialist provision is located.

Quality

5.281   The majority of the facilities in the Borough are ageing and of a poor, or average, condition and quality. The provision rated highest in the Borough in terms of quality, for pools, halls and fitness suites, are the commercial facilities.

5.282   The existing Walsall Council facilities are generally of a poor condition; this quality impacts on the number of facility users and the costs of operating the facilities.

Accessibility

Swimming Pools

5.283   There is significant water space provided across the area, and there are a particularly high number of facilities to the north, north west and south west of the Borough. The only area without significant provision of water space is the south east.

5.284   The quality of all existing swimming pools in the central and extreme south west areas of the Borough is poor or average; good quality facilities are predominantly available in the north, and south of the Borough. This means that although access to swimming pools is good (based on a 20 minute walk time) across Walsall, with the exception of an area in the south east and an area in the North West (where there is access to other facilities over the boundary), the access is mainly to poor or average quality facilities.

Sports Halls

5.285   There is significant indoor hall space across the area, and there are a particularly high number of facilities in the central and southern areas of the Borough. The only areas without significant provision of sports halls are the North West and south east.

5.286   The quality of all existing sports halls in the central and north areas of the Borough are poor or average; good quality facilities are predominantly available in the south east and west of the Borough. This means that although access to sports halls is good (based on a 20 minute walk time) across Walsall, with the exception of the south east and an area in the North West (where there is access to other facilities over the boundary), the access is mainly to poor or average quality facilities.

Fitness Suites

5.287   There are a significant number of facilities in Walsall, particularly in the central and southern areas of the Borough. Commercial facilities are only located in the south west and north east. There are three main areas lacking in fitness suite provision – the north, North West and south east of the Borough.

5.288   The quality of existing fitness suite facilities west of the Borough is poor or average in all areas except where there is a concentration of commercial facilities i.e. the south west and north east of the Borough. This means that although access to fitness suites is good (based on a 20 minute walk) across Walsall, with the exception of the south east and an area in the North West (where there is access to other facilities over the boundary), the access is mainly to poor or average quality facilities.

5.289   Overall the south east of the Borough has less of all types of provision than other areas and therefore accessibility is less good.   A similar situation exists in relation to some facility types for residents in the north, and North West of the Borough.

Local Standards

5.290   The local standards for current and future provision of indoor facilities should reflect the actual demand for provision, and the fact that there is a national drive to increase participation.

5.291   To calculate the recommended Local Standards, the active population for each facility type/sports activity has been divided by the current demand to identify the amount per individual and then multiplied by 1000 to give the standard per 1000 population. All figures used have been taken from the supply and demand appendices relating to the in-house model used.

5.292   Based on this approach, and using the outcome of the supply and demand modelling undertaken, the Local Standards for indoor facilities, based on the total active population in Walsall are recommended to be:

- **Swimming Pools** – 5.6sqm per 1000 population (based on swimming population of 224,574 requiring 1,248 sq m of water space). This standard reflects only community use and not curriculum use/demand (can re-calculate this if school swimming figures are available)

- **Sports Halls** – 63.85 sq m (0.43 of a badminton court) per 1000 population (based on sports hall using population of 225,513 requiring 97 badminton courts)

- **Fitness Suites –** 3.4 stations per 1000 population (based on fitness participating population of 188.635 requiring 655 stations)

Future Standards of Provision

5.293   The recommended future standards of provision will be developed once the future population estimates for the 6 neighbourhood areas are made available.

Analysis of the Findings

5.294   Given the issues highlighted above, it is clear that there are some significant challenges to address in terms of future quality of provision. However, based on the fact that there is a current over supply of all types of facility the Council has the opportunity to make some pro-active decisions in relation to a number of options.

5.295   There are significant and realistic opportunities at local level in the Borough to work in partnership to develop new, high quality provision, which means that rationalisation of existing provision could take place

5.296   Addressing these issues in a planned and phased approach will enable the development of fewer, better quality facilities meeting local need. This approach will optimise opportunities to work in partnership, and provide facilities as part of wider regeneration programmes, e.g. the Town Centre, which means that available resources will be used more effectively.

5.297   It is clear that there are three main issues to address in relation to indoor facility provision, if the future Vision for provision is to be achieved:

- **Issue 1 – too many facilities**

- **Issue 2 – existing facilities are generally of a poor quality; this is a consequence of their age, design and condition, and for some, their size**

- **Issue 3 – continuing to operate too many facilities, of a poor quality, is not a long term sustainable option**

5.298   In order to address these issues, there is a need to:

- **Develop an Indoor Facilities Strategy which builds on the findings of this assessment, and sets out a strategic approach for future provision, based on fewer, better quality, and well-located accessible facilities. The development of this strategy could involve additional FPM runs, to ensure that decisions about investment, refurbishment and potentially rationalisation are soundly based.**

- **Consider opportunities for rationalisation of facilities; the priority being those of a poor quality, and poorly located. Rationalisation should focus on existing Walsall Council facilities, plus those on school sites, given that this is where there is significant current over supply. (This approach reflects that advocated in the Black Country Facilities Strategy September 2009).**

- **Seek to develop local partnerships for future provision, to harness the real opportunities with other providers, e.g. Walsall College, Wolverhampton University**

- **Consider the potential for development of a flagship facility for the Borough, supported by a network of satellite facilities, some located on school sites**

- **Continue to work with other agencies to ensure opportunities for improved sport and leisure indoor facility provision is part of wider Borough programmes e.g. regeneration**

- **Seek to improve existing and retained facilities as appropriate; the priority for this should be well-used facilities which can clearly contribute to the future borough-wide strategic approach to provision**

- **Adopt the recommended Local Standards for indoor facilities as follows:**

- **Swimming Pools** – 5.6sqm per 1000 population (based on swimming population of 224,574 requiring 1,248 sq m of water space)

- **Sports Halls** – 63.85 sq m (0.43 of a badminton court) per 1000 population (based on sports hall using population of 225,513 requiring 97 badminton courts)

- **Fitness Suites –** 3.4 stations per 1000 population (based on fitness participating population of 188.635 requiring 655 stations)

6 Resourcing Open Space

Introduction

6.1 Walsall Council has endeavoured whenever possible to invest in its open space provision. However it is increasingly becoming difficult to maintain sites, let alone enhance them through significant improvement. Improved revenue funding with increased capital support from central Government is currently unlikely and as such more creative financing methods such as partnerships and regeneration initiatives will be required to help continue to improve maintenance and greenspace improvements.

Revenue Funding

6.2 There is a need for the future management and improvement of the Borough's open spaces to follow a strategic framework. The range and diversity of open space provided across the Borough means that it is essential that resourcing and financial planning is put in place to deliver safe attractive open spaces.

6.3 A key issue is the fact that parks and open spaces generally have open access 24 hours a day and as such face problems of vandalism, illegal tipping and abuse which are often difficult to predict and increasingly drain resources. Resources that could be best spent providing safer, cleaner, higher quality green space for local people.

6.4 It is important to note that following further consultation it will be necessary to assess the financial implications for each type of provision and utilise developer contributions wisely.

Capital Funding

6.5 The capital required to improve the infrastructure within the Borough's open spaces is not within the financial resources held by the Council, hence the need to maximise on the capital opportunities held outside by national governing bodies and Government agencies.

6.6 CABE Space support the idea of a strategic framework. In the CABE manifesto they also identify that political support is essential, as is making the case for high quality open space both internally within the Council and externally with the national governing bodies, regional bodies and many partners.

6.7 In order for this study to be a success it is essential to secure 'Buy-in' across the Council. Therefore as a first initiative the establishment of a Parks and Open Spaces Champion should be seen as a means of driving forward the open space agenda and the Council should develop this initiative inviting interest from the elected members.

6.8 In order to deliver a vision for a network of good quality, accessible clean and safe open space across the Borough it is essential to seek financial support at the external and importantly internal level for future improvement to new and existing provision.

6.9 The development of partnership will be fundamental to the delivery of good quality open space. The Borough has already made positive steps through partnership working in open space through the establishment of community initiatives such as self management agreements with clubs and societies. This needs to be taken wider through the involvement of friends of parks and open space groups, local groups interested in driving forward improvements to their local spaces.

6.10 Partnership with the private sector can also bring the benefits and funding to improve the Borough's open spaces. The links with the existing franchises in the parks need to be expanded to rejuvenate day time and weekend use of the parks and open spaces and the associated facilities and driving out the undesirable elements and anti-social behaviour by packing the park with people. For example, Oldham Council have transformed former redundant bowls pavilions into vibrant community focused cafés by working in partnership with local business enabling reinvestment in tired and redundant buildings, revitalising the bowling greens and bringing people into the parks.

6.11   Wholesale commercial sponsorship is very difficult to obtain when requested by the Council. However, working in partnership with third parties may prove more attractive to local, regional or nationally recognised commercial sector investors.

Developer Contributions

6.12   An essential part of the success will be the internal commitment and buy-in to initiatives such as Section 106 funding and developer contributions linked to the growth or regeneration aspirations for the Borough. Ensuring that appropriate revenue funding is in place to sustain capital investment in open space is a key long term management objective.

6.13   The research behind the PPG17 study provides the evidence with regards to the quantity, quality and accessibility to open space across the Borough. The evidence needs to be used to strengthen existing planning policies and support the Local Development Framework through the further development of Supplementary Planning Documents, and to use the evidence to generate clear and transparent negotiation with developers to generate significant investment.

6.14   This study provides the evidence that will enable the Borough Council to move to the next stage and prioritise the need for investment through wider community consultation and stakeholder consultation at a local level.

6.15   When considering the implementation of planning policy that entails on or off-site developer contributions, it is worthwhile reviewing how other authorities determine when provision should be on or off-site.

6.16   Outlined below are examples of other local authority guidance:

- **Fareham Borough Council -** the Council favour on-site contribution, it is dependent upon a number of factors that include the size of the development site and if the site is in close proximity to existing good quality provision. The Council guidance also includes a matrix to identify when on/off-site contributions are appropriate in accordance with the number of dwellings and provision type.

- **Stockport MBC -** the Council seek commuted sum payments for small scale developments, with the funds being held in an investment/interest earning account to accrue funds to enable improvements.

- **Harrogate Borough Council –** The Council seek provision on site whenever possible, if provision falls below a specified size the Council seek off site contributions.

- **Worcester City Council-** shortfalls in provision not accommodated on site are met through commuted sum payments that are then allocated and spent on identified projects.

6.17   Maintenance sums are also an important consideration when dealing with developer contributions. Research of other Council's has revealed that this varies significantly across local authorities:

- **Fareham Borough Council –** maintenance payments to the Council 12 months after a site or provision is transferred to the Council. Maintenance is calculated on the number of bed spaces the type of provision and is updated annually.

- **Stockport MBC –** Maintenance payments to the Council 12 months after handover, maintenance sums are calculated using current rates with a multiplier and are for 15 years.

- **Harrogate Borough Council -** the Council revise the maintenance payments required on an annual basis by adding 10% contingencies to the annual cost and multiplying by the number of years, maintenance is normally required for 5 years.

6.18   The PPG17 guidance identifies that the simplest way to express the requirements for future maintenance is to express it in terms of a sum per unit of provision such as £/hectare or £/sqm.

6.19   The general approach, which has been the norm for many local authorities, has been to multiply the typical cost of annually maintaining a facility by an agreed number of years. The guidance advocates that a fair way to negotiate with developers is to calculate the net present value of the anticipated revenue payments. The commuted sum payment is then based on:

- **The estimated cost of annual maintenance - this needs to be established not so much on the current cost of maintenance but after consideration as to whether the current level of maintenance is adequate to maintain the provision to the standards required. This removes the opportunity to under price the commuted sum payment and transfer historic budgetary constraints or budget reductions onto new provision.**

- **It is good practice to work to a more appropriate cost with an assumed rate of inflation.**

- **An agreed time period for which payment is to cover (research undertaken as part of this strategy has shown that the time period expected varies from 5-25 years).**

6.20   The Council should continue to ensure that developers with permission for new developments make contributions towards the capital expenditure that is initially required to provide and enhance provision (i.e. capital contribution), whilst also contributing to the ongoing revenue cost of maintaining the provision (i.e. revenue contribution).

6.21   The contribution from developers needs to be based on single bed spaces rather than housing units as this will ensure the cost reflects the increase in demand and use created by new development on existing facilities.

6.22   The Council should use the audit findings as a means of identifying where provision and quality improvements require further investment.

6.23   Analysis of existing guidance on open space leads to the conclusion that:

- **The Council should establish and set standards for the different types (typologies) of provision;**

- **The Council need to ensure that all new housing development contributes to open space provision, this includes development of single dwellings;**

- **The SPD should contain a list of priority projects and wherever possible contain costing details which can be annually updated. The initial priorities should be linked to priorities identified in the audit to bring sites up to a good standard.**

6.24   The Council, though planning policy, should ensure that the adopted standards demonstrate the principles of Best Value and the requirement to consult local people and communities. It will ensure that local people have access to a network of good quality facilities within their local area.

6.25   The Council should maintain a Borough-wide open space fund (pooled fund), especially for the areas within the Borough boundaries where there is limited development opportunity, or where developments are small in size and do not generate a contribution that is large enough for improvements, yet the development will still incur additional demand on existing facilities. This would be established to ensure contributions are always sought and create the means whereby funds could be used to enhance and improve existing provision or provide new provision to address deficiencies and need.

6.26   The improvements that can be made to open spaces should be detailed within the SPD, which could relate to improvements to access to facilities. It has to be recognised that the exact improvements to provision may not have been identified at the outset and it may therefore be more appropriate to use the Neighbourhood Management Area level as the area to ring-fence funding. In urban areas the accessibility thresholds can be applied.

6.27   The principle of the pooled fund would be to create a source of funding that could be utilised in a planned way to secure additional investment into green space. This would be either by using monies direct from the fund to undertake improvements or as a source of matched funding to secure greater levels of external investment. One of the valuable assets available to the Borough is land, some of which is not used to its maximum capacity.

6.28   The Council is naturally reluctant to release open space for disposal, however the benefits of reinvesting a substantial part of the proceeds from any sale are considerable and at present there are few alternatives available to close the funding gap. A number of larger City Councils such as Bristol and Leeds are going down this route to enable them to improve the green space to a standard fit for local people.

6.29   It is clear from the audit and assessment that the Council has to focus on improving the quality and accessibility to good quality open space facilities. As such, the acquisition of more land as a result of planning gain through development has to be appropriately resourced not just to keep sites ticking over but to contribute as an asset. Therefore, the Council should only consider the option of adopting more land as a last resort. The focus from developer contributions should be to secure appropriate levels of funding to ensure sites and facilities are improved.

7   Setting Provision Standard

7.1   This section examines the development of local standards for each typology. The local standards consider surpluses and deficiencies in provision on the basis of the quantitative assessments undertaken. GIS mapping has been utilised to illustrate a number of key aspects (Appendix 4).

7.2   Standards of provision have been derived for Walsall on the basis of:

- **Consultation with local residents**

- **Consultation with specific user groups**

- **Consultation with key providers**

- **Consultation with key stakeholders**

7.3   Local residents were asked a range of questions regarding current open space, sport and recreation provision with relation to quantity, quality and accessibility. The consultation and survey findings also reveal the local communities' perception of accessibility, quantity and quality of provision. The distance thresholds have been calculated for each typology using existing standards in the Walsall Greenspace Strategy, responses from consultation alongside a benchmarking exercise with neighbouring Local Authorities.

7.4   PPG17 advocates the development of standards for all the major typologies of provision. The total amount of open space by typology has been measured as part of this audit of provision. Proposed quantity standards have been applied at a neighbourhood area basis in Appendix 5, this demonstrates the levels of surplus and deficiency on an area basis. The assessment of quantity has been undertaken on the basis of:

- **A review of the number of sites and size of provision, in relation to local population**

- **The identification of a site typology based on the 'primary purpose' of each site**

Parks & Gardens

7.5 The Borough has identified a hierarchy of provision for its parks. Within that hierarchy the sites are defined by purpose: Borough Sites, Neighbourhood Sites, Local Sites. The parks and gardens are an integral part of the Borough's open space infrastructure. They provide a sense of place for the local community and provide landscape quality to particular urban areas.

7.6 The Borough provides 30 accessible parks and garden sites covering 275.33 hectares and therefore an overall provision of 1.08 ha per 1,000 population. The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Standard **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 1.08 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To achieve and maintain Green Flag status in 6 parks across the Borough (one in each neighbourhood area)** **To strive for all Borough sites to be of a 'good' quality (61% or above)** **To strive for all Neighbourhood sites to be of an Average to Good quality (46-75% or above)** **For all Local sites to be of Average quality (46% or above)**	**Standard** **To provide access to parks and gardens and for all households in the Borough to be within:** • **1,200m of a Borough site, or** • **600m of a Neighbourhood sites, or** • **400m of a Local site**

7.7 The recommended quantity standards are based on current levels of provision by typology and therefore no current quantitative deficiencies are present across the Borough. Appendix 5 applies the Borough quantity standard on a neighbourhood area basis. This should be referred to where development takes place to ensure provision does not fall below the current Boroughwide standard of 1.08 ha per 1,000 population.

7.8 The quality standard for parks and gardens require the Borough to achieve and maintain the Green Flag Award at 6 sites across the Borough (one in each neighbourhood area). Currently Green Flag Awards are held at 2 sites in Walsall, Palfrey Park in Area 4 and Willenhall Memorial Park in Area 6.

7.9 As part of the quality auditing process a detailed database of site information has been collated (Appendix 1) with a breakdown of quality scores by key criteria. This should be referred to when looking for site specific quality improvements e.g. improvements to infrastructure such as signage, seating and bins and management issues such as site cleanliness and tree management.

7.10 Map 6 demonstrates the access standard for parks and gardens. The GIS analysis has identified that 56% or 60,849 residential households in the Borough are within the combined access catchments set for parks and gardens. Importantly 44% of households are not currently within the catchment area. It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the open space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as a park or garden.

Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace

7.11   It is widely understood that sites of a natural or semi-natural nature that are accessible enhance the quality of life for people. The wildlife and biodiversity benefits that these sites also contribute are often neglected. Biodiversity is important to the quality of the air that people breathe, to the richness in variety of species in an area and as an indicator of the health and quality of a local environment. These areas not only have benefits in terms of biodiversity, they can also be valuable to local economies and as a tourist asset.

7.12   Walsall has 64 sites classified as natural and semi-natural greenspace covering 685.90 hectares and providing an overall standard of 2.70 ha per 1,000 population.

7.13   The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Standard **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 2.70 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To strive for all Borough sites to be of a 'good' quality (61% or above)** **All Neighbourhood and Local sites to be of an 'average' quality (46% or above)**	**Standard** **To provide access to natural and semi-natural greenspace and for all households in the Borough to be within:** • **1,200m of a Borough site,** or • **600m of a Neighbourhood site, or** • **400m of a Local site**

7.14   Quantity standards are based on current levels of provision and therefore no current quantitative deficiencies are present across the Borough. Appendix 5 applies the Borough quantity standard on a neighbourhood area basis. This should be referred to where development takes place to ensure provision does not fall below the current Borough-wide standard of 2.70 ha per 1,000 population.

7.15   As part of the quality auditing process a detailed database of site information has been collated (Appendix 1) with a breakdown of quality scores by key criteria. This should be referred to when looking for site specific quality improvements e.g. improvements to infrastructure such as signage, seating and bins and management issues such as site cleanliness and woodland management.

7.16   Map 7 demonstrates the combined access standards for natural and semi-natural greenspace across the Borough. The GIS analysis has identified that 46% or 50,672 households in the Borough are within the combined access catchments set for natural and semi-natural greenspace. Importantly 54% of households are not currently within the catchment areas. It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as natural and semi-natural greenspace.

Amenity Greenspace

7.17   The Borough's amenity greenspaces provide a number of functions mainly in residential areas enabling local people to take part in recreation close to home.

7.18   The Borough has 139 sites that have been classified as amenity greenspace these sites occupy 185.38 ha and provide the Borough with a provision of 0.73 ha per 1,000 population. The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Standard **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.73 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.**	**Standard** **To provide amenity greenspace within 400m of where people live**

7.19   Quantity standards are based on current levels of provision and therefore no current quantitative deficiencies are present across the Borough. Appendix 5 applies the Borough quantity standard on a neighbourhood area basis. This should be referred to where development takes place to ensure provision does not fall below the current Boroughwide standard of 0.73 ha per 1,000 population.

7.20   As part of the quality auditing process a detailed database of site information has been collated (Appendix 1) with a breakdown of quality scores by key criteria. This should be referred to when looking for site specific quality improvements e.g. improvements to infrastructure such as seating and bins and management issues such as site cleanliness.

7.21   Map 9 demonstrates the access standard for amenity greenspace. Due to the location and size of catchment areas for amenity greenspace there are notable deficiencies in access to these sites. The GIS analysis has identified that 60% or 65,274 residential households in the Borough are within 400m of an amenity greenspace. Importantly 40% are not within 400 m of amenity greenspace. It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as amenity greenspace.

Green Corridors

7.22   Green corridors provide a number of functions, but primarily the sites are linear corridors (such as disused railway lines) with public rights of way and are used for recreational pursuits such as walking, cycling or horse riding. This provision is also very important for the migration of wildlife, especially in urban areas.

7.23   The Borough has 14 sites that have been classified as green corridors these sites occupy 31.70 ha and provide the Borough with a provision of 0.12 ha per 1,000 population. The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Standard **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.12 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.**	**Standard** **To provide green corridors within 1,000m of where people live**

7.24   Quantity standards are based on current levels of provision and therefore no current quantitative deficiencies are present across the Borough. Appendix 5 applies the Borough quantity standard on a neighbourhood area basis. This should be referred to where development takes place to ensure provision does not fall below the current Boroughwide standard of 0.12 ha per 1,000 population.

7.25   As part of the quality auditing process a detailed database of site information has been collated (Appendix 1) with a breakdown of quality scores by key criteria. This should be referred to when looking for site specific quality improvements e.g. improvements to infrastructure such as seating and bins and management issues such as site cleanliness.

7.26   Map 11 demonstrates the access standard for amenity greenspace. Due to the location and size of catchment areas for amenity greenspace there are notable deficiencies in access to these sites. The GIS analysis has identified that 43% or 46,837 residential households in the Borough are within 1,000m of a green corridor. Importantly 57% are not within 1,000 m of a green corridor. It is important to recognise that people will undoubtedly make use of the space nearest to where they live and that may not be a site classified as a green corridor.

Formal Outdoor Sports

7.27   This section considers the wide range of outdoor sports provision across the Borough. It includes specific sites developed within the hierarchy to focus resources and to promote sport and recreation these are sites designated as formal outdoor sports facilities. It is also recognised that sites within other typologies also provide sport facilities within the site e.g. a park with a pitch or bowling green. Further details regarding the provision of grass pitches have been developed within the separate Playing Pitch Strategy a summary of standards is provided below.

7.28   The audit has identified 44 accessible sites that have been classified as outdoor sport (excluding 5 golf courses), these occupy 157.43 ha and provide 0.62 ha per 1,000 population. A further 53 sites have been identified as containing outdoor sports facilities within other typologies.

7.29   The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.62 ha per 1,000 population **Quantity standard for playing pitches** **Mini soccer – 44 pitches** **Junior Football – 30 pitches** **Senior Football – 22 pitches** **Cricket – 13 squares** **Rugby – 7 pitches** **STP (full-size) – 6 pitches**	**To strive for all formal outdoor sport sites to be of an 'average' quality (46% or above)** **Quality standard for playing pitches** **All pitches available for the community to use will be of a good standard (65-90%)**	**To provide an accessible outdoor sports facility within 1,000m of where people live**

7.30   Quantity standards are based on current levels of provision and therefore no current quantitative deficiencies are present across the Borough. Appendix 5 applies the Borough quantity standard on a settlement area basis. This should be referred to where development takes place to ensure provision does not fall below the current Boroughwide standard of 0.62 ha per 1,000 population.

Provision for Children and Young People

7.31   For the purposes of developing the Open Space Strategy provision for children and young people has concentrated the research on the fixed play provision within the Borough and consists of equipped play areas and other specialist provision such as multi use games areas and wheeled play provision or skate parks.

7.32   The provision facilities for children and young people are important in facilitating opportunities for physical activity and the development of movement and social skills. As such the results for quality audit for play provision are often much lower than expected as the audit considers not only the physical condition of the equipment, it also considers the range and play value and measures them against models that are considered best practice in terms of play provision

7.33   The audit and assessment examines space designated for children's play, but recognises that children play in a wide variety of other spaces as well.

7.34   The audit undertaken has revealed that there are 65 sites that have provision for children and young people, occupying 11.31 hectares. The provision is split between sites that are specifically provided for children and young people (i.e. stand alone play areas) and provision within other typologies e.g. parks. The total number of play areas classified as 'stand-alone sites' is 7, with the remaining 58 play areas located on sites classified within other typologies

7.35   The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Standard **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.17 ha per 1,000 children's population (aged 0-19 years)**	**Standard** **To strive for all play sites to be of an 'average' play quality (46% and above)**	**Standard** **To provide access for all households in the Borough to be within 600m of provision for children and young people**

7.36   Quantity standards are based on current levels of provision and therefore no current quantitative deficiencies are present across the Borough. Appendix 5 applies the Borough quantity standard on a neighbourhood area basis. This should be referred to where development takes place to ensure provision does not fall below the current Boroughwide standard of 0.17 ha per 1,000 children's population.

7.37   As part of the quality auditing process a detailed database of site information has been collated (Appendix 1) with a breakdown of quality scores by key criteria. This should be referred to when looking for site specific quality improvements e.g. improvements to infrastructure such as seating and bins and management issues such as site cleanliness.

7.38   Map 10 demonstrates the access standard for provision for children and young people. The GIS analysis has identified that 68% or 73,828 residential households in the Borough are within the access catchments set for provision for children and young people. Importantly 32% of households are not currently within the catchment areas.

Allotments

7.39   This section considers the provision of all allotments across the Borough. The accessibility of open space varies greatly dependent upon the type of provision, and it is by their very nature that allotments are only accessible with restrictions in that you must be a tenant or plot holder. Allotments provide a key type of provision within the overall portfolio of open space, sport and recreation facilities. From the consultation undertaken, the value of allotments is significant, providing facilities for physical activity in addition to the promotion of healthy eating and educational value. The provision of allotments is a statutory function for local authorities under a number of legislative acts including the 1950 Allotment Act.

7.40   The audit undertaken has revealed that there are 41 sites with 1421 plots, occupying 44.40 hectares and providing 0.17 ha per 1,000 population.

7.41   The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Standard **To ensure provision does not fall below the current level of 0.17 ha per 1,000 population**	**Standard** **To ensure that sites are maintained to a quality standard of 'average' or above (46% or above). This includes ensuring facilities and infrastructure are 'fit for purpose'.**	**Standard** **To provide an accessible allotment plot within 1,000m of where people live**

7.42   Appendix 5 applies the Borough quantity standard on a neighbourhood area basis. This should be referred to where development takes place to ensure provision does not fall below the current Boroughwide standard of 0.17 ha per 1,000 population.

7.43   This needs to be considered with caution as from the audit a number of sites have vacant or unmanaged plots whilst others have substantial waiting lists. Management procedures need to be undertaken to reduce waiting lists and make allotment plots accessible to those who wish to use them.

7.44   As part of the quality auditing process a detailed database of site information has been collated (Appendix 1) with a breakdown of quality scores by key criteria. This should be referred to when looking for site specific quality improvements e.g. improvements to infrastructure such as signage and parking and management issues such as site cleanliness.

Cemeteries & Churchyards

7.45   Cemeteries can provide a valuable contribution to the portfolio of open space provision within an area. For many, they can provide a place for quiet contemplation in addition to their primary purpose as a final resting place. They often have wildlife conservation and bio-diversity value.   In the context of this study, it is important to acknowledge that cemeteries are not created with the intention of providing informal or passive recreation opportunities.

7.46   There are 20 sites identified as cemeteries equating to 64.55 hectares of provision across the Borough. The recommended minimum standards are:

Quantity	Quality	Accessibility
Standard **No quantitative Standard Set**	**Standard** **The proposed standard for Cemeteries is 61% plus or to a 'good' standard**	**Standard** **No standard set**

7.47   As part of the quality auditing process a detailed database of site information has been collated (Appendix 1) with a breakdown of quality scores by key criteria. This should be referred to when looking for site specific quality improvements e.g. improvements to infrastructure such as signage and parking and management issues such as site cleanliness.

Institutional Land

7.48 Institutional land in Walsall primarily constitutes educational land owned and managed by schools or the local authority. Almost all of the provision has some restrictions to access to ensure security of the site and those who use it. The Borough has 60 accessible open spaces defined as institutional land, totalling 169.82 ha.

7.49 No standards have been set for this typology, although where sites have community use for outdoor sports they have been included in the standards set in the accompanying Playing Pitch Strategy. Quality assessments were undertaken at sites with community use. Further information can be found in the outdoor sport and indoor sport sections of this report and the accompanying Playing Pitch Strategy.

7.50 There is no appropriate accessibility standard for institutional land, although it is important to take into consideration the growing importance of community use and community access to sports facilities at educational sites.

Indoor Sports Facilities

7.51 The local standards for current and future provision of indoor facilities reflect the actual demand for provision and the national drive to increase participation.

7.52 To calculate the recommended standards for indoor sports facilities the active population for each facility type/sports activity has been divided by the current demand and then multiplied by 1,000 to give the standard per 1,000 population. All figures used have been taken from the in-house supply and demand models.

7.53 The recommended standards are:

- **Swimming Pools** – 5.6sqm per 1000 population (based on swimming population of 224,574 requiring 1,248 sq m of water space)

- **Sports Halls** – 63.85 sq m (0.43 of a badminton court) per 1000 population (based on sports hall using population of 225,513 requiring 97 badminton courts)

- **Fitness Suites –** 3.4 stations per 1000 population (based on fitness participating population of 188.635 requiring 655 stations)

Comparison with other local authorities

7.54 It is useful to gauge provision within the Borough against other similar local authorities, and as such the findings and standards from other PPG17 assessments provide a valuable point of comparison. Provision within the Borough has been compared with neighbouring Black Country local authorities and several 'family group' authorities. This benchmarking data has been used to compare both quantity and accessibility standards. These are shown in Table 51.

7.55 PPG17 advocates that local authorities should move away from the use of national provision standards in order to develop local standards that best fit the Borough and local need. The use of benchmarking with other local authorities is useful to ensure the people of Walsall are provided with a good level of facilities and provision. From Table 51 it is evident that all of the proposed standards are within the range of open space standards from similar Local Authorities.

Table 51 – Quantity and Quality Standards Compared with similar Local Authorities

Typology	Walsall Proposed Quantity Standard	Walsall Proposed Access Standard	Comparison with other Local Authorities		
			Local Authority	Local Quantity Standard	Local Access Standard
Parks and Gardens	1.08 ha/1,000	1,200 m for Borough sites 600 m for Neighbourhood sites 400 m for Local sites	Dudley	0.8 ha/1,000	1,000 m
			Sandwell	0.93 ha/1,000	1,200 / 600 / 400 m
			Wolverhampton	0.27 or 0.60 ha/1,000	960 / 480 m
			Coventry	2.44 ha/1,000 (incl. amenity)	2,000 / 800 / 400 m
			Bury	0.74 ha/1,000	1,200 / 800 / 400 m
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	2.70 ha/1,000	1,200 m for Borough sites 600 m for Neighbourhood sites 400 m for Local sites	Dudley	1.37 ha/1,000 (excl. LNR)	300m / 2km (ANGSt)
			Sandwell	1.68 ha/1,000	1,200 / 600 / 400 m
			Wolverhampton	1.50 ha/1,000	720 m
			Coventry	1.75 ha/1,000	300m / 2km (ANGSt)
			Bury	2.80 ha/1,000	1,200 m
Amenity Greenspace	0.73 ha/1,000	400 m	Dudley	0.81 ha/1,000	300 m
			Sandwell	0.78 ha/1,000	400 m
			Wolverhampton	0.62 ha/1,000	240 m
			Coventry	2.44 ha/1,000 (incl. parks)	2,000 / 800 / 400 m
			Bury	0.51 ha/1,000	400 m
Green Corridors	0.12 ha/1,000	1,000 m	Dudley	0.15 ha/1,000	No standard set
			Sandwell	0.20 ha/1,000	No standard set
			Wolverhampton	No standard set	No standard set
			Coventry	No standard set	No standard set
			Bury	No standard set	No standard set

Typology	Walsall Proposed Quantity Standard	Walsall Proposed Access Standard	Comparison with other Local Authorities		
			Local Authority	Local Quantity Standard	Local Access Standard
Formal Outdoor Sport	0.62 ha/1,000	1,000 m	Dudley	0.35 ha/1,000	1,000 m
			Sandwell	0.35 ha/1,000	1,200 m
			Wolverhampton	1.50 ha/1,000	720 m
			Coventry	1.36 ha/1,000	1,200 m
			Bury	0.90 ha/1,000	800 m
Provision for Children & Young People	0.17 ha per 1,000 children's population (aged 0-19 years)	600 m	Dudley	0.0027 ha/1,000	1,000 m
			Sandwell	0.04 ha/1,000	1,200 / 600 / 400 m
			Wolverhampton	0.05 ha/1,000	960 m
			Coventry	0.10 ha/1,000	2,000 / 800 / 400 m
			Bury	0.27 ha/1,000	400 m
Allotments	0.17 ha per 1,000	1,000 m	Dudley	No standard set	No standard set
			Sandwell	No standard set	No standard set
			Wolverhampton	0.15 ha/1,000	720 m
			Coventry	0.38 ha/1,000	1,200 m
			Bury	2.95 ha/1,000	1,200 m

Recommendations

7.56   A number of recommendations are made in relation to all sites and the assessment undertaken. These are concerned with the use of information gathered and the further development of the study in future years. The following recommendations are made:

a) **Establish a Parks and Open Spaces Champion as a means of driving forward the open space agenda inviting interest from elected members.**

b) **Audit open space, sport and leisure facilities on a regular basis (every two/three years) and publish findings. This will allow trend data to be collated and improvements to be tracked. It is important that findings are published to enable wider stakeholders to track progress.**

c) **Develop a central record of all open space, sport and leisure facilities (indoor and outdoor) to include the findings of the assessment undertaken. The central record should include access to GIS mapping.**

d) **Address the current fragmented responsibilities for the management, development and future provision of open space across the Borough through the establishment of a consultative steering group, involving representatives from leisure, planning, regeneration and grounds maintenance, to consider specific site development proposals relating to existing, former and proposed open space, sport and recreation provision. This inter-departmental group should be established to share, and utilise the expertise of officers, to ensure that specific site development issues are fully considered, and the implications shared, before a planning decision is made.**

e) **Continue to develop the marketing information produced about open space, sport and recreation facilities available, key activities accommodated and access arrangements. The Council should seek to work with key partners in future marketing, such as the local Primary Care Trust (PCT), the wider voluntary sector, education, the Youth Service etc to ensure that open space fulfils a valuable role in meeting wider social objectives (e.g. health improvement, increased active participation).**

f) **Ensure that developers with permission for new developments make contributions towards the capital expenditure that is initially required to provide and enhance provision (i.e. capital contribution), whilst also contributing to the ongoing revenue cost of maintaining the provision (i.e. revenue contribution). The contribution from developers needs to be based on single bed spaces rather than housing units as this will ensure the cost reflects the increase in demand and use created by new development on existing facilities.**

g) **The Council should maintain a Borough-wide open space fund (pooled fund), especially for the areas within the Borough boundaries where there is limited development opportunity, or where developments are small in size and do not generate a contribution that is large enough for improvements, yet the development will still incur additional demand on existing facilities. This would be established to ensure contributions are always sought and create the means whereby funds could be used to enhance and improve existing provision or provide new provision to address deficiencies and need.**

h) **Develop an access standard regarding physical access for those users and potential users with a disability.**

i) **Review maintenance standards for open space, and agree with local people any changes. Report on performance annually. It is important to set quality standards for each of the open space categories.**

j) **Continue to work towards the reduction of the effects of crime and anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces.**

Recommendations for Future Planning

7.57   The Companion Guide suggests that planning policy needs to:

- **Enhance or protect existing open spaces or sport and recreational facilities of value to the local community, the guidance stipulates that this needs to be the key driver that influences planning decisions regarding provision**

- **Ensure new provision fills identified deficiencies in existing provision**

- **Develop planning policy that clarifies the circumstances in which the authority may consider allowing the redevelopment of existing provision**

- **Set clear guidance on developer requirements for both onsite/ off site contributions complete with the methods for calculating any necessary future maintenance or establishment costs**

- **Develop the principles for relocating necessary provision that is poorly located**

7.58   Strategic policies need to be set out in the Core Strategy and the standards should be explained within subsequent Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). The SPD should contain a list of priority projects and wherever possible contain costing details which can be annually updated. The initial priorities should be linked to priorities identified in the audit to bring sites up to a good standard.

7.59   The following recommendations should be implemented for future planning:

- **Where appropriate, the findings and recommendations of this report should be incorporated in the updating and renewal of other Council plans and strategies**

- **Planning documents linked to the evolving Local Development Framework should, where appropriate, include findings of this report**

- **Consideration should be given to a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) setting out standards of on-site open space provision or level of contribution towards off-site provision expected from developers.**

- **Develop an Indoor Facilities Strategy which builds on the findings of this assessment, and sets out a strategic approach for future provision, based on fewer, better quality, and well-located accessible facilities**

- **The Council should ensure that, in policy terms, a high quality of open space, sport and recreation provision is given appropriate weight so that it can be used to develop relevant management and maintenance regimes**

- **Design guidelines should be developed for implementation where new open spaces are proposed**

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