

# **OPEN SPACE STRATEGY**

## **Review of the 2006 Open Space, Recreation and Sport Strategy, January 2015**

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## **i INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS**

- i.1 Following the adoption of the Local Plan in 2004, Stevenage Borough Council procured PMP Consultants to prepare a PPG17<sup>1</sup> compliant Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study as a basis for:
- planning positively, creatively and effectively in identifying priority areas for improvement and to target appropriate types of open space;
  - ensuring an adequate provision of high quality, accessible open space to meet the needs of the local community;
  - ensuring any accessible funding is invested in the right places where there is the most need;
  - conducting section 106 negotiations with developers from a position of knowledge with evidence to support.
- i.2 The study was completed and published in February 2006, and has been used as a basis for developing planning policy and developing the Council's Green Space Strategy for Stevenage 2010-2020 (SBC, 2010).
- i.3 The Council is currently progressing a review of the Local Plan to 2031, and requires an update of the data to ensure that the emerging plans and policies are based on a relevant and knowledgeable understanding of the current situation with respect to open space provision, both current and proposed.
- i.4 The Council is also preparing a separate review of sports and leisure provision. This effectively means that spaces falling into the category of recreational or leisure space – playing pitches, indoor courts and halls, water sports, bowling, multi-use games areas and similar spaces – will be addressed there. The remaining spaces will be captured in here.
- i.5 'Open space' is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as, 'All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity'. This is very similar to the definition in Planning Policy Guidance note 17.

### **Stevenage Borough**

- i.6 Stevenage is a town located in north Hertfordshire. Although established for many hundreds of years, Stevenage is best known as a post-war new town and owes much of its growth, character and nature to the period of rapid growth between 1960 and 1980. Stevenage was in fact Britain's first designated new town. The Borough Council, which took on the assets of the Stevenage Development Corporation in 1980, covers an administrative area that closely follows the urban area of the town.

### **Low and high growth scenarios**

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<sup>1</sup> Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002); cancelled by the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012.

- i.7 In 2014, the population of the town was close to 85,000. The Local Plan for the period up to 2031 expects the population to grow further. During 2013, the first Local Plan consultation period anticipated need for a growth of 5,300 houses, although housing and population data released after this date by the ONS and CLG has suggested that the figure should be closer to 8,200. This has prompted the emergence of a low growth scenario (5,300 dwellings) and a high growth scenario (8,200 dwellings). These are referred to in the document.

### **Volunteers**

- i.8 Unless specifically stated as meaning the Council's Green Space Volunteers – a group of local people who give some of their free time to work with the Council to help make a difference to our community green spaces – reference to volunteers means any person who wishes to contribute to the improvement of open space(s) in the town on a voluntary basis. As opposed to being directed by the Council, this will usually be in relation to a space well known to them.

### **Geographic definitions**

- i.9 The 2006 work split the town into six analysis areas which were derived from the six Area Committees that existed at the time of the survey. The Area Committees were based on ward boundaries, and they were broadly akin to the neighbourhoods conceived at the outset of the modern town. The Area Committees have since been abolished. The review takes a town-wide view of open space, although reference to the neighbourhoods is necessary. They were defined as follows:

<b>Old Stevenage</b>	<i>Symonds Green, Old Town, Woodfield</i>
<b>St. Nicholas</b>	<i>St. Nicholas, Martin's Green</i>
<b>Chells</b>	<i>Chells, Manor</i>
<b>Shephall</b>	<i>Shephall, Bandle Hill</i>
<b>Bedwell</b>	<i>Bedwell, Pin Green</i>
<b>Broadwater</b>	<i>Longmeadow, Roebuck</i>

- i.10 **'Forster Country'** is an area of land to the north of Stevenage, north of St. Nicholas Church and west of Rooks Nest House, bounded by the built extent of Stevenage to the south and the borough boundary to the north. The extent of this area is recognised in the St. Nicholas / Rectory Lane Conservation Area Appraisal (2009). Excluding the church and churchyard, the crematorium, The Bury and other built areas, the open land contained by the conservation area boundary runs to around 51 hectares.
- i.11 **'Great Ashby'** strictly refers to the civil parish of the same name which abuts the Stevenage administrative boundary on the north eastern side of the town. The parish is wholly within North Herts District Council's administrative area. The built up part of the parish, in practice, forms part of the urban area of the town of Stevenage. However, Great Ashby has also been used to define the area of housing, built from the late 1990s, which lies across the administrative boundary between Stevenage and North Herts. Within the strategy, the former definition is used. Where the latter meaning is unavoidable, this is highlighted in the text.

### **Acronyms**



i.12 The following acronyms are used within the report:

<i>AMR</i>	<i>Annual Monitoring Report</i>
<i>ANGSt</i>	<i>(Natural England's) Access to Natural Green space standards</i>
<i>BAP</i>	<i>Biodiversity Action Plan</i>
<i>CABE</i>	<i>Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment</i>
<i>CDA Herts</i>	<i>Community Development Action Hertfordshire</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Community Infrastructure Levy</i>
<i>CIPFA</i>	<i>Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy</i>
<i>CLG</i>	<i>(Department for) Communities and Local Government</i>
<i>CPRE</i>	<i>Campaign to Protect Rural England</i>
<i>CTC</i>	<i>Cyclists' Touring Club</i>
<i>EHDC</i>	<i>East Hertfordshire District Council</i>
<i>FC</i>	<i>Football Club</i>
<i>FiT</i>	<i>Fields in Trust</i>
<i>FVP</i>	<i>Fairlands Valley Park (Stevenage)</i>
<i>GI</i>	<i>green infrastructure</i>
<i>GIS</i>	<i>geographic information system</i>
<i>HCC</i>	<i>Hertfordshire County Council</i>
<i>HLWSP</i>	<i>Hertfordshire Local Wildlife Sites Partnership</i>
<i>HMWT</i>	<i>Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust</i>
<i>KGV</i>	<i>King George V Playing Fields (Stevenage)</i>
<i>LAP</i>	<i>local areas for play</i>
<i>LEAP</i>	<i>local equipped areas for play</i>
<i>LNP</i>	<i>Local Nature Partnership</i>
<i>LWS</i>	<i>Local Wildlife Site</i>
<i>MUGA</i>	<i>Multi-use games area</i>
<i>NEAP</i>	<i>neighbourhood equipped areas for play</i>
<i>NIA</i>	<i>Nature Improvement Area</i>
<i>NHDC</i>	<i>North Hertfordshire District Council</i>
<i>NPFA</i>	<i>National Playing Fields Association</i>
<i>NPPF</i>	<i>National Planning Policy Framework</i>
<i>NPPG</i>	<i>National Planning Policy Guidance</i>
<i>ODPM</i>	<i>Office for the Deputy Prime Minister</i>
<i>ONS</i>	<i>Office for National Statistics</i>
<i>ORS</i>	<i>Opinion Research Services</i>
<i>PPG</i>	<i>Planning Policy Guidance</i>
<i>PPS</i>	<i>Planning Policy Statement</i>
<i>RIGS</i>	<i>Regionally Important Geological Site</i>
<i>SAM</i>	<i>Scheduled Ancient Monument</i>
<i>SBC</i>	<i>Stevenage Borough Council</i>
<i>SLL</i>	<i>Stevenage Leisure Limited</i>
<i>SSSI</i>	<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>
<i>SLOAP</i>	<i>space left over after planning</i>
<i>STOOP</i>	<i>Stevenage Outer Orbital Path</i>

<i>SUDS</i>	<i>Sustainable Urban Drainage System</i>
<i>TPO</i>	<i>Tree Preservation Order</i>

## ii THE 2006 SURVEY

### Background

- ii.1 Stevenage Borough Council appointed PMP Consultants in 2005 to prepare an Open Space, Recreation and Sport Study across the Borough. The study included an audit of all open space provision, providing a robust baseline of data, indicating priorities for future open space and sports and recreation provision and providing a basis for policy and strategy writing.
- ii.2 There were a number of broad aims that the study set out to achieve. In brief, these were to:
- provide a comprehensive audit and assessment of open spaces and sport and recreation facilities across the Borough, including all open space regardless of ownership;
  - undertake a demand assessment and a value assessment for those spaces and facilities;
  - deliver local standards for each type of open space (defined by PPG17) by considering national standards and local context;
  - relate the need for protection, enhancement, relocation, re-provision and new provision to geographical areas within the town;
  - provide a clear picture of existing and future needs by identifying shortfalls and surpluses;
  - provide the basis by which decisions can be made about open space and recreational provision and the tools for the development of fiscal means to achieve this through residential and other development.
- ii.3 The work was guided and underpinned by the Government's guidance of the time, which was set out in '*Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*' and in the companion guide to PPG17, entitled '*Assessing Needs and Opportunities*'. Both of these documents were produced in 2002, replacing an earlier iteration published in 1991. It marked a move towards locally defined standards and a greater emphasis on the quality of open space, whilst recognising that some spaces have multiple functions. This prompted the need for robust assessment of locally available space.
- ii.4 There were four guiding principles for undertaking a local assessment:
- local needs will vary even within local authority areas according to socio-demographic and cultural characteristics;
  - the provision of good quality and effective open space relies on effective planning, but also on creative design, landscape management and maintenance;
  - delivering high quality and sustainable open spaces may depend much more on improving and enhancing existing open space rather than new provision;
  - the value of open space depends primarily on meeting identified local needs and the wider benefits they generate for people, wildlife and the environment.
- ii.5 As a result of following these principles, and the guidance in both PPG17 and the companion guide, PMP and the Borough Council were confident that the study arrived at representative local standards that reflected local needs.

## **Method**

- ii.6 The study undertook an assessment of eight of the ten categories of open space defined in PPG17. These were:
- parks and gardens;
  - natural and semi natural open space;
  - amenity green space;
  - provision for children and young people;
  - outdoor sports facilities;
  - allotments and community gardens;
  - green corridors;
  - churchyards and cemeteries.
- ii.7 The categories that were not investigated were civic spaces and accessible countryside in urban fringe areas. There is no commentary of the reasons for excluding these categories within the study, though much of the land in Stevenage which might be considered 'urban fringe' is designated green belt. Further, pressure for development within Stevenage's administrative boundary means that any other 'urban fringe' land is unlikely to be protected in its entirety for the long term as open space.
- ii.8 Stevenage does not have spaces that might be thought of as 'civic' in their nature beyond the Town Square, which is why it may have been excluded as a category. The study also excluded roadside grass verges, 'small, insignificant' areas of grassland or trees, space left over after planning (SLOAP), farmland and farm tracks, and private roads and private gardens.
- ii.9 The process followed the five steps outlined in PPG17 and the Companion Guide.
- Step 1: identifying local needs.*
- PMP conducted consultation, surveys and drop-in neighbourhood sessions to establish need and perception of need, alongside household questionnaires and face to face interviews with relevant officers and organisations.
- Step 2: auditing local provision.*
- Using a list of open spaces provided by the Council, PMP visited well over 600 sites and consistently assessed each on the basis of quantity, quality, accessibility and value. They were categorised according to the list of types, and digitised on a GIS. This provided the raw data for the assessment and analysis.
- Steps 3 and 4: setting and applying provision standards.*
- Using the data collected and the assessments derived, PMP were able to determine a set of provision standards, apply them for each open space type and determine any surplus or deficit geographically. The geographic areas were based on the six neighbourhoods of Stevenage.
- Step 5: drafting policies and implementation.*

The final step was largely the responsibility of the Borough Council, who intended to use the evidence in the preparation of the Local Development Framework, though PMP provided pointers.

- ii.10 The strategic context at the time of the study was broad. It included an emerging East of England Regional Spatial Strategy and the recently adopted Stevenage District Plan (2004), which committed land to the west of the town for residential expansion, as well as a number of Council corporate plans. In addition, the Government had supported its commitment to the quality of open spaces by setting up a dedicated design agency, CABE Space, which provided everything from guidance at a strategic level to practical support on the ground in relation to public spaces. As a result of the strategic review, PMP identified a handful of key issues:
- as a new town, Stevenage was designed around the idea of neighbourhoods having easy access to space and facilities, but the contemporary issue was one of quality and maintenance;
  - growth from the expansion of the town, specifically in the west, would bring pressure to bear on existing space and facilities (not least from new development using 'spare' land for development);
  - open spaces and recreational facilities were valued and protection afforded in part by a number of documents, not least the new Local Plan, but
  - there was no single document pulling together a co-ordinated approach to open space and recreation.

### **Demographics**

- ii.11 The study used the 2001 Census population (app. 79,800) as a baseline, but is unclear about both the end date for the study and the basis for the increases in population which appear in the main table about open space quantities in PMP Study Appendix J (Quantity Standards). The table does make some reference to a delivery of 14,400 houses in 'urban extensions', which was an aspiration held by the Core Strategy to 2021; consultants DTz did prepare some demographic evidence to support the Core Strategy, and this is perhaps where the population figures originate from.

### **Findings**

- ii.12 The study provides a wide range of conclusions, actions and policy pointers in relation to six of the open space typologies<sup>2</sup> which range from the broad – such as protecting and improving parks and gardens (PG5) – to the more specific – such as establishing a range of actions for each of the neighbourhood areas in respect of specific sites for the children and young people's typology. However, a series of headline outcomes related to the space standards themselves, and their relationship to the geographic areas are discussed below.

### *Quantity*

- ii.13 The findings of the study in respect to quantity of open space typologies is set out in Table 1 below (red numbers demonstrate a deficiency).

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<sup>2</sup> Excludes cemeteries and green corridors.

- ii.14 On the whole, quantity standards were set at or close to the level of provision at the time, with that provision inevitably decreasing as the population increases in the future case scenario (the study does not speculate on future provision of open space in line with population growth). The exceptions to this are the children and young people category, where the standard set reflects the need to 'thin out' provision to make the current stock more manageable and easier to maintain, and the allotment category, where the standard is set low to enable some disposal of vacant or underused allotments (as was the trend at the time).

**Table 1: Quantity of Open Space (2006)**

			Town	St Nicholas	Old Stevenage	Chells	Bedwell	Shephall	Broadwater
Typology		Standard (ha/000)	Provision (ha/000)						
Parks and Gardens		<b>0.73</b>							
	existing		0.73	0.00	0.04	1.14	2.80	0.65	0.00
	future		0.61	0.00	0.02	1.05	2.14	0.64	0.00
Natural & Semi Natural		<b>1.78</b>							
	existing		1.78	0.70	1.46	1.97	2.21	2.11	2.32
	future		1.47	0.71	0.91	1.81	1.69	2.08	2.22
Amenity Greenspace		<b>1.1</b>							
	existing		1.09	1.04	1.40	0.93	1.16	0.87	1.07
	future		0.90	1.00	0.87	0.85	0.89	0.86	1.02
Children & Young People*		<b>0.8</b>							
	existing		1.35	0.81	1.93	0.48	1.36	1.52	1.83
	future		1.12	0.77	1.20	0.44	1.04	1.50	1.75
Outdoor Sports Facilities		<b>2.2</b>							
	existing		2.20	0.43	2.81	1.74	2.97	3.1	1.9**
	future		1.82	0.41	1.75	1.59	2.27	3.04	1.81**
Allotments		<b>0.09</b>							
	existing		0.13	0.07	0.18	0.04	0.23	0.09	0.16
	future		0.11	0.06	0.11	0.04	0.18	0.09	0.15
Burial Land		none							
	existing			0.00	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
	future			0.00	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00

\* children and young people measures play areas / 000 population, not area.

\*\* excludes golf

### Quality

- ii.15 The quality of open space typologies was generally assessed by reference to national, regional or local standards, and through consultations undertaken through surveys and other means. On the whole, the quality of most open spaces was considered to be good, with sites in all

categories except allotments achieving a very good status. Concerns were raised on most typologies with respect to management issues and, depending on the type, included problems such as litter, vandalism, dog-fouling and maintenance. The responses to the quality aspects of the work lead PMP to derive a recommended 'quality vision' for each typology.

- ii.16 A small proportion of the amenity green space sites were rated as poor or very poor. However, this group forms the highest proportion of sites by far, with 393 of 653. The low rating in the case of these sites is likely to reflect the fact that many will be small scale and may lack any specific use or definitive management regime, leaving them open to variable treatment over time.

#### *Accessibility*

- ii.17 Sites were given an accessibility rating and straight line routes drawn radially from them. This highlighted areas of deficiency and over-supply.
- ii.18 In the case of most typologies, the standard has been set at a five minute walk to access open space. This has been derived from the survey information which suggests, in the majority of cases, that the preferred means of accessing open space is on foot. This does not necessarily reflect the availability and accessibility of spaces, as some are deficient at this level (most notably the natural and semi-natural spaces). However, the setting of standards on this basis does provide an indication of where there is deficiency and offers means by which this can be addressed or, if necessary, justified.
- ii.19 In the case of parks and gardens, and sports facilities, the study found that due to the nature of activities, which were often planned or more formal, there was an acceptable drive time to reach places and spaces. The dominance of Fairlands Valley Park as a destination in Stevenage is an example of this – the park is predominantly located in only a couple of neighbourhood areas, but it effectively serves the town as a whole. Clearly, some sports and pastimes can only be played in specific places that won't necessarily be provided locally (e.g. hockey or cricket pitches). However, analysis still needs to be done to ensure such facilities are available and broadly accessible across the town.

#### *Value*

- ii.20 The study used the data collected to make an assessment of the value of each space. This largely reflected the quality and quantity criteria – for instance, the general deficiency of parks and gardens outside of the Fairlands Valley Park straddling Chells, Broadwater and Shephall, combined with that parks' overall quality lead to it being valued highly as an asset. Equally, sites with high usage and a good perception will have a high value.
- ii.21 There are issues within the typologies, especially within children's play, where the rationalisation programme would potentially improve poorly performing sites because of their accessibility even if they weren't valued, and in relation to allotments where the lack of usage in some areas despite good accessibility would lead to their rationalisation or disposal.

- ii.22 Sites with a low value (particularly in the amenity green space typology) – which includes poorly used and poor quality sites as well as good sites in poor locations - are put forward as sites for potential disposal.

*Other findings*

- ii.23 As well as commenting on the individual status of sites and typologies, the PMP work also made recommendations for planning policy advice and grounds maintenance.
- ii.24 In the case of the former, the study demonstrated how a particular site might be evaluated in the event of a development proposal coming forward on it. This looked, in turn, at the strategic importance overall of the type of space under consideration and then the individual contribution of the site in terms of its assessed quality, accessibility and the relationship to other sites in the vicinity. The study developed a 'value assessment matrix' which recommended courses of action dependent on whether the site was valued highly or not and on whether it was, in itself, of high quality or not.
- ii.25 The study also looks at the adopted plan of the time – the Stevenage District Plan Second Review of 2004 – and evaluates each of the policies in the Leisure and Recreation chapter. On the whole, the plan is supported, although some pointers are offered (e.g. where matters may be better addressed via supplementary planning advice).
- ii.26 In relation to both of these matters, the study also offers a flow diagram for dealing with development and the obligation to provide either on-site open space or a financial contribution in lieu of that provision.
- ii.27 Much of the policy and standards work is supported by reference to work carried out in other authorities, though it isn't clear how these places were chosen (some of the standards setting work is from PMP's own commissions with other authorities).
- ii.28 Finally, the PMP work does make some references to the expansion of Stevenage, and to the need for new provision to serve a growing population. However, any reference to cross-boundary working and cross boundary issues – to the west and to the east – is extremely limited throughout the work.

**Legacy**

- ii.29 The PMP study was prepared as an evidence base for the progression of the Local Development Framework in Stevenage, which would have been a successor document to the Stevenage District Local Plan Second Review. Some of the findings of the study were taken forward and used in this way in the preparation of the Core Strategy (which was formally withdrawn in 2012) and in various other documents, including the draft Old Town Area Action Plan.
- ii.30 The study was also used as a basis for the Green Space Strategy which was prepared by the Council to plan for the maintenance and management of open space in the town. A number



of specific site assessments against the study's criteria were undertaken as they were evaluated for their development potential.

- ii.31 Because no plans have been adopted between 2004 and the current time the PMP study did not undergo rigorous testing through an examination process. It is, however, expected that the study is robust, given that other similar studies have been carried out by PMP and tested at other inquiries but it should set a marker in the ground that the review process should also be robust and rigorous in its re-examination in order that it provides a sound basis for policy writing and strategic direction.

### iii THE 2014 REVIEW

#### **Task and Purpose**

*A review of the PMP 'Open Space, Recreation and Sport Study' (2006)*

*To provide a basis upon which Local Plan policies for open space and green infrastructure can be formulated*

#### **National Planning Context**

*National Planning Policy Framework*

- iii.1 The Coalition Government have embarked upon a process of simplifying planning guidance and legislation.
- iii.2 The approach to open space was, for a long time, guided by *Planning Policy Guidance note: 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation* and its companion guide, *'Assessing Needs and Opportunity'* (both ODPM, 2002). The publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012 cancelled PPG17 and PPS12. The Companion Guide remained extant until it too was archived by the Government, on 7 March 2014.
- iii.3 The NPPF, however, recognises that, *'Access to high quality open spaces...can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities'* (para 73). As a result:
- iii.4 *'Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required'* (para 73).
- iii.5 It goes on to state that:  
  
*'Existing open space...including playing fields, should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location'* (para 74).
- iii.6 During 2009, Natural England produced guidance promoting the need for green infrastructure planning, and PPS12 defined green infrastructure<sup>3</sup> and advised local planning authorities to plan for it alongside physical and social infrastructure.
- iii.7 The duty to conserve biodiversity is set out in section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The Government has expressed its commitment to this requirement

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<sup>3</sup> PPS12 defined green infrastructure as, "a network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities". This definition has altered within the NPPF.

through its Biodiversity Strategy 2020, published in 2011. Key to the strategy is retaining the protection and improvement of the natural environment as a core objective of the planning system, the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships, and the creation of 12 Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) as a means of creating a geographically specific focus on biodiversity goals on a significant scale.

- iii.8 In relation to the strategic view of ‘green infrastructure’<sup>4</sup>, the Government directs local authorities to,

*‘set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure’ (para 114).*

- iii.9 The NPPF also makes clear that the proper planning of green infrastructure is one way of dealing with vulnerability within landscapes and ecosystems as a result of possible long term changes as a result of climate change (para 99). New development can add to the overall threat that climate change brings. Whilst Stevenage is perhaps less vulnerable than some other places as a borough, the town sits within a much wider landscape which is sensitive to changes, and we must be aware of our influences upon it.
- iii.10 Paragraph 113 of the NPPF establishes that the LPA should have ‘criteria based’ policies in the local plan against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged (proportionate to their relative importance).
- iii.11 It is clear that the Government continues to value green infrastructure and open space and the contribution it makes to quality of life on a number of levels. Government expects that open space is considered strategically, whilst being monitored and protected. At a local level, both the quality and quantity of open space available to communities ought to be properly provided for and protected where necessary. However, there is no new guidance provided to local authorities on how to conduct these assessments.
- iii.12 There are no NIAs that impinge on Stevenage, but the Lea Catchment NIA was a strong candidate for funding and only narrowly missed out on being a pilot. This NIA has continued as a locally agreed NIA, and part of its area covers the Stevenage Brook on its course through the Borough close to the southern boundary.

#### *The legacy of the PPG17 Companion Guide*

- iii.13 At the outset of this open space review, the Companion Guide had not been withdrawn. The Council looked at similar authorities to understand how open space assessments are being

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<sup>4</sup> The NPPF contains a new definition of green infrastructure, changed from the earlier PPS12 definition: ‘A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities’. The NPPF adds that, ‘Green infrastructure includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, street trees, allotments and private gardens’.

approached in the context of the NPPF. Those authorities fell into one (or more, highlighted in bold) of four categories and were as follows:

- ‘Similar authorities’ as defined by ONS, CIPFA or CLG on the basis of population or other national indicators – **Dacorum**, Dartford, Dover, Gosport, Gravesham, **Harlow**, Hyndburn, Kettering, Medway, **Northampton**, Redditch, Tendring, Thurrock;
- Other authorities with an initial study conducted by PMP – Burnley, Chelmsford, Congleton, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Harborough, Kirklees, Knowsley, Maidstone, Oswestry, **Tamworth**, Wellingborough, Vale Royal;
- Under-bounded towns: Leicester, Nottingham;
- New towns or expanded towns – Basildon, Bracknell Forest, Crawley, **Dacorum**, **Harlow**, Halton, Milton Keynes, **Northampton**, Peterborough, Swindon, **Tamworth**, Telford.

- iii.14 Of these, only Crawley, Knowsley, Milton Keynes and Northampton had conducted open space reviews since the NPPF was published. Crawley is a similar authority to Stevenage. Milton Keynes and Northampton have major urban areas, but are also surrounded by significant rural hinterlands, and do not have the same pressure on land, whilst wishing to maintain a quality and quantity of open space within their urban contexts.
- iii.15 Knowsley is least like Stevenage, being an expansive metropolitan hinterland comprising significant areas of undeveloped land and small ‘townships’ of a varying nature.
- iii.16 Each of these four authorities has, in its review, referenced the methodology outlined within PPG17, and observed the open space typologies defined within PPG17. Three of the four are at an advanced stage of plan preparation, and the open space reviews for an element of the evidence base for those plans; the same three have conducted their reviews in house (Crawley is the exception in these cases).
- iii.17 The review of the PMP work bears in mind the guidance in PPG17 and the Companion Guide largely because this was the easiest way to consider the data and revisit it, and at the time of the commencement, the Companion Guide was in limbo. As the review has progressed, the reliance on cancelled guidance has become less.

### **Green Infrastructure**

- iii.18 In recent years there has been an increasing recognition of the role of ‘green infrastructure’ in contributing to the health and well-being of places and of the contribution it can make to sustainable development. Both the NPPF and the NPPG refer to the importance of planning for green infrastructure both as an essential contributor to healthy places and communities and as a way of combating the long term negative effects of climate change.
- iii.19 The Government’s key publication in addressing its approach to natural assets and biodiversity is set out in its Biodiversity 2020 Strategy. The Strategy set out a desire to establish Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) across England – a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people – to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment.

- iii.20 LNPs work strategically to help their local area manage the natural environment. They aim to make sure that its value, and the value of the services it provides to the economy and the people who live there, is taken into account in local decisions, for example about planning and development.
- iii.21 A Hertfordshire LNP operates at the County level and is currently vested in the HMWT. It was formally recognised in September 2012 and has a strategic plan for the period 2013-2016. The objectives of the plan are:
- Healthy and resilient ecological networks [*focused around a recognition of the important county landscapes, including chalk rivers and hornbeam woodland, against the pressures of accommodating development*]
  - Health and well-being through the natural environment [*recognising a correlation between access to the countryside and green spaces and people's general well-being and health*]
  - Sustainable economic growth through the natural environment [*centred on the value of a healthy natural environment for farming and resource production including food, and the advantages a good natural environment provides in attracting investment and people and boosting productivity*]
  - Water for people and wildlife [*recognising the water resource constraints in the county, the impact that has on distinctive environments and the needs of people, business and wildlife to have access to water*]
- iii.22 The LNP operates by creating linkages with the Local Enterprise Partnership, with local authorities and with utility providers, amongst others at the national and local level. There are no nationally important biodiversity designations within Stevenage, though there are a significant number of Local Wildlife Sites and one regionally important geological site. The Hertfordshire Local Wildlife Sites Partnership is now subsumed within the LNP.
- iii.23 The Lea Catchment NIA includes part of Stevenage borough along the length of the Stevenage Brook, a tributary of the Beane.
- iii.24 Stevenage is a predominantly urban environment, with large areas of managed open space and around 35 small scattered woodlands that predate the development of the new town. There are small areas of countryside within the administrative boundary, though these are either under pressure from developers or designated as green belt (or both). Aside from any recognition as having a biodiversity interest, these areas of countryside largely have an element of protection as countryside, green belt or common land.
- iii.25 The National Landscape Character Areas<sup>5</sup> recognise the diverse landscapes within the country and wash over the urban areas. This means that Stevenage is covered by four designations, though the most significant are the East Herts Clayland and the North Herts Chalk. County level descriptions of the landscape surrounding Stevenage build on this advice and highlight the local characteristics and conditions prevalent. Landscape connections seem to be most

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<sup>5</sup> Defined by Natural England

common to the east, looking to the Beane Valley in particular, though development pressures have typically emerged from the north and west.

- iii.26 Stevenage has 38 Local Wildlife Sites (the latest being designated at the end of 2013). These were reviewed during the spring and summer of 2013 by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, and the review has informed the Council of priorities and will inform the forthcoming review of the Stevenage BAP. More is said about these sites in the natural and semi-natural sites chapter, where most of the wildlife sites are identified (also see Appendix M).
- iii.27 From the perspective of the emerging local plan, the importance of the open space strategy is most pressingly felt from the perspective of local residents, visitors and business, who seek local spaces for their recreation needs, and to provide structure and character to the town. It's about making the most of our parks, open spaces and natural environments within the town, whilst recognising that they are part of a wider countryside which goes out way beyond our administrative boundaries. The wider issues of green infrastructure planning are evident, but are cross boundary matters, and are of raised profile for our neighbouring authorities because of their rural characters. We need to ensure that the green corridors and ancient connections to the wider landscape are maintained, but the focus for Stevenage is more local.

### **Other National Advice**

#### *CABE Space*

- iii.28 Within the last ten years, open space and open space management has enjoyed a greater focus and profile, largely through the work of CABE Space. CABE Space was part of the Commission for Architecture and The Built Environment (CABE), and was publicly funded under the previous Labour Government. CABE Space aimed, *'to bring excellence to the design, management and maintenance of parks and public space in towns and cities'*.
- iii.29 CABE Space was abolished in 2011. CABE, in a significantly slimmed down form, was merged with the Design Council and both organisations became self-supporting. As a result, the focus of their work broadened, but the publicly funded expertise of the years up to 2011, research and advice generated through its life remains valid.
- iii.30 There is no doubt that CABE Space recognised the value of public space and the benefits it can bring for people and organisations through its proper design and management. In turn, new public spaces were arguably better able to meet the demands of their users as a result, and best practice in respect of public space sharpened as more recent case studies emerged.
- iii.31 As time progresses, the relevance of such work must inevitably be raised (particularly if the sector continues to innovate and develop as it did under CABE Space), but it is reasonable to assume that some of the more recent publications – all of which remain available on the Design Council's website – provide some useful pointers in the provision and management of public open space<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Conversely, it could be argued that because the present Government abolished CABE Space, and streamlined planning guidance into the NPPF, the documents are in fact no longer relevant.

iii.32 Notable publications of relevance here include:

*Urban green nation: building the evidence base* (2010) – gauges the state of England’s urban green space and its impact on people’s health and well-being;

*Open space strategies: best practice guidance* (2009) – provides a single guide for England where the creation of an open space strategy is required by policy;

*The value of public space* (2004) – demonstrates how cities in the UK and around the world have received far-reaching economic, health and social benefits from making the best of their public spaces.

#### *Sport England*

iii.33 Sport England is responsible for grassroots sport in England. At the time of the PMP work, they advised on assessing the open space needs of an area through their document, ‘*Planning for Open Space*’ (2002). Sport England replaced this guidance in July 2014 with ‘*Assessing needs and opportunities guide for indoor and outdoor sports facilities*’ which reflects the advice of the NPPF.

iii.34 Sport England also advises on planning for playing fields and for indoor facilities such as sports halls and swimming pools. These are outside the remit of this open space review, though Sport England have been heavily engaged on Stevenage’s Sports Facility Study, which is being prepared in parallel.

#### *Fields in Trust*

iii.35 Fields in Trust (FiT) is, since 2007, the operating name for the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA). The NPFA devised the ‘six acre standard’ for playing fields which was long considered the benchmark for provision across the country. FiT, an independent charity with a Royal Charter, now seek to secure and improve outdoor space for sport and play for future generations. Whilst campaigning and advising on the use and protection of open space, FiT have no recent guidance relevant to the review.

#### *Other relevant organisations*

iii.36 Whilst there is presently no further advice on reviewing or preparing open space studies above and beyond that already discussed, a number of agencies will have a bearing on the nature and availability of open space in Stevenage. These include:

- Natural England
- English Heritage
- Environment Agency
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- National Childhood Bureau / Play England

iii.37 Engagement with other relevant organisations as part of this review are dealt with later in this document (para 1.1.42 – 1.1.44).

#### **Local Planning Context**

iii.38 Stevenage Borough Council adopted its Second Review of the Local Plan in 2004. This is the most recent adopted Local Plan. A number of the policies contained within it remain in place

having been 'saved' and approved by a direction from the Secretary of State in 2007 whilst the Council prepared its Core Strategy. The Council did not adopt a Core Strategy, and Government have since adopted the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012.

- iii.39 However, the saved policies remain in place. These include several in relation to open space and wildlife sites. The most pertinent to this review include:
- EN10 Green Links
  - EN15 Ancient Lanes and Hedgerows
  - EN16 Countryside Heritage Site
  - EN17 Wildlife Sites and Regionally Important Geological Sites
  - L10 Principal Open Spaces
  - L11 Fairlands Valley Park
  - L13 Redundant school playing fields
  - L14 Children's play space
  - L16 Children's play space provision in residential developments
  - L17 Informal open space provision in residential developments
- iii.40 The Council withdrew its Core Strategy in 2012 after it was found unsound. Since then, the Council has published an Interim Planning Policy Statement (April 2012) which is regarded as a material consideration, though it has little advice regarding open spaces. Draft DPDs covering site specific policies and the Old Town introduce the idea of extending green lungs to Grace Way and St. Nicholas, and protecting allotments as principal open spaces.
- iii.41 The Council issued a First Consultation in respect of a Local Plan to 2031 in summer of 2013. This drew on the PMP work to seek to establish new policy on open spaces. It sought views on the two new green lungs and also postulated on the idea of protecting smaller open spaces than had been protected by the 2004 plan. Of those expressing a view, the majority sought the protection of smaller spaces and the establishment of the two new green lungs. These views are a factor in the review taking place here.
- iii.42 The emerging Local Plan is expected to undergo further consultation in mid to late 2015 (with pre-submission consultation expected in August/September 2015) with adoption anticipated in late 2016.



#### **iv METHODOLOGY**

- iv.1 The review is being carried out in parallel with separate studies that are considering sports and leisure provision and allotments. This document therefore deals primarily with the following, whilst reflecting those separate studies:
- amenity green space
  - parks and gardens
  - natural and semi natural open space;
  - children and young people;
  - green corridors;
  - cemeteries.
- iv.2 These types of open space are described in Part 1 at Stage 2.
- iv.3 Part One of the review deals with the first two of the five stages set out in the Companion Guide, namely:
- identifying local need;
  - auditing local provision;
- iv.4 Part Two loosely deals with the final three stages of the five whilst moving towards a more holistic approach to strategy (i.e. a standards driven approach was not pursued):
- set provision standards;
  - apply the provision standards;
  - draft policies and recommendations.

##### **Overview of the five stages**

###### *Identifying local need*

- examines local need for, and perception of, local space generally;
- no new comprehensive household survey;
- questions about open space have been included within the Sports Facility Study;
- recent consultations regarding public spaces have been reviewed and referenced.

###### *Audit local provision*

- The PMP Study identified 653 sites across eight categories of open space;
- Detailed examination of this dataset left 455 different sites in the dataset;
- A desktop review added a potential 50<sup>7</sup> new sites;
- therefore the 2014 review dataset contains 505 sites (see Appendix A);
- site surveys have been carried out across geographic areas and open space typologies.

- iv.5 These two stages comprise an update of the 2006 work. The completion of these allows the review to arrive at a position whereby the two datasets can be compared, and a baseline position for 2014 derived. This first element of the report is concluded with a discussion

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<sup>7</sup> 54 were identified, but four were discounted on survey. One site (954) was not visited as it was a late addition to the review; the site is of a similar nature to 952 and 953 and were completed as part of the same project.

covering the drivers for change over the eight year period, the key differences and whether these changes have been beneficial or detrimental overall.

*Set / apply the provision standards*

- developing and applying standards for open space is only part of a wider strategy approach to open space;
- however, development and application of standards remains relevant;
- continuing proportionate provision of open space against housing need and population growth is unlikely to be sustainable;
- quality a greater consideration than quantity.

- iv.6 Other pressures also exist in seeking to develop a policy position in respect of open space:
- the duty-to-cooperate with neighbouring authorities;
  - new development within and close to Stevenage in the next twenty years could deliver significant areas of open space that could contribute markedly to Stevenage's overall offer (e.g. in land buffering the A1(M) and land with literary connections around Weston Lane).
- iv.7 This does not necessarily point to a standards driven approach, and the decision has been made to develop strategy and policy using a working group of internal and external specialists to ensure that the approach to open space is rounded and robust.
- iv.8 With the input of the working group, the strategy was developed.

*Draft policies and recommendations*

- iv.9 The ultimate purpose of the review is to provide evidence for the development of policies within the development plan for Stevenage's open spaces. This was agreed by the working group and external consultees, and will be tested through the statutory process of preparing and adopting a plan.

# 1 PART ONE

## 1.1 Stage 1: Identifying Local Needs

### In this section:

- *examination of local need / perception of need for local open space across typologies;*
- *review of past consultations between 2006 and 2014;*
- *analysis of new survey work for this review.*

### Review of recent past consultations

- 1.1.1 This section reviews past consultations where open spaces have been a factor in the discussion. This includes (most recent first):
- green space satisfaction surveys 2013-2014
  - relevant aspects of consultation completed for the current Local Plan (Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031, First Consultation)
  - Stevenage 2021, Our Town Our Future (Stevenage Community Strategy 2013)
  - Stevenage Corporate Plan 2013-2018
  - Stevenage Green Space Strategy for Stevenage 2010-2020
  - Stevenage Residents' Survey 2009
  - re-evaluation of the PMP consultations, 2006

### *Green space satisfaction surveys*

- 1.1.2 The Borough Council has undertaken regular satisfaction surveys in connection with its open spaces. The Council's website<sup>8</sup> carries details of a 2010 survey which suggested overall satisfaction with a broad range of facilities at Fairlands Valley Park – of nine listed attributes, over 75% felt that they were 'good' (as opposed to 'poor' or 'bad').
- 1.1.3 A new survey is currently ongoing – it continued through the summer season and will continue into 2015. This survey seeks to gather views about Fairlands Valley Park (in one survey) and other green spaces (in another). The latter lists 46 principal sites.
- 1.1.4 Early responses suggest a high level of satisfaction with the borough's parks and green spaces. On average, over 60% of people use green spaces every week (this fluctuates between seasons), with over 60% considering them good or excellent. Responses suggest most people use the parks for simple recreational pursuits – to walk, relax and get fresh air. Cleanliness and trees/grass are cited as the most important elements of open space (no-one responded that they were not important). Bicycle parking and car parking had high proportions of people considering them unimportant, but most respondents were reaching their open spaces on foot from home. Very small numbers were accessing parks and open spaces by public transport or bicycle.

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<sup>8</sup> Held at the GreenSTAT page: <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces/51782/>

- 1.1.5 On the whole, respondents were extremely satisfied with the natural elements of parks and green spaces. Cleanliness also appears to be good, but the most dissatisfaction relates to information and signage.

*Review of consultation - Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031, First Consultation*

- 1.1.6 A number of comments were received specifically relating to the value of Stevenage's open spaces. There were insufficient responses to base a strategy upon, or evaluate the town's need for open spaces of any kind.

- 1.1.7 Of the comments received, the main issues arising were:

- the value placed upon the area of land to the north of Stevenage around Weston Road known as Forster Country. A number of residents and interested persons recommended that this land was protected for its literary and cultural significance. Amongst residents and members of the Friends of Forster Country expressing this, English Heritage also sought a firm view on the area from the Council. The housebuilder with options in the area supported the protection of land here for the benefit of future residents as well as those currently living in the area;
- a general concern at the loss of green spaces to development. Some respondents referred to specific issues that were of relevance to them (Trent Close, Collenswood School);
- reference to the importance of open spaces in the structural growth of Stevenage and a feeling that their continued protection was right;
- an overall preference for the more comprehensive protection of open space offered by 'option c'<sup>9</sup> in the consultation document;
- cross boundary issues – the role of open space in Stevenage and for residents in and close to Stevenage, particularly at Norton Green, Great Ashby and Aston;
- support for a strategic approach to open space. This was particularly the case amongst those statutory consultees with a concern for the natural environment, who felt that any approach to open space policy ought also to consider the wider issues of biodiversity, ecology and habitat and the access to natural spaces available to the general public.

*Community Strategy: Stevenage 2021, Our Town Our Future*

- 1.1.8 The community strategy is the five year plan for SoStevenage. It outlines the partnership's vision and how they are working to improve Stevenage and contribute to the development of the town. The community strategy sets out a long-term vision of how they want Stevenage to be, as well as short term goals to achieve it which are a shared responsibility between SoStevenage and residents. The strategy draws from consultation and discussion with a wide range of Stevenage people and organisations. The third Community Strategy was published in 2013.

- 1.1.9 The second Community Strategy (2007) demonstrated that Stevenage residents valued open spaces and were proud of them as a factor in making Stevenage a good place to live. Whilst

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<sup>9</sup> 'Option c' constituted the most comprehensive protection for the town's open space; carrying forward existing open space designations, designating two 'green lungs', protecting allotments and protection for smaller elements of open space.

the third Community Strategy is a shorter document, with less detail about the consultations, it acknowledges that:

- people value the green spaces and parks in the town (pg.4)
- there is a wide variety of green spaces in the town and resources can be targeted to support their use (pg.14)
- people need to be encouraged to use their spaces more, especially in respect of safety (pg.15)
- many people would like to volunteer (pg.15).

1.1.10 Ensuring clean and green spaces remains a priority of the Strategy. It emphasises the success in achieving two Green Flag awards for Stevenage parks, and seeks to encourage more involvement in parks and gardens, especially through 'Friends' schemes.

*Stevenage Corporate Plan, 2013-2018*

1.1.11 The Stevenage Corporate Plan has developed a vision for the town, which includes recognition of the role and purpose of open spaces within the town. The Plan has developed these principles having,  
*"looked at local issues, data and statistics and ... listened to what residents have told us is important to them"*. Page 8 sets out some of the ways that the Council has collected the ideas and views of residents.

1.1.12 It contains a clear recognition of the value placed upon open space by the residents and visitors to the town:  
*"Our aim is for Stevenage's residents to have decent homes, employment, feel safe, and have access to clean and green spaces"* (pg. 5).

1.1.13 The plan recognises that the original ambition of the new town was to provide a self-contained and independent town with easy access to many services and abundant green spaces:  
*"Green space is important as it contributes to residents' health and wellbeing, enhances feelings of social safety and creates a sense of place and identity in the town. When Stevenage New Town was developed it was carefully designed and planned to ensure communities had access to open green spaces to improve quality of life"* (pg. 14).

1.1.14 The Council sets out commitments within the Corporate Plan with respect to open spaces:  
***"What we will do:***

- *Ensure green spaces in new developments;*
- *Maintain our clean streets and green spaces"* (pg. 14).

*Stevenage Green Space Strategy*

1.1.15 The Borough Council published a Green Space Strategy in 2010, drawing heavily on the PMP Study and the work being undertaken at the time on the Borough's Core Strategy<sup>10</sup>. Work on the Green Space Strategy included consultations with interest groups (such as Sport Stevenage and the Stevenage Play Action Network) and stakeholders (such as the County Council and

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<sup>10</sup> The Core Strategy was ultimately found unsound, and withdrawn, in 2012.

Groundwork). It also drew on the Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Study, conservation area appraisals and landscape sensitivity studies, amongst other things.

1.1.16 This process determined a series of key issues for green spaces and green infrastructure, including:

- protecting green spaces from development;
- providing clean, green and attractive green spaces;
- improving provision for children and young people;
- a perceived shortfall in some sports facilities;
- meeting demand for allotments and green infrastructure from new development;
- promoting healthy lifestyles to combat deprivation, and
- protecting green spaces with a historic or cultural connection.

1.1.17 Unsurprisingly, these issues resonate with the findings of the PMP work and the consultations that have taken place on the quality of life in Stevenage before and after the strategy.

*Stevenage Residents' Survey, 2009 (published 2010)*

1.1.18 Stevenage Borough Council commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to conduct a residents' survey in 2009. This followed similar surveys carried out in 2005 and 2007, and the collection and submission of statistics to the 2008 Place Survey as part of the Labour Government's short-lived National Indicators regime. In respect of open space, the Residents Survey has some interesting findings:

- there is a very high proportion of satisfaction with Stevenage as a place to live (85%), which is comparable with other surveys (para 3.1). Trends indicate that satisfaction is increasing (para 3.3);
- the main reason given for having pride in Stevenage is 'parks and open spaces' (58%) with the environment (31%) fourth. These reasons were consistent with earlier surveys (para 3.6);
- 'parks and open spaces' were ranked as being the easiest local service to access (para 4.1);
- three out of ten respondents thought parks and open spaces had got better in the preceding three years (para 4.4) with 83% of people being satisfied with parks and open spaces (para 4.8).

*Revaluation of the original PMP survey, 2006*

1.1.19 The original PMP work conducted a number of user assessments in coming to their conclusions and recommendations. These were:

- a household survey, distributed to 5000 households across the Borough but equally across the six neighbourhood areas, resulting in 966 returns;
- an internet survey with schools;
- four drop-in sessions;
- internal consultations with Council officers, and
- consultations with external agencies.

1.1.20 The consultations informed the strategy and fed into it to help understand:

- the key issues and problems facing different Council departments and agencies;
- the needs and requirements of local residents
- the attitudes and expectations for open space within the Borough;
- the positive and negative aspects about existing provision, and
- existing strategic provision.

*Main findings: Quantity*

- 1.1.21 On the whole, respondents thought provision of open spaces across all types was sufficient, except in the case of provision for children and young people. This was consistent across all user assessment types (PMP para 4.7-4.11, 4.16).
- 1.1.22 Within children's play areas, not only was there thought to be deficiency in provision, there was also felt to be deficiency in equipment (PMP para 4.16)
- 1.1.23 Some respondents noted that the provision of parks was compromised because many parks are dominated by sports pitches (PMP para 4.12).
- 1.1.24 Overall, PMP concluded that the perception was that open space provision – except for children and young people – was about right (PMP para 4.18).

*Main findings: Quality*

- 1.1.25 Respondents were split fairly equally on whether the main problems attributed to open spaces – litter vandalism, dog fouling and anti-social behaviour - were major or minor issues, leading PMP to conclude that problems might be site specific rather than clustered (PMP para 4.19-4.20).
- 1.1.26 People were satisfied with structural elements of open spaces – paths, planted areas and boundaries – but less satisfied with services provided, such as toilets, bins and seats (PMP, para 4.22-4.23).
- 1.1.27 Litter, dog fouling and vandalism were also cited by external agencies. However, overall, these were attributed to misuse and anti-social behaviour rather than poor management and maintenance (PMP, para 4.26-4.28).
- 1.1.28 Overall, whilst provision might be adequate, there should be a greater emphasis on quality (PMP, para 4.30).

*Main findings: Accessibility*

- 1.1.29 There were high levels of satisfaction with accessibility to open space, both in terms of distance and time taken (PMP, para 4.31-4.32).
- 1.1.30 Fairlands Valley Park is a key, centrally located park with good accessibility, although bus services to the park were criticised (PMP, para 4.34-4.35)

- 1.1.31 Although mentioned by a minority, the perceived lack of signage and information appeared to be an issue for some respondents (PMP, para 4.33).

*Main findings: Usage*

- 1.1.32 Regular daily and weekly use of all open space is high in Stevenage, and higher than in other authorities. This is both recorded and perceived. Parks and gardens are most frequently used, allotments the least. People most frequently use open space for fresh air, to walk and to exercise (PMP, para 4.37-4.42).
- 1.1.33 External agencies felt that the cycle network was well used and would benefit from plugging gaps in provision (PMP, para 4.43).
- 1.1.34 Fairlands Valley Park was particularly well used, and benefits from a diversity of facilities (PMP, para 4.45).
- 1.1.35 It was considered that fear of anti-social behaviour was greater than the problem itself, though who considered this is not stated (PMP, para 4.46).

*PMPs Conclusions (PMP, para 4.57-4.60):*

- 1.1.36 Overall provision of open space is sufficient with some potential deficiencies in children's play facilities (especially older children). This is a factor associated with the new town, which has also allowed for good accessibility to open spaces.
- 1.1.37 There is a concern about protecting it from development (this was particularly true of Forster Country, which warranted special mention; PMP, para 4.14). Concerns also exist about litter, vandalism, tipping, dog fouling and anti-social behaviour.



### **New consultations undertaken**

- 1.1.38 The Open Space Review has been undertaken in parallel with a Sports Facility Study<sup>11</sup>, which has considered the provision of outdoor and indoor sports provision in Stevenage – which includes pitches and hard courts – and a review of allotment provision<sup>12</sup>.
- 1.1.39 A survey was prepared to canvas opinion with individuals about the level of provision of sports pitches and open spaces. This was placed on the Borough Council's website for three months (February to April 2014) and promoted via newsletters, the press and direct email contact, and distributed to sports clubs and individuals associated with sport and sports provision in Stevenage. Over 400 responses were received from individuals with further responses received from clubs and organisations. A number of questionnaires were also provided to students, who fed back specifically on sports facilities, but who also made comments on informal provision for walking, cycling and jogging within the borough's open spaces.
- 1.1.40 From the perspective of open space and green infrastructure (as opposed to sport), the survey was made available to a number of groups with an interest in green infrastructure and open space at a national, regional or local level. These are listed at Appendix B. Hard copies of the survey were supplied to the Council's Green Space Volunteers, who were also encouraged to distribute these and electronic versions amongst their own contacts.
- 1.1.41 Consultations with Council officers have been ongoing as part of the review and are not recorded here.

### **Analysis of responses: Organisations**

- 1.1.42 Five organisations responded (one only to say they had no comments). Whilst this is a low number, they were the key organisations with a responsibility towards the natural environment and open spaces; the CPRE, the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Environment Agency. Members of the Friends of Forster Country responded on an individual basis, but offered no commentary as a group.
- 1.1.43 Each organisation had a specific take on the role of green infrastructure / open space and the way it interacted with their objectives. The Environment Agency related it particularly to the presence of river corridors within and close to the boundary of the borough, whilst the CPRE were concerned for the balance of pressures on land within Stevenage and sought an analysis of 'urban fringe' land beyond the urban area. The HMWT emphasised the success of the Green Space Volunteer programme in relation to projects that they have been involved with in the town. The multi-functionality of green infrastructure – particularly natural open space – was a key theme, along with the value placed upon it by different users (including wildlife). Broadening out the scope of the work beyond the typologies defined was also a recurrent theme. Strategic measures of the success of green space were mentioned consistently; this included the ANGSt, the BAP and Hertfordshire's Strategic GI Study.

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<sup>11</sup> Conducted by Nortoft, delivered September 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Conducted by Stevenage Borough Council, Parks and Gardens, May 2014.

1.1.44 The comments received will be observed and considered in the production of the review. The main points raised by each organisation are summarised at Appendix B.

#### **Analysis of responses: Individuals**

1.1.45 There were 425 responses received to the survey from individuals, although because some of the questions were not compulsory, the response rate for some questions is below that. It is considered that this represents a reasonable pool for gauging trends and opinions about the provision of open space across the town.

1.1.46 Comparisons are made with the findings of 2006 where relevant.

#### *Those responding*

1.1.47 Of the respondents, 407 lived and / or worked in Stevenage. Around 320 responses gave some personal information<sup>13</sup> revealing that, of those:

- 194 (60%) were female;
- 143 were between 25 and 45 (44.2%), 100 between 46 and 60 (31%) and 65 over 60 (20.1%);
- 145 considered their work as 'professional' (45.5%) and 57 (17.9%) were retired;
- 303 described their ethnicity as 'white' (93.5%).

1.1.48 These responses should be considered in the light of the demographic profile of those responding, as there is likely to be an under-representation of the facilities used by younger people, as the survey was skewed to those in their middle and older years.

#### *Use of open spaces*

1.1.49 People were asked which types of open space they used based on the typologies defined in the open space review (formal parks and gardens<sup>14</sup>, other parks<sup>15</sup>, natural green spaces, amenity green spaces and children's playgrounds). There were 396 responses to this question, which also divided choices between various sports facilities, as well as open space provision. This question did not consider frequency of use.

1.1.50 Over 75% of respondents use the formal parks and gardens, with over 40% using each of the other parks (42.4%) and natural green spaces (48.7%). Over a third – 133 respondents (33.6%) – use children's playgrounds. The lowest response rate was for amenity green space, with only 85 people using these (21.5%), though this seems inconsistent with the frequency information in the next paragraph. The rate of usage for formal parks and gardens and natural green spaces is higher than any of the rates for sports facilities, with swimming and cycling being the most popular of these (42.2% and 39.1% respectively).

#### *Frequency of use*

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<sup>13</sup> Personal information did not have to be given to complete the survey, but those wishing to enter the associated prize draw did.

<sup>14</sup> 'Formal parks and gardens' were specifically named as Fairlands Valley Park, Town Centre Gardens, Millennium Gardens and the Bowling Green.

<sup>15</sup> 'Other parks and gardens' was a splinter category designed to allow people to categorise those areas thought of, or referred to, as parks but not defined as such within the open space review. They usually accommodate multiple playing pitches with some ancillary play facilities or have a complementary or secondary use as amenity space

1.1.51 Despite the lukewarm response to the use of amenity spaces demonstrated above, they have the highest number and proportion of people using them on a daily basis (42 of 254 respondents, 16.5%). The formal parks and gardens are used well on a weekly basis, as are the children's playgrounds. However, the dominant response for all but the formal parks and gardens is an occasional usage (i.e. less than monthly).

1.1.52 Findings on usage are broadly similar between 2006 and 2014, with parks and gardens most frequently used on a weekly basis (36% vs. 37% in 2006) and natural and semi-natural spaces second (27% vs. 32% in 2006). However, of 318 people responding, 312 said that they used the parks and gardens (98.1%). Whilst much of the use is occasional, the percentages were above 75% for all typologies.

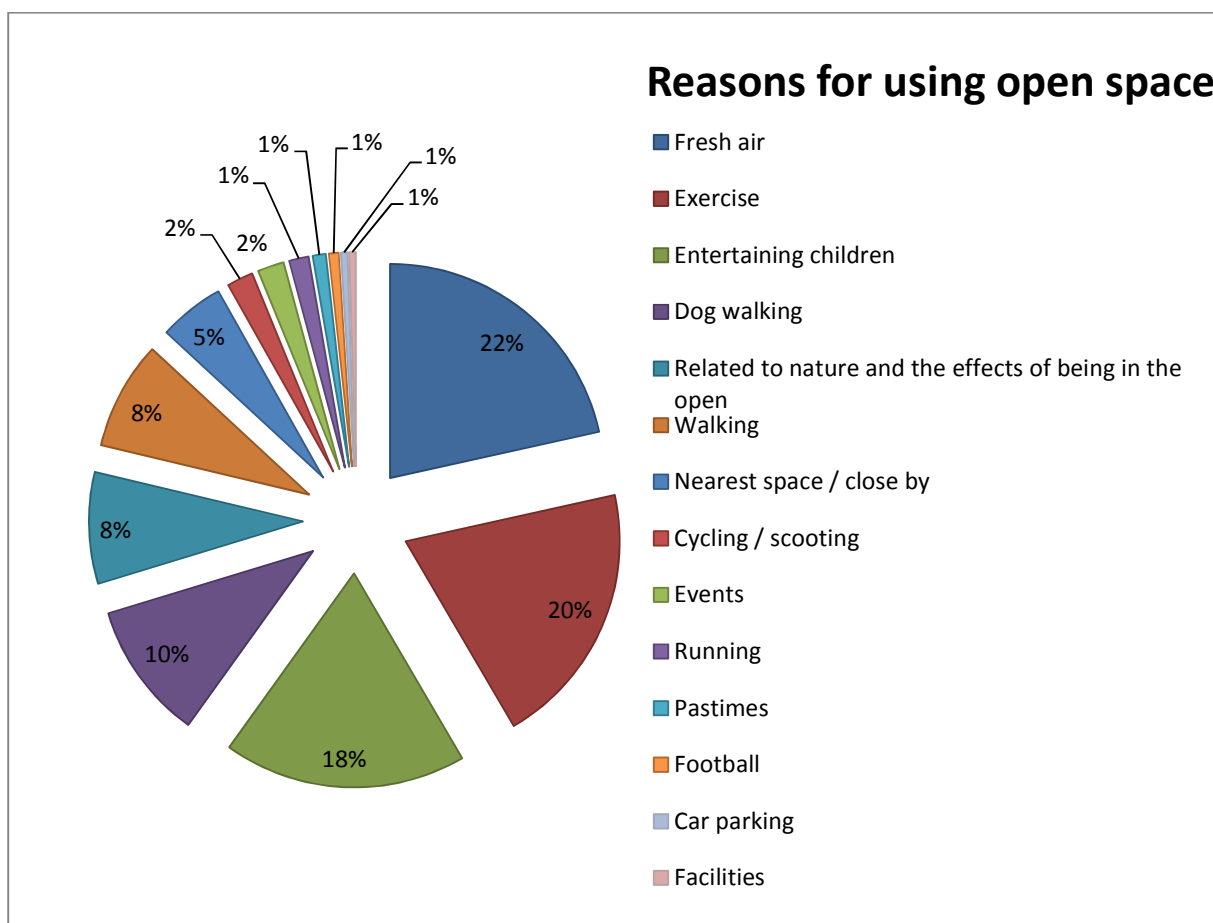
**Table 2: Number of respondees using open space by typology (2014 surveys)**

**How often have you used each of the following types of open spaces, in Stevenage, in the last 12 months? (Please leave blank if you do not use)**

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Occasionally	Response Count
Formal parks and gardens (Fairlands Valley Park, Town Centre Gardens, Millennium Gardens and Bowling Green)	28	111	77	96	312
Other parks and gardens	23	73	70	121	287
Natural green spaces (e.g. meadows and woodlands)	35	82	78	91	286
Amenity green spaces (e.g. grass areas in housing areas)	42	54	30	128	254
Children's playgrounds	13	61	45	121	240
			<i>answered question</i>		<b>318</b>

1.1.53 When asked about their physical activity, the most important activity was walking and running (107 people ranked this as number one of 344 responding), with walking/running and cycling having the highest levels of response overall (241 and 217 responses respectively) and 157 people of 268 responding (76.2%) said that they engaged in walking or rambling as a means of physical activity every week (the next highest was cycling with 65). This tallies with the findings in 2006, where walking, fresh air and exercise were the top responses.

1.1.54 There were 292 people who made comments about the reason they visit a particular named space, which resulted in over 400 individual reasons. Again, fresh air and exercise came out top, with entertaining children (or grandchildren) third. There were a high proportion of people who gained some emotional connection or satisfaction from being in the countryside or natural environment, or from being close to nature.



1.1.55 When asked about the relative importance of the types of open space, the formal parks and gardens were ranked top most often (150 times from 312 responses). The natural green spaces were ranked top 87 times. Both categories were also ranked number 2 over 60 times each. The other parks and gardens clearly have a complementary role to the dominant types, and this is demonstrated in the high ranking at number 4 of the amenity green spaces; they were ranked fourth 113 times (i.e. as amenity spaces are consistently ranked fourth, the other parks are likely to be the third most popular spaces). Children's play space were ranked bottom more than any other type (123 times), but this is more likely to reflect the specific nature of the space than any inherent popularity (i.e. these spaces are unlikely to appeal to those without young children).

#### *Provision of open space*

1.1.56 Most respondents are overwhelmingly content with the amount of open space provided within each category, with this feeling strongest where formal parks and other parks are concerned. Those who thought there was too much open space were virtually insignificant, but around 3 in 10 people felt that there was too little provision of natural green spaces, amenity green spaces and children's play space.

1.1.57 In 2006, there was concern that there was insufficient provision for children and young people, with only 37% stating that they felt it was adequate – over half were concerned that

there was not enough. In 2014, this has improved to 49% feeling that provision is about right and 28% feeling there was too little. A similar improvement in perception has occurred with amenity green space; although the proportion of those thinking provision is adequate has remained the same, those believing there is too little provision has dropped from 38% to 32%.

- 1.1.58 There is no indication that people think that sports pitches dominate some open spaces, which was a concern in 2006.

#### *Quality of open spaces*

- 1.1.59 In discussing their favourite spaces, no space emerged as having specific problems repeated by more than one respondent, though as Fairlands Valley Park was so dominant, many of the comments will be attributable to it.

- 1.1.60 On the whole, when asked about specific problems, the 279 respondents expressing an opinion felt that any problems that did exist were minor.

**Table 3: Problems experienced in open spaces (2014)**

Do you experience any of the following problems at [your named location]? (Please select all that apply)

	Significant problem	Minor problem	Response Count
Vandalism and graffiti	28	159	187
Litter / tipping	74	156	230
Anti-social behaviour	30	135	165
Dog fouling	89	146	235
Noise	11	115	126
Smells	6	110	116
Maintenance	28	114	142
	<b>answered question</b>		<b>279</b>

- 1.1.61 Dog fouling and litter were considered to be the main problems affecting open spaces. All of the problems listed appeared to be considered minor problems.

- 1.1.62 The numbers within the 'minor problem' column raise some concerns, as they are generally high. Vandalism / graffiti and litter / tipping top the list of minor concerns, with dog fouling third. There may be concerns with these minor problems across the board, but they may also be high because the questionnaire listed these matters to be ticked rather than asking respondents to think about the minor problems that did actually exist and record them. For instance, none of the comments expanded on what type of smells are causing minor issues within the spaces they visit, or how intrusive the noises are and from what source they emanate. Equally, there will be no objective measure of these things – the comments are therefore a valuable expansion of these concerns and can be used to pinpoint where there are patterns of concern.

- 1.1.63 Within the comments for this question, a number of people said that none of these items were a problem at all, or accepted that problems were an inevitable result of them being open

to the public (which is fine so long as the problems don't compromise general enjoyment and maintenance is trusted and evident).

- 1.1.64 Also within the comments, there were common themes around dogs; most notably, this related to the control of dogs and dogs running free, which clearly causes some concern. Evidently, dog walking is a popular activity in open spaces. However, dog mess is a recurrent issue with both owners and non-owners complaining that some owners don't pick up; dog walkers state that some spaces are not suitable for dog walking and sometimes comment on a lack of dog bins; some users of open space are deterred from using some parks because of a fear of dogs.

#### *Access to open space*

- 1.1.65 Opinions about the accessibility of open spaces varied dependent on its function. With the larger, more formal spaces – formal parks, other parks and natural green spaces – it was felt to be acceptable to travel up to 15 minutes to reach them, and the use of the car or bike to get there was also acceptable (though walking to these spaces was still the dominant preferred form). It's not clear how the longer time and the different forms of transport correlate – it could be that a fifteen minute walk and a five minute drive may be acceptable, but a fifteen minute drive to these spaces could be unacceptable. However, the split between the car and walking to the formal parks and gardens is close; 46.5% of those responding (140 people) walk, and 40.5% (122 people) drive.
- 1.1.66 With amenity green spaces and children's play spaces, there was a clear dominance of walking as a means of getting there (almost 90% of respondees in both cases) and a five minute timescale (though the proportion of five minute and ten minute journey in the case of children's playgrounds was much closer).
- 1.1.67 With all open spaces, access by public transport hardly warranted a mention, but the importance of this mode to those that do use it cannot be measured from the survey.
- 1.1.68 In respect of the named space that respondees visited most often, 64% of people walked and 36% of people used a car (though there was some element of cross over with some people choosing two modes in answer to this question). On the whole, people travel for less than 20 minutes to get to their most frequently visited open space.

#### *Named spaces*

- 1.1.69 When asked to name the space they use most often, Fairlands Valley Park is totally dominant with 141 responses (48.1% of those received). Of the other formal parks and gardens, Town Centre Gardens is mentioned 21 times, and the Bowling Green just once. Millennium Gardens isn't mentioned at all. Other dominant places are Forster Country, Shephalbury Park, Hampson Park, Great Ashby Park (which is in the adjoining district), St. Nicholas Park, Monks Wood and common land around Symonds Green and Fishers Green.

1.1.70 There is a dominance amongst the responses of a use of these spaces for light exercise, getting fresh air and access to open areas, for dog walking, relaxation and entertainment for children. However, there are one or two less run of the mill responses that warrant comment:

- Town Centre Gardens is often mentioned in relation to a shopping or work related trip as a place to come to for a break or moment's relaxation;
- Forster Country represents the easiest access to open countryside within the town, with one respondent citing the 'uplifting psychological effect';
- a mobility scooter user cited Fairlands Valley Park as being easy to use;
- Fairlands Valley was the most frequent use for one respondent simply because it was the location for parking for Stevenage FC home games;
- photography features as a pastime within the open spaces on a number of occasions.

1.1.71 Whilst many people said that there was open space closer to them that they used less frequently, only 63 named one (and fewer said why they didn't use it). However, those stating both a place and a reason for not using that space fell broadly into groups:

- the space is not suitable for their use (not suitable for dog walking or exercise, or aimed at a different group of people e.g. children);
- the space is not as attractive as their more frequently visited space (for various reasons: general maintenance, problems such as dog mess / litter, or too busy or too many teenagers);
- the space lacks activities or facilities;
- the space has anti-social behaviour associated with it (whether observed or perceived); e.g. vandalism, noise, free-running dogs;
- personal choice.

#### *General comments*

1.1.72 The questionnaire had a free comments section at the end of the survey which offered a space for some extra comments where they hadn't been covered by the questions. Comments were mixed and broad, relating often to the good quality of spaces, but conversely to the poor quality of them; some particular issues and hotspots were raised; comments were made in generality and specifically in respect of particular areas. The key points follow:

- fears about open spaces being lost to housing and the consequential urbanisation of the town; brownfield sites should be considered first;
- new developments lack open space, meaning people have to travel further to get to it;
- a growing town / population needs a growing and improving stock of open spaces;
- open space is integral to the historic development of the town and essential in its character and attractiveness;
- areas of open space – of any size – can be good for general well-being for individuals and for the community;
- the value of small areas of open space within housing areas is often overlooked, especially for children wanting to play safely close to their homes, or less mobile people looking for green space in their locality;
- open spaces need to cater for children, both young and teenage, the latter where they are not posing a risk to pedestrians;

- children need variety in play; Fairlands is excellent, but local play areas suffer by comparison
- children's play equipment is in need of upgrading in some areas;
- the ecological role of open spaces should be recognised;
- meadow flowers / areas or wild growth can look scruffy and unkempt;
- small areas of open space should be sold to nearby homeowners to look after and maintain
- litter and dog mess is a recurring theme – solutions such as more bins, more regular litter picks and dog free areas recur; one comment suggested that a dog park should be established for dog owners;
- Forster Country should be (variously) acknowledged, protected and access improved;
- litter is associated with young people and spectators at sporting events / matches;
- there were several comments on the good quality and maintenance of open spaces generally (more in number than those relating to poor maintenance and quality); there's a desire to see this maintenance continued so parents don't have to worry about children's safety;
- however, also contrary comments that open spaces, woodlands and planted areas are often neglected and have been progressively pinched and squeezed so as to lose the original vision of a green place;
- some parks need better facilities – toilets, park managers and outdoor gym equipment;
- concern over the care and treatment of common areas of land and the SAM at Six Hills (which is also a common).

#### *Running and Jogging in parks*

1.1.73 One of the strong indicators coming out of the consultation process relevant for both the open space review and the Sports Facility Study is the popularity of running and jogging as a pastime. This falls a little bit between the two studies – the vast majority of this pastime takes place informally away from specific facilities. This makes it hard to assess statistically and to plan for. It does however indicate that the quality and management of open spaces generally is important to facilitate this pastime and encourage people to get out and be healthy. There seems to be a reliance upon the bigger open spaces for running routes, particularly Fairlands Valley Park, but local runners may also chose routes based upon their own vicinity and any reduction in quality or quantity of local spaces may also have an impact on the amount of running and jogging undertaken.

1.1.74 Cycling is also mentioned frequently, but the presence of an extensive segregated cycle network makes the focus of any investment more obvious.

#### *Student responses*

1.1.75 The student survey was set up as part of the Sports Facility Study as a response to the lack of comments coming through the main survey. There were 60 responses overall, mainly from the Barclay School and the Youth Council, and they were principally within the 12-15 age range, with a moderate skew in favour of boys.



1.1.76 The questions asked related to sports activities, but amongst the most popular sports activities outside of school were walking, cycling and running, and so the quality of open spaces within the town to enable these things remains important. There was not considered to be a shortage of these opportunities, although the students did point to a lack of skate parks and MUGAs despite these not being cited as one of the five most important activities (perhaps because of the shortage?). Within the free comments section, however, the provision of a new/improved skate or bike park was one of the issues that come up several times.

*Some key thoughts*

- Formal parks and gardens are well used and well thought of. This relates most particularly to Fairlands Valley Park and Town Gardens, both of which seem highly regarded and valued and well used;
- the role of amenity green spaces are downplayed, but there is evidence to suggest that people understand their function and role within the structure of the town, that they should be available and accessible as local spaces. It may be that they're presence is taken for granted, as there is a fear for their loss to other uses;
- the dominant activity within parks and open spaces is light exercise, walking and relaxation;
- on the whole, people consider that there is about the right amount of open space provision, with a quiet concern that there could be more amenity green space, children's play space and natural green space (although this is less evident than in 2006);
- people are prepared to travel longer and further for open spaces of high value. Conversely, spaces that are intended to provide local amenity – such as children's play areas and small open areas – should be accessible on foot over short distances;
- public transport does not feature as an important means of getting to and from open spaces;
- when thinking about spaces they use, people tend to think about the major parks and open spaces, particularly Fairlands Valley Park;
- people are prepared to use open spaces further from their place of residence if it offers a better experience or suits their needs better. People often have reasons for travelling further afield which are not necessarily down to the quality of the space;
- smaller sites suffer by comparison to the larger sites;
- local sites may have issues with litter, dog fouling, safety, vandalism or other anti-social behaviour, but they do seem to be localised issues rather than embedded throughout all sites. Perceptions are varied, but more people consider open spaces to be well maintained and valuable than consider them to be of poor quality;
- young people do use spaces outside of school for physical activities including running, cycling and walking, which points towards a need to maintain open spaces within the town to accommodate this. The need for a skate / bike park is raised several times.

## 1.2 Stage 2: Auditing Local Provision

### In this section:

- *definition of open space typologies;*
- *outline of the desk based review of open spaces and the follow-up site visits and audit;*
- *comparison of the position in respect of sites between 2006 and 2014.*

### Open space typologies

- 1.2.1 There are five main types of open space that are the subject of the review. They are defined below.

#### *Amenity green space*

- 1.2.2 Amenity green space is the most numerous of all the types of open space. It is typically formed of smaller pieces of open land – generally under one hectare – ordinarily laid down to (mown) grass. Their extent tends to be defined by the uses around them, and they have no specific entrance point. They are available for spontaneous and informal use, and they will ordinarily be maintained in some way by the local authority. They are almost exclusively located within residential areas; they may be planned as specific spaces for informal recreation, or ‘left over’ spaces that become used because they’re there. They often have no specific function, and may or may not have trees and/or bushes which may or may not show signs of maintenance themselves. Dependent on the combinations of equipment, maintenance, size and functionality (and hence attractiveness), these spaces may simply offer a visual or structural function.

- 1.2.3 Spaces under 0.05ha, and/or not practical for informal recreation of any kind (roundabouts, road verges, banking to footpaths and cycleways) have generally been excluded from this category, and the survey as a whole.

#### *Children’s play space / Children and young people*

- 1.2.4 Within the context of this study, site assessments have borne in mind that children and young people might play in any accessible public space. Children’s play space, for the purposes of this study however, constitutes unsupervised, equipped play space. Notwithstanding the definitions of Local Areas for Play (LAP), Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP) and Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP) that are defined for the purposes of new housing development, this category has been treated broadly; if equipment for children’s play exists on site, it falls into this category. It also includes multi-use games areas where they’re not picked up by the sports facility study.
- 1.2.5 Sites within Stevenage vary markedly as a result of a recent rationalisation programme which has reduced the number of play areas, but increased the quality of remaining ones. This means that some spaces are very well equipped with modern, safe and varied play opportunities, whilst others – particularly where equipment has still to be removed – look rather forlorn. This category does not include sites where the equipment has gone but the soft floorings associated with equipment remain. The list of sites also differs from the list of

children's play areas on the Council's website<sup>16</sup> because it also includes privately provided play areas / spaces not maintained by the Council.

#### *Cemeteries*

- 1.2.6 Stevenage has two ancient churches – at Shephall and St. Nicholas – and both have associated burial grounds. In addition to these two sites, the principal municipal burial land at Almonds Drive and Weston Road are included within this category. The benefit that these spaces have for recreation has to be acknowledged, though their specific function within the town and the requirement to ensure that there is specific allocated space for the needs of the population means there were no standards explicitly set for this category.

#### *Natural and semi-natural open space*

- 1.2.7 For the purposes of this study, natural and semi-natural space constitutes open space that is not actively managed as amenity space and tends towards wilder land. It will include woodlands, grasslands, water meadow, commons, informal copses and, often, buffer land to roads and railways. Some of this land will be managed for informal recreation, and may be provided with bins, lighting, information, trails and other facilities of this sort. Some will be private and offer no public access at all. Many will be protected for their local nature interest.
- 1.2.8 In most cases, natural and semi-natural spaces will differ from amenity green space by:
- being closer to a 'natural' state, offering habitat and biodiversity not possible in amenity green spaces and by being less planned and less regular;
  - offering a different type of recreation focussed on a closeness to nature;
  - offering a greater variety of flora and fauna against the type generally offered by amenity green space;
  - being less reliant on having their success as an open space measured by the level of human recreation taking place.

#### *Parks and Gardens*

- 1.2.9 Within the PMP Study, Stevenage only had four sites attributed to the 'parks and gardens' category. These were the formal spaces at the Bowling Green and Millennium Gardens (Old Town), Town Centre Gardens and Fairlands Valley Park. The latter two have a Green Flag award for their facilities. Facilities within these parks – such as children's play areas and multi-use games areas – have largely been attributed separately to the children and young people category.
- 1.2.10 Stevenage has a number of spaces that go by the name '...Park', but the primary function in all these cases – as attributed by the PMP work – is outdoor sport. The function of these spaces is being considered through the Sports Facility Study, although the site visits have demonstrated that there is significant activity on these sites when formal sport is not taking place, and residents' surveys have suggested that local people don't think of their local 'park' as being solely provided for pitch-based recreation.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces/25669/>

### *Other typologies*

- 1.2.11 Outdoor sports pitches and allotments make up the remaining sites, contributing to the 600+ across the borough. *Outdoor sports pitches* are primarily those sites used for formal games (principally football, rugby and cricket) and include private sports clubs, school playing fields and municipal playing pitches. *Allotments* are Council owned and managed areas of land where Stevenage residents are able to rent space for growing their own produce.
- 1.2.12 PMP also included green corridors in their study. These long strips of green space are excluded from consideration within the main study and dealt with specifically in a section in Part Two.
- 1.2.13 At the outset, there was a general assumption that these typologies would not be purposely surveyed as part of the review, though as the work developed this approach was kept under review.

### **Desk based review**

- 1.2.14 The starting point for the study was a desk based review of the dataset. The PMP work contained well over 600 sites. The following general rules were applied in coming to them afresh:
- all sites, with the exception of children's play areas, are subject to minimum site size threshold of 0.05 hectares (500m<sup>2</sup>), which also removes the inconsistency where such sites were initially omitted;
  - sites developed / partially developed<sup>17</sup> since the PMP study were removed or amended;
  - amenity green space should serve some recreational purpose, or have the potential to do so;
  - land which is (largely) highway verge / SLOAP etc.<sup>18</sup> should be removed, though this is not to say it does not have some, alternate, structural value. This also ensures 'like for like' comparison between (e.g.) New Town areas with large highway verges / cycle routes and newer developments;
  - a general assumption that highway verge is the first 5m from edge of the road where it's not clearly defined (e.g. not behind a footpath or fence etc.) or shown on GIS;
  - narrow strips of linear green space between opposing front elevations and front gardens are generally excluded; this is particularly relevant for areas where dwellings are arranged in a 'Radburn' layout;
  - new sites added / existing boundaries amended to reflect known or observable changes (e.g. changes of typology, addition / removal of facilities equipment etc.);
  - new sites which meet general criteria, but were excluded from PMP study, added.
- 1.2.15 Applying these rules, alongside the correction of some inconsistencies with the original dataset (duplications, errors in measurement) led to the deletion of around 185 sites primarily on account of size or the removal of play equipment (Appendix C), and queries arising on 40

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<sup>17</sup> Only where the remaining space fell beneath the 0.05ha threshold.

<sup>18</sup> Also includes roundabouts, banking to footpaths and cycleways.

sites (Appendix D). Also at this stage, 47 were added as new sites with a further seven were added during the site survey stage, making 54 new sites found overall (Appendix E).

- 1.2.16 Completion of the desk based analysis provided a revised dataset which provided the basis to start physically re-visiting sites to update the previous analysis.

#### **Revisiting open spaces**

- 1.2.17 Visiting all sites is a significant undertaking and, with the Stage 1 assessment of needs indicating that the satisfaction levels with open space was being maintained or improved, the likelihood was that sites are in general retaining their level of quality, amenity and accessibility in the perception of Stevenage's population. A method needed to be established to revisit the assessments made on those sites without necessarily visiting all sites.
- 1.2.18 Prior to *any* site visits taking place, an evaluation was undertaken – according to type and geography – to determine the ideal range of existing sites that should be visited to get a representative sample among those in the review. Initial thoughts provided for a 10% sample across open space types and neighbourhood areas (except for cemeteries and parks which, because of the low numbers involved, should be visited in their entirety), and hence a target was established as follows:
- amenity green space – Broadwater, Old Stevenage, St. Nicholas (5 from each); Chells and Bedwell (4 from each); Shephall (3) – 26 in total
  - cemeteries – all three
  - children's play areas – one from each neighbourhood area – 6 in total
  - natural and semi-natural - Old Stevenage and Shephall (2 from each); Bedwell, Broadwater, Chells (1 from each) – 7 in total
  - parks and gardens – all four
- 1.2.19 This made for a total of 46 sites overall.
- 1.2.20 Alternatives to this approach were considered; for instance, one could visit the large(r) sites – say the 60 sites that over a hectare – but an analysis of these sites suggests an over emphasis on the natural and semi natural category (59% of this category are over a hectare; 62% of sites over a hectare are natural and semi-natural).
- 1.2.21 Ultimately, it was felt that the broad spread of type and geographic location described above, visited at random, offered the best way forward. This would test the assumption about general improvement in parks established from Stage 1, and any doubt in it could then be addressed after the initial site visits.
- 1.2.22 There were, therefore, three main areas of survey:
- existing sites with queries (Appendix D);
  - new sites (Appendix E);
  - other existing sites (the notional 46 discussed above).

1.2.23 These were supplemented by site visits undertaken through 2012 and 2013 by the Environmental Performance and Development Manager<sup>19</sup>, who used the PMP work to reassess the value of some green spaces when they were the subject of development queries.

*Existing sites with queries*

1.2.24 The queries at 40 existing locations required site visits. The main reasons for visiting these sites were to check:

- the presence of play equipment in light of the rationalisation and improvement of sites;
- the extent of boundaries or different elements of provision;
- changes in open space category;
- whether, following the desktop study, some sites should be deleted.

1.2.25 Visiting these sites to resolve the queries obviously gave the opportunity to reassess the current quality, accessibility and use against the PMP study.

*New sites*

1.2.26 There were 54 sites added to the portfolio of open spaces as a result of the review. These were added through various means, including:

- omissions from the previous work (e.g. through information from colleagues and others, or studying aerial photos);
- new provision as a result of development taking place and open space being provided within it, and
- during the course of site surveys.

1.2.27 All of these new sites were assessed using the same criteria applied to those sites under review. During the course of the site visits, four were removed from further consideration.

*Other existing sites*

1.2.28 Sites were not specifically identified for survey. Instead, broad areas of the town with clusters of new and query sites were visited at the same time and the walking route between these sites was used to visit other sites as they were passed. Walking routes were not pre-determined.

1.2.29 At the end of the survey period, around 140 existing sites had been visited representing a good spread across types and locations. This was well beyond the initial desire to visit 46, and was felt to be an adequate and representative sample, not least because the majority of sites were showing maintenance of, or improvement in, their 2006 condition.

1.2.30 The spread of sites and typologies (including new sites) was as follows:

**Table 4: Distribution of surveyed sites by type and location**

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<sup>19</sup> The post of Environmental Performance and Development Manager was formerly known as the Green Spaces Policy and Development Manager until a review in 2014.

	Bedwell	Broad-water	Chells	Old Stevenage	Shephall	St. Nicholas	Total
Allotments	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Amenity green space	13	25	19	17	15	16	105
Cemeteries	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Children's Play	8	7	4	8	8	3	38
Natural and semi natural	7	8	1	10	10	2	38
<i>Outdoor sports</i>	1	1	0	1	4	0	7
Parks and gardens	3	0	0	1	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>195</b>

1.2.31 This sample represents almost 40% of all sites which is considered to be an adequate proportion. As discussed above, outdoor sports and allotments categories are not well represented because they are the subject of parallel studies being undertaken elsewhere.

1.2.32 The field notes of all of these surveys are set out below (Appendices F and G).

*Revisiting existing surveys: Environmental Performance and Developer Manager visits*

1.2.33 The PMP Study set out a methodology for dealing with the possible disposal or development of open spaces. The Environmental Performance and Development Manager has, in the course of their work, had cause to formally report on the status of open spaces using this methodology when necessary (and largely as a result of planning enquiries).

1.2.34 Within the period mid-2012 to early-2014, there have been 24 visits to open spaces which have resulted in a comparison with the usage and quality assessments made in 2006 (though two have been deleted from this review on the basis of size). Allowing for sports sites and deleted sites, this represents about 5% of all sites in the review. The majority of these sites fell into the amenity green space category (20) and geographically most sites were in Broadwater (8) though all neighbourhoods had at least two sites represented.

1.2.35 On the whole, observations by the Environmental Performance and Development Manager considered that the conditions on the sites had at least been maintained. In four cases, investment and rationalisation lead to the conclusion that the quality of the spaces had been, or would be, improved. For some visits, the level of usage was difficult to determine, although some visits were made out of the prime season for outdoor play.

1.2.36 On the whole, the sample would tend to suggest that the surveys carried out in 2006 remain a reasonable indicator of conditions at present.

1.2.37 Table 5, over the following pages, lists the 22 sites that remain a part of the review, summarises the comments made on the visit and indicate in the final column any change from the 2006 position. A positive change is highlighted with green shading, a negative change with red shading. It should be noted that the general trend is for the quality and access scores to remain the same or improve.

Table 5: Open Space assessments by the Environmental Performance and Development Manager (2013-2014)

Site ID	Name	Type	Neighbourhood	Comments	2014 Quality Score	2014 Access Score	2014 Usage Level
1	Ridlings Playing Fields	Outdoor sports	Shephall	Site area changed to match GIS with minor boundary amendment. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2012 that improvements in drainage at the site had improved use and quality.	good	average	high
2	Ridlings Play Area	Children's Play Area	Shephall	Environmental Performance and Development Manager in 2012 acknowledged a decrease in the quality of the site since 2006, although a scheme to improve it was in the pipeline and the site remains a listed play area for the Borough.			
3	Peartree Park	Outdoor sports	Shephall	Residential infill on western boundary. Changes to reflect 4 and 4a below. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented on an enquiry to develop a small area in 2012, remarking that the loss of this would exacerbate parking problems at a well-used site.	average	poor/ average	high
11	Leaves Spring A (SHP-1)	Amenity green space	Shephall	Site boundary changed to exclude highway verge / match GIS. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2013 that the site remains well maintained and attractive, though underused. Large number of trees remain on site	average	good	Low
99	Pankhurst Crescent B (CHL - 8)	Amenity green space	Chells	Site boundary changed to match GIS. Comments made by the Environmental Performance and Development Manager in 2013 suggest the site remains valued, used and maintained.	average	average	often
124	Flinders Close (CHL - 53&54)	Amenity green space	Chells	Site boundary changed to include adjacent areas / match GIS. Partly subject to a planning application. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2013 that the site remained poorly used and poorly maintained, with no prospect for improvement, but still guarded against disposal because of the lack of amenity green space in the area.	poor	poor	low/ insignificant
126	Cromwell Road (CHL - 1)	Amenity green space	Chells	Site boundary changed to include adjacent areas / match GIS. Part subject to a planning application for 2 houses (0.16ha). Environmental Performance and Development Manager comments in 2013 suggest that the site continued to be well maintained, valued and well used.	good	average	often



Site ID	Name	Type	Neighbourhood	Comments	2014 Quality Score	2014 Access Score	2014 Usage Level
146	Bedwell Rise	Amenity green space	Bedwell	Site boundary changed to exclude infill development. Environmental Performance and Development Manager remarked in 2013 that the site remains well maintained and well used.	good	good	often
213	Vardon Road C (PGN -50)	Amenity green space	Bedwell	Environmental Performance and Development Manager saw the site in 2013 and reported that there was no obvious use. Lack of comment on maintenance suggests this has been maintained, rather than deteriorated or improved.	average	poor	often?
255	Chapman Road A (SYM - 11)	Amenity green space	Old Stevenage	Site was assessed by the Environmental Performance and Development Manager in 2012 as 'attractive and well maintained', though it's acknowledged as being remote. Disposal site considered acceptable.	average	very poor	
268	The Chase B	Amenity green space	Broadwater	Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2012 that the space continued to be well maintained, clean and tidy.	good	good	often
274	Skipton Close A (BWR - 10)	Amenity green space	Broadwater	Site boundary changed to exclude infill development. Subject to comments from Environmental Performance and Development Manager in 2012, who noted improvements in the site since 2006.	good	average	
277	Kimbolton Crescent A (BWR-13)	Amenity green space	Broadwater	Site boundary changed to match GIS. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2012 that this is the largest amenity site south of Hertford Road and that s106 monies were to be used in 2013 for improvements to the site. The site had maintained its quality and usage from 2006 and this was likely to improve.	good?	good?	often
300	Spring Drive A (BWR-22)	Amenity green space	Broadwater	Site area changed to include removed play area. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2012 that the site has retained levels of maintenance and use seen in 2006	average	Poor	often
306	Tye End (BWR-24)	Amenity green space	Broadwater	Environmental Performance and Development Manager observed an improvement in the quality of the site on a visit in 2012. The site remains well used and valued locally.	average	poor	Often
412	Ripon Road D,E,F (STN - 32,33,34)	Amenity green space	St Nicholas	Site boundary changed to match GIS. Environmental Performance and Development Manager remarked in 2013 that the site remains well maintained and an important visual break.	average	good	often?

Site ID	Name	Type	Neighbourhood	Comments	2014 Quality Score	2014 Access Score	2014 Usage Level
413	Ripon Road B (STN - 30)	Amenity green space	St Nicholas	Environmental Performance and Development Manager makes no comment on the quality of the area in 2013 in accepting that the loss of the land might be acceptable.			
492	Lingfield Road A (PGN - 29)	Amenity green space	St Nicholas	Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2013 that the site continued to be well maintained and well used.	good	average	often
510	Junction Oak Cross and Broadhall Way	Amenity green space	Broadwater	Site boundary changed to exclude highway verge / match GIS. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2012 that the site remains well maintained and well used, and in the 2006 was recorded as high value.	good	good	often
521	Sleeps Hyde A, B (BWR - 55,56)	Amenity green space	Broadwater	Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2012 that the site maintained its quality and use from 2006.	good	good	often
575	Yarmouth Road, (SYM - 39)	Amenity green space	Old Stevenage	Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2012 that the site remains well maintained, well used and attractive.	good	good	often
618	Sound Barrier B	Natural and semi natural	Old Stevenage	Site boundary changed to match GIS. Environmental Performance and Development Manager commented in 2013 that the site remains valuable, well used and well maintained.	good	good	often

### Scoring the 2014 Review

1.2.38 The process of assessing the quality and access of the open spaces within the review was not straightforward. It did, however, aim to be consistent. The approach taken is outlined below.

#### *The 2006 work*

1.2.39 During the PMP Study, every site was assessed against criteria established around its quality, access and usage. Given the quantity of sites being assessed, the assessments were simple and straightforward and are able to be completed for sites quickly. Essentially, sites receive a separate ranking for quality and accessibility under one of the following:

- very good;
- good;
- average;
- poor;
- very poor.

- 1.2.40 There are broad statements beneath each of these that should be referred to in helping to assess the space. There was no similar ranking for usage, which was simply 'rated' during the site visits.
- 1.2.41 For the 'parks and gardens' and the 'children's play spaces', the five rankings were broken down into component elements, including specific consideration of litter, dog fouling, provision of planting, provision of seats and bins and the maintenance and management of the equipment provided. Each criteria gathered points which determined scores for the quality and access categories. These were linked to Green Flag criteria at the time.
- 1.2.42 The survey forms and the reasoning from the 2006 work were not available to the Council for the review, but the final ranks clearly were.

#### *The 2014 work*

- 1.2.43 The review is an update of the work. In assessing the spaces, the decision was taken to use the same assessment methods and criteria as were used previously. There are a number of reasons for this:
- the 2006 method was accepted by those involved and participating in the study previously - it was tried and tested;
  - the Environmental Performance and Development Manager has been using this form of assessment since in considering the value of spaces that may be threatened with change or development. This means that using the same method will make the review comparable with 2006 and any assessments made between 2006 and now;
  - continuing to use the same method means there is a greater degree of comparison between now and 2006 than there would be with any other method;
  - devising a new method would take time and resources to devise and would require testing and approval from a wide range of stakeholders.
- 1.2.44 There are, however, difficulties and interpretation is required. This is discussed below.

#### *Quality and Access*

- 1.2.45 On the whole, the categories and criteria assume that open spaces are primarily used for human recreation and should be set up as such – grass, neat planting, facilities etc. This makes it difficult to assess spaces that are predominantly natural (such as woodland or water meadow), that don't lend themselves to informal recreation, or that predominantly provide a structural or visual function.
- 1.2.46 On a similar theme, the criteria assumes that good spaces will be 'equipped' and so provide things to do, places to sit, places for rubbish, lighting, signs etc. However, in many cases, the study is looking at incidental open spaces – green space in residential areas – which is often used informally for, say, children's play or walking a dog. The absence of 'equipment' or 'information' doesn't necessarily make for a poor quality space.

- 1.2.47 Likewise, the criteria assume that spaces will be well planted with a variety of vegetation and neatly trimmed grass. Again, these are not necessarily the identifiers of a well-loved or well used space.
- 1.2.48 In terms of access, the criteria discuss access by public transport, cycles and cars and discuss parking arrangements and toilets. Many of the spaces are intended to be local; access by public transport is an unlikely requirement in many cases and the provision of toilets at every open space would be a colossal waste of resources both in terms of provision and management. The criteria also discuss access for 'disabled' people without defining disability. The possible spectrum of 'disability' is broad and not limited solely to physical attributes or the presence of a wheelchair (less than 8% of disabled people use a wheelchair<sup>20</sup>). Further, there are no known complaints or concerns raised with the Council about the provision of open space or play space for 'disabled' people or children<sup>21</sup>.
- 1.2.49 Finally, some of the quality and accessibility criteria require an assessment of use – for instance, the presence of vandalism or dog waste may or may not hinder usage of the space. As discussed below, assessing usage itself can be very hard, and this makes any evaluation of how usage might be affected by elements that are perceived to be negative all the more difficult.
- 1.2.50 The point is that in making assessments, one has to try to balance the considerations and use the criteria as a guide. Often, the best way to assess the picture is by comparing the sites to one another.
- 1.2.51 And so, in assessing quality and accessibility, there is mindfulness towards the criteria, but weight is also given to the previous assessment outcome and the context in which sites are found in comparison with one another.
- 1.2.52 One change to the scoring concerns the quality measure in respect of children's play areas. This review adds a measure for the number of items of equipment on offer. It is felt that the quality of a play area will be increased if the variety of equipment available at it is interesting and diverse. Spaces score one point for each different piece of equipment, and the criteria has a weighting of three<sup>22</sup>.

### *Usage*

- 1.2.53 'Usage' is much harder to assess. The site visits are inevitably fleeting and cannot practicably be carried out at the height of any particular spaces' use and popularity – for instance, some were carried out during school hours and in February/March when weather is changeable and maintenance less frequent; notable differences in usage were seen when the sun was out during the school Easter holidays.

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<sup>20</sup> The Papworth Trust, 2010, via the English Federation of Disabled Sport website

<sup>21</sup> Confirmed with the Environmental Performance and Development Manager during a meeting on 22 April 2014.

<sup>22</sup> The scoring criteria for the children's play areas have a maximum score of 170, plus a variable score for the number and variety of play pieces available. The score could therefore rise above 170 if a site was well located and equipped, but 170 provides something of a benchmark. The maximum score on access is 75.

- 1.2.54 The 2006 data on usage is sparse. Again, for the review, clues have to be found and assumptions made. But this is dangerous ground – should we assume that if a teenage play area has suffered vandalism or graffiti that it is a bad and neglected place, or is it a sign that teenagers do gather there and want to impose ownership? Is a neat, nicely planted space better used than one with overgrown grass and muddy paths through it? And a cemetery may have no-one (alive) in it, but it's still being used.
- 1.2.54 Any usage information is cautiously recorded. The site surveys have shown that dog walking is very common in some areas; that children's play areas are being used; that woodlands have established informal paths around them. The more important spaces have trails and paths marked out; pitches are laid out with goals and posts erected and stud marks in the ground; in some amenity spaces, people are walking through them or sitting on benches. Some of the more neglected spaces might have garden waste dumped around the edges from properties that back onto it, or be impenetrable for access, or have the remnants of removed play equipment still deteriorating in the ground. It points towards usage, but it's not definitive.
- 1.2.55 And so all assessments of quality, accessibility and usage are subjective, but informed by the criteria, the context, by comparison and on the recorded information available.
- 1.2.56 A full list of sites with their quality and access rating are set out in Appendix H.

### 1.3 Towards a baseline: the difference between 2006 and 2014

1.3.1 This section describes the differences between 2006 and 2014, and seeks to define and explain the reasons for the differences seen. It is structured as follows:

- overview – a comparison of the two years based on the 2006 standards. This accounts for changes in population projections between the two years;
- a statistical comparison of the two years, looking at changes to the **quantity, quality** and **accessibility** of spaces;
- a summary of the main points arising from that comparison;
- a discussion of the changes, and the drivers for change.

#### Overview

1.3.2 At the end of the 2006 Study, PMP defined a series of ‘standards’ for each type of open space based upon the quantity of open space in each geographic area and the cumulative provision across the town. This was as follows:

**Table 6: Open Space Standards (2006)**

Population			Town						
			Town	St Nicholas	Old Stevenage	Chells	Bedwell	Shephall	Broadwater
	2006 PMP	→→	79715	12411	17121	12559	12473	13146	12005
	PMP 'future'	→→	96418	12934	27520	13718	16320	13368	12558

Typology		Quantity standard (ha/000)	2006 Provision (ha/000), except '+' which is no. of sites/000*						
Parks and Gardens	actual (ha)		58.46	0.00	0.68	14.36	34.88	8.54	0.00
	existing	<b>0.73</b>	0.73	0.00	0.04	1.14	2.80	0.65	0.00
	future		0.61	0.00	0.02	1.05	2.14	0.64	0.00
Natural and Semi Natural	actual (ha)		142.11	9.13	24.95	24.80	27.57	27.79	27.87
	existing	<b>1.78</b>	1.78	0.74	1.46	1.97	2.21	2.11	2.32
	future		1.47	0.71	0.91	1.81	1.69	2.08	2.22
Amenity Green space	actual (ha)		87.25	12.93	23.93	11.68	14.46	11.45	12.80
	existing	<b>1.10</b>	1.09	1.04	1.40	0.93	1.16	0.87	1.07
	future		0.90	1.00	0.87	0.85	0.89	0.86	1.02
Children & Young People (+)	actual (ha)		6.13	0.28	1.53	0.40	1.77	1.43	0.72
	Sites		108	10	33	6	17	20	22
	existing	<b>0.80</b>	1.35	0.81	1.93	0.48	1.36	1.52	1.83
Outdoor Sports Facilities	future		1.12	0.77	1.20	0.44	1.04	1.50	1.75
	actual (ha)		232.60	5.29	48.09	21.84	37.00	40.70	79.68
	existing	<b>2.20</b>	2.20	0.43	2.81	1.74	2.97	3.10	1.9**
Allotments	future		1.82	0.41	1.75	1.59	2.27	3.04	1.81**
	actual (ha)		10.38	0.83	3.07	0.49	2.92	1.15	1.92
	existing	<b>0.09</b>	0.13	0.07	0.18	0.04	0.23	0.09	0.16
Burial Land	future		0.11	0.06	0.11	0.04	0.18	0.09	0.15
	actual (ha)		7.33	0.00	7.04	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.00
	existing	n/a	0.09	0.00	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
Total	future		0.08	0.00	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
	actual (ha)		544.26	28.46	109.29	73.57	118.60	91.35	122.99

\*figures derived from Appendix J of the PMP study. Discrepancies between Appendix M and Appendix J in site calculations within the PMP work are not explained. The figure of 544.26ha includes duplications from the PMP work and all sites that were subsequently deleted from the 2014 review.

\*\* excludes the golf club

1.3.3 The 'Quantity Standard' is the key column, defining the amount of each type of open space across the borough. It is drawn from the existing town-wide provision, except in the case of allotments (where the trend was for contraction) and play areas (where rationalisation of sites was ongoing).

1.3.4 The 2014 review considered the open spaces included in the 2006 study in two distinct steps – the desktop review and the site surveys. On the whole this has removed and added sites and more accurately assessed the area of all sites, making amendments where changes have occurred. The figures in red denote a drop below the 2006 standard both across the neighbourhoods and looking to the future (though deficiencies in the future as expressed here are primarily driven through a rise in population over the plan period). The position at the end of this process is shown in the table below.

Table 7: Comparison Open Space Standards (2014)

			Town	St Nicholas	Old Stevenage	Chells	Bedwell	Shephall	Broad- water
Population <sup>23</sup>	2011 actual	→→	83957	13075	19501	13105	13103	12868	12305
	2031: 5300	→→	93191	13700	25000	13700	16200	13400	13800
	2031: 8200	→→	99803	13700	25300	13700	21000	13500	14100

Typology		2006 Quantity standard (ha/000)	2014 Provision (ha/000), except '+' which is no. of sites/000						
Parks and Gardens	actual (ha)		57.90	0.00	0.59	14.38	34.80	8.55	0.00
	existing	0.73	0.69	0.00	0.03	1.10	2.66	0.66	0.00
	2031: 5300		0.62	0.00	0.02	1.05	2.15	0.64	0.00
	2031: 8200		0.58	0.00	0.02	1.05	1.66	0.63	0.00
Natural and Semi Natural	actual (ha)		145.70	9.81	24.49	25.53	29.88	28.14	27.85
	existing	1.78	1.74	0.75	1.26	1.95	2.28	2.19	2.26
	2031: 5300		1.56	0.72	0.98	1.86	1.84	2.10	2.02
	2031: 8200		1.46	0.72	0.97	1.86	1.42	2.08	1.98
Amenity Green space	actual (ha)		77.03	11.01	23.89	8.97	14.24	8.32	10.60
	existing	1.10	0.92	0.84	1.23	0.68	1.09	0.65	0.86
	2031: 5300		0.83	0.80	0.96	0.65	0.88	0.62	0.77
	2031: 8200		0.77	0.80	0.94	0.65	0.68	0.62	0.75

<sup>23</sup> The population estimates in this table, which give rise to the 2031 provision per '000 population are derived from:

- an assumed 2.28/household on 5,300 or 8,200 additional dwellings provided between 2011-2031
- on the lower figure, geographic projections for housing completions of 1,100 within Bedwell (town centre), 2,100 in Old Stevenage (western and northern urban extensions), 400 within Broadwater (Bragbury End) and the remaining 1,150 distributed evenly through the borough;
- on the higher figure, geographic projections for housing completions of 3,200 within Bedwell (town centre), 2,220 in Old Stevenage (western and northern urban extensions), 550 within Broadwater (Bragbury End) and the remaining 1,180 distributed evenly through the borough;
- 93.2K and 99.8K are based on projections sent to Nortoft, in April 2014, during their work on the Sports Facility Study. The ward projection totals are 95.8K and 101.3K.

Typology		2006 Quantity standard (ha/000)	2014 Provision (ha/000), except '+' which is no. of sites/000						
Children & Young People (+)	actual (ha)		6.12	0.39	1.26	0.37	2.40	1.31	0.39
	sites		69	9	17	6	16	13	8
	existing	0.80	0.82	0.69	0.87	0.46	1.22	1.01	0.65
	2031: 5300		0.74	0.66	0.68	0.44	0.99	0.97	0.58
	2031: 8200		0.69	0.66	0.67	0.44	0.76	0.96	0.57
Outdoor Sports Facilities	actual (ha)		252.61	6.31	53.59	20.94	35.67	41.28	94.82
	existing	2.20	3.01	0.48	2.75	1.60	2.72	3.21	3.11
	2031: 5300		2.71	0.46	2.14	1.53	2.20	3.08	2.78
	2031: 8200		2.53	0.46	2.12	1.53	1.70	3.06	2.72
Allotments	actual (ha)		11.92	0.83	4.44	0.51	2.98	1.13	2.03
	existing	0.09	0.14	0.06	0.23	0.04	0.23	0.09	0.16
	2031: 5300		0.13	0.06	0.18	0.04	0.18	0.08	0.15
	2031: 8200		0.12	0.06	0.18	0.04	0.14	0.08	0.14
Burial Land	actual (ha)		8.89	0.00	8.60	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.00
	existing	n/a	0.09	0.00	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
	2031: 5300		0.10	0.00	0.34	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
	2031: 8200		0.09	0.00	0.34	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
Total	actual (ha)		560.59	28.35	116.86	70.70	119.97	89.02	135.69

For ease, the actual changes in the amount of space (in hectares) available between 2006 and 2014 are shown in the table below:

Table 8: Actual change in hectares by type and location, 2006-2014

	Town	St Nicholas	Old Stevenage	Chells	Bedwell	Shephall	Broadwater
Parks and Gardens	-0.14	0.00	-0.09	0.02	-0.08	0.01	0.00
Natural and Semi Natural	3.59	0.68	-0.46	0.73	2.31	0.35	-0.02
Amenity Green space	-10.22	-1.92	-0.04	-2.71	-0.22	-3.13	-2.20
Children & Young People	-0.01	0.11	-0.27	-0.03	0.63	-0.12	-0.33
Outdoor Sports Facilities	20.01	1.02	5.50	-0.90	-1.33	0.58	15.14
Allotments	1.54	0.00	1.37	0.02	0.06	-0.02	0.11
Burial Land	1.56	0.00	1.56	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
All land	16.33	-0.11	7.57	-2.87	1.37	-2.33	12.70

#### Statistical Comparison between 2006 and 2014

1.3.5 It is important to note that the tables above are effectively a like-for-like comparison between 2006 and 2014. This is presented in advance of any thought to future strategy, which is the subject of Part Two. Comparing the two years, the notable factors are:

##### 1. Quantity

- overall growth in the amount of open space in the survey by 16.33ha;
- an increase in open space provision in Broadwater of 12.7ha;
- an increase in outdoor sports provision of 20.01ha  
(although all three of these could be attributed to the addition to the stock of site 676, Former BAE Sports Club/Stevenage FC training ground, at 15.4ha);



- a reduction in the overall amount of amenity green space by over 10ha, mainly attributable to drops in Shephall (3.13ha), Chells (2.71ha), and Broadwater (2.2ha). These, along with St. Nicholas, have seen significant decreases in the availability of this type of space for their resident populations;
- reductions in overall open space available in Chells (2.87ha) and Shephall (2.33ha);
- increases in the amounts of open space available in Old Stevenage (7.57ha), 5.5ha of which is in the outdoor sports typology (mainly new site 926, Burymead Playing fields, at 3.48ha);
- increases in the levels of natural and semi-natural space in Bedwell (2.31ha), attributable to four small new sites and amendments to the measurements of other sites;
- allotment and cemetery provision has principally been made in Old Stevenage;
- St. Nicholas and Bedwell have seen increases in children's play space, with Bedwell gaining 0.63ha (a 35% increase). This is mainly attributable to investments at Hampson Park, Town Gardens and Fairlands Valley Park.
- The area of land available for children's play space has remained consistent (around 6.1ha), despite a drop in available sites from 108 to 69 (a loss of 39 sites, mainly attributable to Broadwater (14) and Old Stevenage (16)). Broadwater lost 14 of its 22 sites (64%); Old Stevenage lost 16 of 33 (48%);
- of the standards across town, the 'parks and gardens', 'natural and semi-natural' and 'amenity green space' rates are all now below the 2006 rate, with the amenity green space standard taking the biggest hit; the rates for 'allotments' and 'children and young people' remain above the 2006 levels, but these were both engineered in the 2006 study to be well below the actual amount available, the former because of diminishing demand and the latter because of a rationalisation programme;
- of the neighbourhood areas, St. Nicholas has the lowest quantity of open space (28.35ha), a reduction of 0.11ha. It remains deficient in all typologies. Chells is similarly deficient, though remains relatively abundant on 'parks and gardens' and 'natural and semi-natural space'. Bedwell is, by far, the best served neighbourhood for open spaces having much of Fairlands Valley Park, Hampson Park, Town Centre Gardens, King George's Playing Fields, Whomerley Woods and Monks Wood amongst others. It also has a good balance of typologies. Whilst Broadwater has a higher quantity of open space, much of this is tied up in the outdoor sports provision at the golf club (56.52ha) and Stevenage FC's training ground (15.40ha).

## **2. Quality**

### **1.3.6 Of the sites 137 sites revisited and surveyed (see Appendix H):**

- 109 had either improved (34 sites, 24.8%) or remained the same (75 sites, 54.7%). Only 28 sites (20.4%) had worsened. Improvements were seen very evenly throughout the neighbourhoods (either six or seven sites in each neighbourhood, except St. Nicholas, where there were four). There were 13 improving amenity green spaces and 9 improving children's play areas.
- of those sites which had worsened, nine were in Shephall whereas only two were in Chells and one in Bedwell. The remainder were shared almost equally between the remaining neighbourhoods. There were 10 worsening amenity green spaces and 12

worsening children's play areas<sup>24</sup>. Broadly speaking, the worst performing children's play spaces are expected to be removed in due course (e.g. 406 Stanley Road), or have some investment directed towards them (e.g. 2 Ridlins Park).

- the trend for maintained or improved conditions seen through the site surveys reflects the optimism from Stevenage's residents which comes through the consultations and surveys.

Of the 53 new sites surveyed<sup>25</sup> (see Appendix H):

- 24 were rated good or very good on quality with 8 on each of average and poor quality. None were very poor. There was no obvious geographic pattern in this distribution.
- the children's play spaces scored on a range between 107 and 161, which compares with a range of 70 to 187 for all sites. This suggests the new sites were marginally better on average than all sites. The two lowest scoring new sites were 913 Riccat Drive and 914 Windrush Close in north east Stevenage, both of which were provided by house developers rather than the Council (by contrast, privately provided play areas at 921 Glanville Crescent, 934 Watson Road and 947 Sacombe Crescent are among the best performing on quality indicators).

### **3. Access**

- 1.3.7 All sites can be assessed against the 2006 standards for accessibility. Maps are located at Appendix I.

#### *Parks and gardens*

- 1.3.8 The 2006 study set accessibility standards for Fairlands Valley Park (15 minutes' drive time or 6km) and for the category generally (10 minutes' walk or 800m). There has been no change to the number of sites in this typology, so no new provision. The entire borough remains within the 15 minute drive time of Fairlands Valley Park. With respect to the walk times, the same areas of the borough are outside of this boundary – essentially the eastern fringes of Chells, Shephall and Broadwater along with St. Nicholas and northern and western parts of Old Stevenage.

- 1.3.9 The map shows a 2km radius around the parks and gardens. This covers virtually the whole borough. Given the recent consultation evidence that people are as likely to walk as drive to formal parks and gardens, and that Fairlands Valley Park in particular is well regarded, there appears to be an adequate provision of parks and gardens in 2014, albeit perhaps dependent on the continued attractiveness of Fairlands.

#### *Natural and Semi-Natural*

- 1.3.10 The 2006 study set the accessibility standard at a 5 minute walk or 400m. It found that the main area of deficiency was in northern Bedwell to the east of the town centre, and to the eastern side of the Old Stevenage High Street. There was deficiency in St. Nicholas between Martins Way and Canterbury Way, and small areas of deficiency in fringe locations at Chells Manor and Bragbury End.

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<sup>24</sup> As discussed earlier, the scores for children's play spaces are not directly comparable and caution needs to be taken in drawing a conclusion on the condition of children's play spaces. Refer to the field notes for further details, Appendices E and F).

<sup>25</sup> Ormonde Square was not surveyed (see footnote 7).

- 1.3.11 The main deficiency in Bedwell has been reduced a little on the eastern side, with the addition of sites 922/923 alongside Fairlands Way, though neither of these sites is of a particularly high quality. The deficiencies at Chells Manor and St. Nicholas remain, though the deficiency at Bragbury End has been removed with the addition of site 910, the Blenheim Way amenity buffer, alongside the railway. Whilst rather opportunistic, this site does appear to be well used, with a well-trodden path evident alongside the railway line.

*Amenity green space*

- 1.3.12 The standard for amenity green space in the 2006 study was set at a five minute walk or 400m. The catchment maps demonstrated that there were no residential areas within the borough that were outside of this catchment. The study noted that there were some areas where there was substantial overlapping of catchments (such as Fishers Green and Symonds Green) and as a result thought might be given to the value of specific spaces within these areas and the role they play as amenity green spaces.
- 1.3.13 The catchments in 2014 cover the town less thoroughly, with deficiencies through Fairlands Valley Park and around Brittain Way (though clearly the Park itself will be used by some as amenity space) and east and south of the Lister Hospital. The former may be down to the removal of some of the smaller sites which were previously included as roadside verges or incidental spaces. Overall, the coverage might be slightly reduced, but it remains comprehensive. This remains a good result, with 135 of the 185 sites removed from the survey falling into this category.

*Children and Young People*

- 1.3.14 The accessibility standard for children's play areas was set at a five minute walk or 400m in the 2006 study.
- 1.3.15 The study noted that during 2006 the Council was undergoing a structural review of the provision of children's play spaces and, at that time, there were 108 sites within this typology. The number in 2014 is 69.
- 1.3.16 This change makes any assessment of children's play space in 2014 more difficult. The mapping of the catchment areas demonstrates that the deficiencies have opened up, which is unsurprising, given that there are fewer sites. Previously, deficiencies could be seen around the Lister Hospital, adjacent to Grace Way, in Chells Manor, at the northern end of Shephall Way and on the eastern edge of Broadwater. Without exception, these areas of deficiency have been maintained or – more likely - opened out, and a new area of deficiency has established itself on the south side of Broadwater alongside the railway (though some of this will be resolved with the provision of a promised new play area at site 304 Tintern Close).
- 1.3.17 One could point to the improvements made at Shephalbury Park, Hampson Park and Town Gardens amongst others and suggest that these are now more attractive to a wider catchment. This may draw people into the parks by car, and parking is certainly available at the bigger facilities to allow this. However, there are occasions where the geography of the new town's roads make easy access more difficult – the links between Grace Way and

Lonsdale Road, and Hertford Road and Broadwater Crescent, for instance, are not conducive for vehicular access.

- 1.3.18 Finally, the accessibility standard itself could be challenged. With a growing propensity for children to use bikes or scooters to get around and quality becoming of greater importance than quantity in providing open space, a five minute threshold appears to be unnecessarily stringent measure.

#### *Allotments and Cemeteries*

- 1.3.19 The provision of allotments has been subject to a separate survey. However, allotments operate in a similar way to playing fields; tending an allotment is a pastime for which people are prepared to travel beyond their nearest site to the nearest available site. The important aspect of allotment provision is accommodating need and coping with the ebb and flow of demand. It follows that allotment accessibility is not sensibly measure by distance radii.
- 1.3.20 The provision of cemeteries for the town's needs is not within the remit of this work, but earlier, separate work has suggested that – with the Weston Road extension – sufficient land is available for the short to medium term. No standard for provision was set within the 2006 study because it cannot easily be influenced through planning policy, and that remains the position for this review.

#### **Main points arising from the 2014 study review**

- 1.3.21 A number of factors seem to emerge from this analysis. These are:
- broadly, the *amount of green space* available for the town is relatively constant;
  - despite this, the rising population means that there is *less space per head* to go round;
  - *amenity green space is the most vulnerable* to loss;
  - on the whole, quality is being maintained or improved, though about 1 in 5 are getting worse;
  - Bedwell is the best provided neighbourhood for open space, though the northern area suffers from a lack of natural and semi-natural space.
  - Old Stevenage has similar levels of open space, though is more reliant on the outdoor sport typology;
  - generally, the St. Nicholas neighbourhood area suffers from a lack of open space across all typologies, with Chells also deficient in many types;
  - the *tight urban boundary* means that the addition of large spaces is unlikely in the future;
  - *accommodating the built needs of the town* is likely to expose more spaces to the threat of being developed. Most typologies – with the only certain exclusion being cemeteries – will be opened up to this possibility;
  - conversely, *accommodating the built needs of the town* will be one way to increase the amount of space the town has to offer;
  - children's play space has been rationalised. Whilst many sites have been lost, the overall area has not reduced. However, there remain some sites still to be removed and further investment is expected into some remaining sites, with one new site expected to be provided. Sites refurbished in the intervening period are of a high quality, are well used and are likely to attract more people from a wider area. On

- paper, accessibility has worsened overall although this may be countered by some sites becoming more attractive;
- multi-functionality of spaces is an increasingly important issue.

### **Changes, and the drivers of change 1.**

#### ***The amount of green space***

- 1.3.22 The review has found that the total amount of recreational open space available to the town has increased by 16.33ha. Alongside that, the open space available within Broadwater, and the amount of outdoor sports provision has also risen by between 12 and 20 hectares. This might be significant if it were not for the addition of a new site, not counted within the previous survey, at the former BAE Sports Club (15.4ha). The land is currently used by Stevenage FC as a training ground<sup>26</sup>.
- 1.3.23 In practice, whilst this site is open and in practical and regular use, it is not readily available for wider use in the community. Even if it was, it is located in a relatively poor position against the eastern boundary of the town, accessed from Aston Lane, and isn't easily accessible by anything other than the car. This suits the specialised nature of the site. The site was also in private outdoor sports use at the time of the last survey, so the formal addition of this site to the survey means very little in practical terms.
- 1.3.24 There has also been an increase in the amount of natural and semi-natural space within the review. The largest increase is in Bedwell, where four new sites have been added (Fairlands Way A and B, Vardon Road and St. Nicholas School).
- 1.3.25 Overall, the review deleted 185 sites (most of them in the amenity green space category, see para 1.3.28 below, and many below the 0.05ha threshold) totalling 18.17ha, and introduced 50 new sites totalling 20.63ha. Between deletions and additions, the net increase is only 2.46ha.
- 1.3.26 The re-measurement of sites using GIS accounts for a loss of 2.84ha.
- 1.3.27 Allowing for the addition of the training ground, the changes in the amount of open space are minimal. Changes have been driven by technical differences between the 2006 and the 2014 review, notably changes in definitions which have now excluded space. Clearly, the survey has picked up new sites provided since 2006 or missed by that survey for whatever reason.

#### ***2. The decrease in amenity green space***

- 1.3.28 However, putting aside the addition of the Stevenage FC training, ground, the open space provision within the borough is roughly similar to that provided in 2006 at just over 544ha. There have been ebbs and flows in each typology.

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<sup>26</sup> The site was bought by the football club in 2011, and has been substantially remodelled to accommodate them, though the existing facilities at BAE were of a high standard. The facility includes full size football pitches and a clubhouse. The club have invited season ticket holders to visit the location on special open days.

- 1.3.29 However, it is the amenity green space category that has suffered the most, losing 10ha across the town.
- 1.3.30 Most of the amenity spaces deleted (81) were below the newly imposed threshold of 0.05ha<sup>27</sup>. This accounts for almost 3.5ha of land. Of course, on the whole, this land still exists as open land.
- 1.3.31 Many of the deleted amenity green space sites measuring between 0.15ha and 0.06ha in the 2006 study (27 of 42) have been removed because they included elements that weren't open space, such as gardens, roads and parking areas. Once these elements were removed, the remaining space was usually below 0.05ha and they were excluded because of this. This accounts for a further 2.5ha.
- 1.3.32 The 15 other sites between 0.15ha and 0.06ha are set out in the table below (1.5ha). Eight of these are excluded on the basis that they constitute highway verge, which is not useable open space. Five further sites have been developed or partially developed. Of the remaining two, one remains as open space but under a different typology, and the last one has been excluded on the basis that it is private land.

**Table 9: Medium amenity green spaces deleted**

Harefield	Shephall	0.15	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Filey Close C	Old Stevenage	0.14	Site developed since PMP study	
Clovelly Way B	Old Stevenage	0.13	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Leaves Spring C	Shephall	0.11	Site partially developed. Remainder does not meet definition	
Skylark B	Shephall	0.10	Site does not meet definition	Fenced land within curtilage of community building
Wychdale	Broadwater	0.10	Developed for car parking	
Marlborough Road	Chells	0.10	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Tye End	Broadwater	0.09	Developed for car parking	
Brunel Road B	Chells	0.09	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Meadow Way C	Bedwell	0.09	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Skylark A	Shephall	0.08	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Popple Way	Bedwell	0.08	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Brunel Road C	Chells	0.08	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Pankhurst Cres. A	Chells	0.08	Incorporated into other site (98)	
Archer Road E	Bedwell	0.08	Site developed since PMP study	

- 1.3.33 There are ten sites larger than 0.15ha that have also been excluded (about 3.7ha overall). These are listed in the table below. Again, the common thread is either one of definition or threshold. The largest site lost to amenity green space is now part of the Marriots School playing fields, so is still in use as open space, whilst Almonds Lane was developed.

<sup>27</sup> Stage 2 of this review explains how the threshold of 0.05ha was imposed on all spaces except children's play spaces to help to ensure consistency and to avoid the work becoming too complex (see para 1.2.3).

Table 10: Large amenity green spaces deleted

Ridgmond park amenity	Chells	1.40	Incorporated into other site (101)	-
Almonds Lane	Old Stevenage	0.45	Site developed since PMP study	-
Upper Sean	Shephall	0.41	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Abbots Grove	Bedwell	0.36	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Gonville Crescent	Shephall	0.28	Site does not meet definition	Series of fragmented spaces
Bawdsey Close, Corten Close	Old Stevenage	0.24	Site includes gardens. Remainder below threshold.	
Archer Road A	Bedwell	0.22	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Torquay Crescent E	Old Stevenage	0.21	Site does not meet definition	Highway verge
Torquay Crescent G	Old Stevenage	0.20	Site does not meet definition	SLOAP
Bernhardt Crescent	Chells	0.19	Site does not meet definition	SLOAP

1.3.34 Overall, 151 amenity green space sites were deleted from the survey. Only 9 of these had been developed or partially developed (about 6%). The vast majority remain undeveloped and as they were in 2006, but excluded from the review because of their size or nature.

Table 11: Developed sites

Name	Neighbourhood	Area size (ha)	Quality Score	Access Score	Usage Level
Almonds Lane	Old Stevenage	0.45	poor	very poor	Low/Insignificant
Woolners Way A&B	Old Stevenage	0.18	good	poor	Low/Insignificant
Filey Close C	Old Stevenage	0.14	good	average	Often
Leaves Spring C	Shephall	0.11	average	average	Low/Insignificant
Wychdale	Broadwater	0.10	good	good	-
Tye End	Broadwater	0.09	-	-	-
Archer Road E	Bedwell	0.08	poor	very good	Often
Lodge Way	Broadwater	0.05	average	average	Low/Insignificant
Bandley Rise	Shephall	0.05	average	very good	Low/Insignificant

1.3.35 Like the situation with the amount of space overall, the results are a little misleading and driven largely by technical issues with the review work. The losses in the amenity green space category seem severe, but they mask the fact that most of this open space has been excluded on account of its individual size. Very little amenity green space has been lost as open space.

### *3. Space per resident*

1.3.36 According to the evidence from the review, the borough has maintained the levels of open space – more or less – at those seen in 2006. Notwithstanding the practical management and policy decisions which have protected and enhanced existing assets and ensured the provision

of new open space, this has been observed in the review through an ebb and flow of losses and gains achieved variably through:

- disregarding very small spaces (though these largely remain undeveloped and open);
- disregarding open land that doesn't fit with the idea of useable recreational space (private land, left over land, road verges etc.);
- counterbalancing losses with new provision of space or recognition of existing spaces that weren't previously contributing;
- more accurate measurement of sites by GIS.

1.3.37 However, the maintenance of space at 2006 levels means that there is less space per person because of the rise in population since then. Overall, the provision in 2006 totalled 544.26ha; whilst this has risen to 560.59ha in 2014, the actual amount available overall per thousand people has dropped from 6.83ha to 6.68ha because of the increase in the population.

1.3.38 The position in relation to 2006 and 2014 are set out below. At 2014, the level of provision of three typologies – children's play space, allotments and outdoor sports – remains above the standard set in 2006. The current rate of provision of the other three typologies – parks and gardens, amenity green space and natural and semi-natural space – is now below the 2006 standard.

**Table 12: Comparison between 2006 and 2014 – standards and area**

Population			St		Old		Bedwell	Shephall	Broad- water
			Town	Nicholas	Stevenage	Chells			
	2006 PMP	→→	79715	12411	17121	12559	12473	13146	12005
	2011 actual	→→	83957	13075	19501	13105	13103	12868	12305

Typology			Provision (ha/000), except '+' which is no. of sites/000*						
Parks and Gardens	ha (2006)		58.46	0.00	0.68	14.36	34.88	8.54	0.00
	ha (2014)		57.90	0.00	0.59	14.38	34.80	8.55	0.00
	standard (2006)	0.73	0.73	0.00	0.04	1.14	2.80	0.65	0.00
	position (2014)		0.69	0.00	0.03	1.10	2.65	0.66	0.00
Natural and Semi Natural	ha (2006)		142.11	9.13	24.95	24.80	27.57	27.79	27.87
	ha (2014)		145.70	9.81	24.49	25.53	29.88	28.14	27.85
	standard (2006)	1.78	1.78	0.74	1.46	1.97	2.21	2.11	2.32
	position (2014)		1.74	0.75	1.26	1.95	2.28	2.19	2.26
Amenity Green space	ha (2006)		87.25	12.93	23.93	11.68	14.46	11.45	12.80
	ha (2014)		77.03	11.01	23.89	8.97	14.24	8.32	10.60
	standard (2006)	1.10	1.09	1.04	1.40	0.93	1.16	0.87	1.07
	position (2014)		0.92	0.84	1.23	0.68	1.09	0.65	0.86
Children & Young People (+)	ha (2006)		6.13	0.28	1.53	0.40	1.77	1.43	0.72
	sites (2006)		108	10	33	6	17	20	22
	ha (2014)		6.12	0.39	1.26	0.37	2.40	1.31	0.39
	sites (2014)		69	9	17	6	16	13	8
	standard (2006)	0.80	1.35	0.81	1.93	0.48	1.36	1.52	1.83
	position (2014)		0.82	0.69	0.87	0.46	1.22	1.01	0.65
Outdoor Sports Facilities	ha (2006)		232.60	5.29	48.09	21.84	37.00	40.70	79.68
	ha (2014)		252.61	6.31	53.59	20.94	35.67	41.28	94.82
	standard (2006)	2.20	2.20	0.43	2.81	1.74	2.97	3.10	1.9**
	position (2014)		3.01	0.48	2.75	1.60	2.72	3.21	3.11



Typology			Provision (ha/000), except '+' which is no. of sites/000*						
Allotments	ha (2006)		10.38	0.83	3.07	0.49	2.92	1.15	1.92
	ha (2014)		11.92	0.83	4.44	0.51	2.98	1.13	2.03
	standard (2006)	0.09	0.13	0.07	0.18	0.04	0.23	0.09	0.16
	position (2014)		0.14	0.06	0.23	0.04	0.23	0.09	0.16
Burial Land	ha (2006)		7.33	0.00	7.04	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.00
	ha (2014)		8.89	0.00	8.60	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.00
	standard (2006)	n/a	0.09	0.00	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
	position (2014)		0.09	0.00	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
Total	ha (2006)	6.83	544.26	28.46	109.29	73.57	118.60	91.35	122.99
	ha (2014)	6.68	560.59	28.35	116.86	70.70	119.97	89.02	135.69

1.3.39 Whilst it is evident that the level of open space available per person is reducing, and will continue to reduce without further provision, the crux is whether this is important.

#### *4. Geographical factors, and administrative boundaries*

1.3.40 Stevenage is a distinct and unique place. Essentially a post-war new town surrounding a traditional Hertfordshire village, it has developed quickly on a social ideal developed immediately after the war. This has, to some extent, capitalised on natural characteristics of the land (for instance in the creation of the lanes and Fairlands Valley Park), but more obviously emphasises the idea of neighbourhoods and communities meeting their daily needs locally around a town centre designed to serve everyone.

1.3.41 Open space provision in this context is provided within the neighbourhoods themselves, with the older neighbourhoods being very well served compared to the newer neighbourhoods. Bedwell and Broadwater, as a result, are better served by locally available open spaces than St Nicholas and Chells. There remains a question over whether space was provided in the earlier parts of the town just to create a sense of spaciousness, rather than to deliver usable space for recreation. Fairlands Valley Park also distorts the provision in the town on account of its size and the nature of its space, which serves a local amenity need as well as a town wide - and even a regional – function. The size of the town means Fairlands is effectively available to everyone very easily.

1.3.42 Old Stevenage and Broadwater appear to have had the greatest additions of open space, but this is distorted by the new addition of large outdoor sports areas. Shephall, Chells and St. Nicholas have had drops in their overall open space available, which can be largely attributed to decreases in amenity space (see above). Bedwell has also seen a marginal decrease, but Bedwell doesn't have the lack of open space available already that the other three have.

1.3.43 The changes geographically are again marginal, but they do tend to reinforce the differences between areas in the town when it comes to the availability of open spaces.

1.3.44 So again, there appear to be no specific drivers of change in this case, and the crux of the matter is again whether this matters in practice.

1.3.45 There are other mitigating factors. Because of the nature of the urban boundary, tightly drawn around the built form of Stevenage, it is possible that the three more deficient neighbourhoods have a stronger relationship with open space outside of the borough

(especially in Great Ashby) which does not fall within the remit of the review. A further quirk is the shape of Woodfield ward. It is part of the Old Stevenage neighbourhood area but the eastern area is much more closely related to the St. Nicholas ward than it is to the Old Stevenage area. Attributing the open spaces more closely related to the St. Nicholas area to that neighbourhood considerably improves its performance, almost doubling the amount of space available to it (and whilst reducing Old Stevenage's overall provision).

- 1.3.46 However, this provision might be something worth considering in the strategy for the emerging local plan if a comprehensive picture of open space provision for the different parts of Stevenage is to be addressed within it.
- 1.3.47 On the subject of the borough boundary, its nature means that the borough is unlikely to be in a position to add significant tracts of open space to the overall quantum in areas that currently appear deficient based on the prevailing standards. Likewise, any pressure to meet standards or address deficiencies will inevitably place pressure on land which is likely also to face pressure from other land uses as the borough seeks to meet its needs for growth.
- 1.3.48 This points to a need to address the purpose of the standards, the reasons for providing open space and the need to determine carefully what the right balance is between land uses to allow Stevenage to grow effectively and maintain its role in the wider sub-region.

#### ***5. Accommodating the built needs of the town***

- 1.3.49 The data has demonstrated that the amount of open space being lost to development is relatively small. However, some spaces allocated within the adopted local plan have not come forward, but will be lost in the next plan period. This includes the southern part of Chells Park and land on the eastern side of Scarborough Avenue. Some small areas of open space within housing areas have also been used to assist with parking problems in neighbourhoods – Tye End and Wychdell are recent examples (notably, these are both in relatively spacious Broadwater). Pressure on the Council's own open land is demonstrated through the many requests for comments made by the Estates team to the Environmental Performance and Development Manager in the last two or three years alone (see para 1.2.37 above, and Table 5). Recent concern amongst residents at the potential sacrifice of relatively small areas such as Marlborough Road also demonstrates an increasing tension between the need to develop and the need to protect open spaces.
- 1.3.50 This pressure upon land within the boundary will continue and is likely to intensify. For the plan period, the likely housing requirement is between 7,000 and 8,000 units, and the requirement for employment land is also likely to be high. With the boundary effectively around the built form of the town, options available include:
- intensification of the existing town;
  - finding and using 'brownfield' opportunities;
  - denser development in the town centre;
  - using available undeveloped land in the town (including open spaces or parts of open spaces);

- using ‘greenfield’ land on the edge of the town with the likelihood that this will require co-operation with neighbouring authorities.

1.3.51 Not only does the need for further development place pressure on existing open spaces, some of which will become vulnerable, but also new housing development will require open space to be provided for new residents, and ways and means of providing that also need to be found. This will be a particular challenge in the town centre, where open space is already limited but the pressure to provide new housing is greatest.

1.3.52 The requirement to accommodate development within a tightly bounded authority is by far the most aggressive driver of change for open space going into the next plan period.

### ***6. Children’s play space and allotments***

1.3.53 Two categories of open space were in a state of flux at the time of the original PMP work in 2006. At that time, the Council managed an abundance of equipped play sites for children, but had acknowledged that the sheer number was compromising their quality. It was seeking to address this through a rationalisation programme. Similarly, allotments were going through a downward trend and sites were being neglected and abandoned, with Council resources having to be put into keeping sites in reasonable condition where they were part occupied.

1.3.54 Both typologies have seen changing circumstances through the intervening eight years.

1.3.55 In respect of ***play spaces***, the Council had 108 sites listed in the PMP work. There’s no confirmation of this within PMP, but it’s likely that the overwhelming majority were Council maintained. The number of sites within the current review is down to 69, but the Council website holds a list that includes only 52. The discrepancies occur because:

- some sites have been provided privately as a result of new housing and are not adopted by the Council;
- some sites that are due to be removed still remain in situ;
- some sites are simply missing from the Environmental Performance and Development Manager’s list;
- some sites – notably the MUGAs and the skate parks – have been included within the play space typology for the review but are excluded from the list of children’s play areas, which is otherwise dominated by swings and slide type sites.

1.3.56 So, the rationalisation of the play spaces is still in flux to some extent. Some of the more neglected sites visited as part of this review will disappear in the short term. What is clear, however, is that some play areas have been removed, others have been invested in. This is most evident at Town Gardens, Shephalbury Park (west) and Hampson Park, where new and varied equipment has supplemented or replaced pre-existing equipment. The aim is to make such parks attractive for families and their children from toddler age to teens.

1.3.57 The evidence from the surveys, and from anecdotal evidence, is that such parks are attracting people to them more readily than some of the sparser local facilities. It seems probable that families are more likely to visit such spaces - especially if they are combined with an attractive

and appealing environment with supplementary facilities – as a destination from a further distance that might otherwise be expected, and possibly even arrive by car. It may be worthwhile exploring this a little more closely and perhaps introducing a hierarchy of play spaces with the well-equipped play areas in major parks having a broader reach than simpler local facilities.

- 1.3.58 The removal of play spaces has exposed parts of the town to a more limited accessibility to equipped play. This is especially true of the southern areas of Broadwater. In some cases the geography of the town makes access to alternative sites difficult because of the way the road is set (this is particularly true of Hertford Road, which is a surprising barrier to Shephalbury Park). However, the reassessment of the larger play areas, and the proposed addition of a new play area at Tintern Close will address some of this problem.
- 1.3.59 **Allotments** have had an altogether different track, with interest in them growing in the last eight years, rather than continuing to decline. What was a plan to manage a decline and disposal of some sites has turned into a picture of full occupancy and a waiting list. The Council does have a statutory duty to meet demand, but this is a difficult task because of the fluctuations in demand. Providing land to meet need would take time and space and providing at a peak of demand could also leave the Council with land that it may then find surplus in a short period. The latest national trends suggest that the recent wave of interest in allotments has peaked and that demand is down; this is reflected in the size of the waiting list in Stevenage itself. New allotments are due to come into use next year (2015) at Edmonds Drive.
- 1.3.60 So, in each of these cases, there remains a need for monitoring of the situation. The play areas have been both removed and improved across the borough whilst the space available to them overall has remained constant. Coverage has worsened, but the pull of some sites has arguably widened. The availability of allotments has remained above the standard set in 2006, and allotments are in full use currently, with more planned to come into use and the waiting list reducing. This appears to be a happy situation, but remains trend driven, more so than other forms of open space.

## **7. Multi-functionality**

- 1.3.61 The sites in the 2006 review were assessed from the perspective of a 'primary purpose'. This meant that there was no nuancing of any open space even if there were different activities going on (except for play areas, which were identified separately within parks and amenity green space).
- 1.3.62 Site surveys reveal that many of the major green spaces categorised by PMP within the 'outdoor sports' typology are performing a wider function. It is evident that these spaces are used informally for recreation; they are used for exercising, for walking dogs, as short-cuts through the town and for hanging out. The investment in children's play spaces at major green spaces, and particularly within Fairlands Valley Park, Hampson Park, Shephalbury Park and Town Gardens, suggests a move towards creating major destinations with a variety of offer that a wider catchment of residents can spend more time at. Equally, it is probable that

residents very close to some of the major green spaces will effectively be using these spaces as their amenity green space. This needs some more sophisticated treatment in this review.

- 1.3.63 This may seem like a relatively minor quibble, but Fairlands Valley Park is included as a 'park and garden' even though it's likely to operate as amenity green space for residents nearby who will nip in and out of it to, say, walk the dog. This pattern is repeated across the borough; in the case of most of the outdoor sports sites, the playing pitches only ever cover a proportion of the whole area and are only ever used for a small proportion of the week. The remainder of the time – indeed, the majority of the time – such sites will offer open access recreation for everyone. Many of the outdoor sports sites will be thought of by local people as parks and – in the case of places like St. Nicholas and Shephalbury – are probably better described as parks than outdoor sports pitches.
- 1.3.64 The multi-functionality of many spaces within the town means that some neighbourhoods may be demonstrating a deficit where none is perceived in practice. Bedwell has a marginal deficiency in amenity green space in 2014, down from 2006, but is oversupplied in 'parks and gardens' and 'outdoor sports'. This can be partly explained by the presence of Town Gardens, Fairlands Valley and Hampson Park within the neighbourhood, all of which are likely to serve an amenity function for some residents on top of their formal designation.
- 1.3.65 There's no formal driver of this trend; spaces have always been multi-functional. However, the principle of multi-functionality needs to be considered within the strategy because it has the potential to reduce pressure on land, to better use available land, the focus management and resources on fewer sites and to better reflect the space available to each neighbourhood by accepting that spaces have more than one function in that neighbourhood.

### **8. Outdoor Sports typology**

- 1.3.66 It should be noted that, although included within the review and comparison above, there is no need to carry the outdoor sports standard forward into the strategy. All future requirements for indoor and outdoor sports facilities, and playing pitches, will be sought through the provisions of the parallel Sports Facility Study. This sets out within it a list of sites, projects and priorities alongside a costed set of anticipated contributions for each sport or pastime. The only exclusions to this are the informal provision for outdoor gyms, trim trails and jogging routes, which need to be picked up as part of the open space work as there is no formal standard set out in the Sports Facility Study.

## 1.4 CONCLUDING PART ONE: ISSUES FOR THE STRATEGY

- 1.4.1 In concluding Part One, several issues have emerged. They are expressed below as possible overarching aims, and issues within each typology. These form the basis for developing and open space strategy.
- 1.4.2 They are not intended to be definitive or finite, but have been used as a basis for testing by a working group established within the Council from relevant interests. These people, also involved in Stages 1 and 2, were:
- Julia Hill, Environmental Performance & Development Manager
  - Paul Seaby, Services Manager - Street Scene & Amenities
  - Cristian Pinta, Arboriculture and Conservation Manager
  - Richard Javes, Planning Policy Manager
  - Richard Crutchley, Senior Planning Officer.
- 1.4.3 The working group used these to discuss and develop the strategy for the Local Plan.

### Possible 'general aims'

- i. Maintain a baseline provision
- ii. Ensure an informed protection of open spaces throughout the town
- iii. Seek the provision of new open space across typologies 1-6 with new developments in a clearly defined way (e.g. via 'standards')
- iv. Manage the acceptable release for development land identified as open space where it serves no function or purpose (burden of proof with promoter)\*
- v. Ensure that open space that is subject to development pressure or purposes can be replaced at an equal or better standard in the neighbourhood, or nearby existing open spaces can be improved\*\*
- vi. Work with neighbouring authorities to acknowledge the provision of open spaces outside of the borough as an amenity for Stevenage residents (and vice versa)
- vii. Emphasise the importance of quality of provision over quantity (whilst not using this as an excuse to remove spaces)

\* Acknowledges that some spaces have been audited as being of poor quality and/or in poor locations and could be developed without any overall detriment to open space provision.

\*\* Acknowledges that open space of good quality and/or good accessibility will be under pressure for development at some point and that this situation should be prepared for.

### Proposed aims for specific typologies

#### 1. Parks and gardens

- Reconsider the definition of formal parks, clarifying the role and distinction of multi-functional, well managed destination spaces for the town as opposed to more localised recreation grounds referred to as parks
- Increase the number of parks and gardens under a new definition
- Define 'destination parks' aimed at the whole family
- Achieve the increase through suitable intensification of selected amenity green spaces
- Encourage community action / Friends groups

*Local Plan action:*

Formal (named) policy protection to all sites

Specific management plan / routine

## **2. Amenity green space**

- Most vulnerable to loss – how much is tolerable and where is the balance?
- Focus management on key spaces
- Assumption that sites remain undeveloped (subject to Aims iv and v above)
- Maintain the 'green link' network through major amenity spaces and parks
- Encourage community 'ownership'
- Licensing process for amenity green space under 0.05ha, otherwise no formal protection
- Development of formal running routes where appropriate (e.g. 3-2-1) and identification of informal athletics provision, to include jogging, walking and trim trails, in principal open spaces (cf. Leisure Study)

*Local Plan action:*

Formal (named) policy protection of high quality / large open spaces

General policy protection afforded to sites over 0.05ha

## **3. Allotments**

- Monitor national and local trends for allotment demand
- Consider the need for additional allotments

## **4. Natural and semi-natural space**

- Expansion of road verges experiment
- New country park in 'Forster Country'
- Measurement against ANGSt (inc. cross boundary consideration)
- Woodland strategy (woodland hierarchy; project definition; management strategy; Green Space Volunteer strategy)
- Recognition of value of non-recreational natural / semi-natural space

*Local Plan action:*

Specific policy protection to recognised sites (SSSI, regionally important sites, Local Wildlife Sites etc)

General policy protection afforded to all identified sites

## **5. Outdoor sports**

- Better use of sports facilities and playing pitches for that purpose
- Determine which spaces are outdoor sports provision with peripheral amenity green space and which are amenity green space with peripheral sports provision

- Development of formal running routes where appropriate (e.g. 3-2-1) and identification of informal athletics provision, to include jogging, walking and trim trails, in principal open spaces (cf. Leisure Study)

*Local Plan action:*

Formal (named) policy protection to all sites

Specific management plan / routine

## **6. Children and Young people**

- Complete the current rationalisation
- Monitor the use of new sites
- Move with best practice
- Define 'super-play areas' with a larger catchment
- New MUGA provision within new housing areas and at Shephalbury and St. Nicholas (cf. Leisure Study)

*Local Plan action:*

How to protect sites from development – usually enough to protect the park they're in?

## **7. Green corridors**

- Formally define types – ancient paths, hedgerows and lanes / strategic transport corridors / other green corridors
- Better integrated green corridors as a transport route
- Promote the routes as alternatives to other forms of transport, especially between the town centre and the rural hinterland (horse and pony, STOOP)
- Promote the routes as walking / jogging routes
- Protect the routes and acknowledge the role / function of the open space

## **8. Cemeteries**

- Consider the need for further burial land beyond the use of the Weston Road extension

## **New development areas**

- In general, provide open space according to the standard (for all typologies)
- Seek to ensure, however, that space is not provided for the sake of meeting that standard
- Provide instead in accord with the strategy
- The standard serves to identify how much space overall the town should have
- Seek to link the housing strategy in with the open space strategy?

## **Further Issues**

- Balanced distribution – do we want a balanced distribution of space, or to acknowledge the differences and work with them in some way?
- Where do standards sit – what is their role; do we continue with them; hindrance or useful?



- If standards are useful, what is appropriate (provision and distances)?
- CIL vs. section 106; contributions should go into capital (provision) not revenue (maintenance)
- Town centre open space – how will all that housing accommodate the ‘required’ open space?
- Can we make trade-offs?
- Do restrictive covenants exist on open space; are there different covenants; how do they affect any potential development?
- ‘Windfall’ open space – that space deleted from the review as being too small, but which remains ‘open’ – does it have a role?
- How do you acknowledge the role of smaller pieces of open space, as well as road verges and green corridors?
- Multi-functionality
- Disability, accessibility, equality

1.4.4 Part Two of this document takes these issues and develops the strategy.

## 2. PART TWO

### GOING FORWARD: AN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY TO 2031 (or Stages 3 and 4: Setting and applying provision standards)

#### 2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The 2006 PMP Open Space Study has been reviewed, alongside a review of the Borough's sports and leisure facilities. The Sports Facility Study<sup>28</sup> sets out a path for meeting the Borough's needs for formal facilities, including sports pitches, for the remainder of the plan period. This is guided by the Borough's own expectations, but also by the expectations and guidance of sports' bodies and organisations.
- 2.1.2 In respect of open space provision, there is now more flexibility in how to deal with open space provision than there was at the time of the PMP Study in 2006. The PMP Study set out 'standards' that define how much open space we would expect to provide (like children's play areas, amenity green space and formal parks and gardens); much of the methodology in arriving at these was defined by Government guidance. However, the means of defining and providing open space have changed since the PMP study was completed, particularly in light of the NPPF. It is also unlikely to be sustainable to provide open space in this way – i.e. rigidly using standards – with a constantly growing population, both from a resource perspective, but also practically given the finite nature of land within the borough. A new way forward needs to be found.
- 2.1.3 This part of the document represents stages 3 and 4 of the PMP methodology; however, rather than focusing on the derivation and application of open space standards, it will explore a holistic town-wide strategy and provide recommendations for planning policy (the Local Plan) and management of open space over the course of the plan period to 2031 (the Green Space Strategy).
- 2.1.4 In order to develop a strategy for the Local Plan, a working group of key officers was established to steer the process. The group was made up of officers directly involved in planning policy and parks and open space management, supported by input from the portfolio holder:
- Julia Hill, Environmental Performance & Development Manager
  - Paul Seaby, Services Manager - Street Scene & Amenities
  - Cristian Pinta, Arboriculture and Conservation Manager
  - Richard Javes, Planning Policy Manager
  - Richard Crutchley, Senior Planning Officer.

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<sup>28</sup> Prepared by the Nortoft consultancy. The Strategy covers the period 2014-2031

2.1.5 Latter stages drew on the support of other officers within the Council, external organisations such as HMWT in order to progress specialist areas such as biodiversity and habitat, and involved discussion and consultation with adjoining authorities.

2.1.6 This strategy is the output from the group's work. A full list of all sites and their designations as a result of this review is held at Appendix N.

## 2.2 Aims of the strategy

2.2.1 The strategy is concerned with the use and protection of open space, and sets a framework for the development of planning policy. It is linked to parallel work to devise a strategy for the use and development of allotments (2014-15), to the Sports Facility Strategy prepared for the Council by Nortoft (2014) and future work on cemetery provision. The management and maintenance of open spaces is the concern of the Green Space Strategy (2010) which is expected to be updated as a result of this document.

The aims of this strategy are to:

1. Maintain a baseline provision of open space
2. Ensure an informed protection of open spaces throughout the town
3. Manage the acceptable release for development of land identified as open space where it serves no function or purpose (the burden of proof is with the promoter)<sup>29</sup>
4. Ensure that other open space that is subject to development pressure / purposes can be replaced at an equal or better standard in the neighbourhood, or nearby existing open spaces can be improved<sup>30</sup>
5. Seek the provision of new open space across typologies<sup>31</sup> within new developments in a clearly defined way
6. Work with neighbouring authorities to acknowledge the provision of open spaces outside of the borough as an amenity for Stevenage residents (and vice versa)
7. Emphasise the importance of quality of provision over quantity (whilst not using this as an excuse to remove spaces)

2.2.2 The aims are relevant to **every typology** and applicable in **all cases**. These aims underpin the Council's approach to open spaces across the town, and inform their management and provision. They act as an umbrella for the separate provisions for each typology.

2.2.3 The strategy applies across the town. Open space is considered to be a resource available to all residents, employees and visitors to the town. However, references are made to the neighbourhood areas when discussing local conditions, and 'neighbourhood' means the six areas of the town defined by ward boundaries and described at the beginning of Part One. Thinking about neighbourhoods allows people in the town to see how the strategy affects

<sup>29</sup> Acknowledges that some spaces have been audited as being of poor quality and/or in poor locations and could be developed without any overall detriment to open space provision; 'no function and purpose' is in respect of the results of the surveys.

<sup>30</sup> Acknowledges that open space of good quality and/or good accessibility will be under pressure for development at some point and that this situation should be prepared for.

<sup>31</sup> The typologies are: parks and gardens; amenity green space; allotments; natural and semi-natural space; outdoor sports; children and young people. Each has a section of this report dedicated to it. Outdoor sports have no specific standard for provision in this report and are dealt with exclusively within the Sports Facility Study.

their part of it. When considering the effect of gaining or losing open spaces from a neighbourhood, its proximity to the neighbourhood boundary also requires thought, as any consequences could also be felt across the boundary. Boundaries are not absolute.

2.2.4 Each aim is discussed further below.

**Aim 1: Maintain a baseline provision of open space (no 'net loss')**

2.2.5 The 2006 assessment of open space determined that the town had 544 hectares of open space; the 2014 review considered it to have risen to 560 hectares. The reasons for this are given above (see para 1.3.22).

2.2.6 The population of the town is expected to rise over the next 20 years. The Borough Council does not wish to lose open space in accommodating new development. Open space serves a purpose for existing residents, employees and visitors which will not change over that time. New development will predominantly come about through urban extensions. This will remove surrounding countryside, but will also aim to provide formal open spaces and improve access to countryside beyond by creating links to it.

2.2.7 It is therefore reasonable to expect the overall quantum of open space to remain (and in all likelihood increase) through the coming years.

The quantity of open space within the town should not drop below 560ha. Net gains and losses from the open space network will be monitored through the Annual Monitoring Report.

**Aim 2: Ensure an informed protection of open spaces throughout the town**

2.2.8 The review of open space has allowed an up to date picture of open spaces across the town to emerge. It has allowed some consistency to be derived, typologies and site sizes to be reassessed and legislative requirements to be considered. Within this, the saved policies of the adopted plan have also been revisited with a view to rewriting them for the Local Plan to 2031.

2.2.9 The original study set a framework for assessing the value of open spaces and for defining them. This remains important. Each open space has a role, a purpose and a use. All open spaces can be protected on this basis in the local plan as a result of the review, but also those sites that have more to offer because of their attributes (e.g. size, location, offer, heritage or wildlife importance) can be afforded a specific protection or role because of these.

Principal Open Spaces, green links and corridors, heritage sites and wildlife sites should be defined and protected in Local Plan policy, along with a general principle – subject to the other aims of the strategy – for the protection of all open space.

Principal Open Spaces are the destination parks, other parks and gardens, principal amenity green spaces and principal woodlands along with the children's play areas within each.

**Aim 3: Manage the acceptable release for development of land identified as open space where it serves no function or purpose (the burden of proof is with the promoter)**

- 2.2.10 Whilst the strategy *aims* to protect all of the open space defined in the review (*Aim 2*), to think that this will be enough to deter approaches from developers would be short-sighted. History has demonstrated that open spaces will come under pressure for development, and that some will be released.
- 2.2.11 The original study had a defined methodology for determining whether or not a site could be released, and this was applied in a number of cases, often demonstrating that the loss of the space was not advised.
- 2.2.12 The review proposes an alternative.
- 2.2.13 Several sites in the review have been assessed as being of poor quality or poor accessibility. On the whole, this suggests that they are not performing an effective role as open space, or they are located in a place that is not conducive to recreation regardless of their quality. Their location could be a factor in their quality<sup>32</sup>. Whilst not wishing to promote the loss of open spaces, if developers are to pursue open space as a possible building resource, some sites will be more appropriate to lose than others. The purpose of this aim is to identify those sites that the Council could tolerate losing without replacement, thereby protecting the best open spaces from development pressure. This aim also reflects the core planning principles of the NPPF in favouring land for development of a lesser environmental quality<sup>33</sup>.

The Council is not promoting any open space for development and any sites falling into these categories are covered by the general aim to protect all open spaces (*Aim 2*).

The Council will consider disposing of the sites of a **poor** or **very poor quality**, as set out in the list below, without any need for replacement. The Council will also consider the disposal of sites assessed as having **poor** or **very poor accessibility** on their merits, bearing in mind the assessed quality of the space (the higher the quality, the greater the resistance to any loss will be)<sup>34</sup>.

In both cases, disposal will only be acceptable where:

- (a) there is no existing or proposed intervention to improve the site as an open space, including access to it, and
- (b) the scheme promoter demonstrates, by means that will include robust liaison with the local community, that the open space is not serving its function or purpose as open space locally, and
- (c) the loss of the space will not leave the local neighbourhood with no access to local amenity space (defined by a five minute walk), and
- (d) there is a proposed scheme for the site which is likely to be acceptable in planning terms.

<sup>32</sup> Natural and semi-natural space is excluded from this list because assessments of quality tend to be made from the perspective of human recreational use. Natural and semi-natural spaces are likely to have benefits that are not measured in this way (e.g. biodiversity, natural heritage, environmental benefits).

<sup>33</sup> NPPF, para 17

<sup>34</sup> Sites of a good or very good quality are also covered by *Aim 4*.

ID	Site name	Neighbourhood	Size	Quality	Access
49	Sheepcroft Hill	Shephall	0.10	very poor	very poor
624	Sheringham Avenue	Old Stevenage	0.16	very poor	poor
636	Huntingdon Road	Old Stevenage	0.08	very poor	average
238	St Albans Drive	Old Stevenage	0.06	poor	very poor
481	Jessop Road E	St Nicholas	0.08	poor	very poor
18	Pear Tree Spring B	Shephall	0.36	poor	poor
124	Flinders Close	Chells	0.37	poor	poor
235	St Albans Link	Old Stevenage	0.21	poor	poor
384	Wheatlands A	Chells	0.05	poor	poor
439*	Ely Close D	St Nicholas	0.34	poor	poor
444	Southwark Close E	St Nicholas	0.07	poor	poor
454	York Road A	St Nicholas	0.16	poor	poor
915	Cherwell Drive	Old Stevenage	0.05	poor	poor
942	Columbus Close	Chells	0.35	poor	poor
108	Faraday Road B	Chells	0.11	poor	average
121	Elliot Road	Chells	0.06	poor	average
391	Dryden Crescent D	Chells	0.06	poor	average
421	Canterbury Way F, Ripon Road K	St Nicholas	0.28	poor	average
436	Ely Close F	St Nicholas	0.06	poor	average
443	Norwich Close A	St Nicholas	0.11	poor	average
525	Manderville	Broadwater	0.08	poor	average
601	Scarborough Avenue C	Old Stevenage	0.08	poor	average
157	Plash Drive B	Bedwell	0.08	poor	good
432	Ely Close E	St Nicholas	0.37	poor	good
598*	Scarborough Avenue E	Old Stevenage	0.36	poor	good
163	Poppy Mead	Bedwell	0.37	poor	very good
220	Vardon Road E	Bedwell	0.28	poor	very good
The following sites are protected as wildlife sites, and this Aim does not apply to them <sup>35</sup> :					
276	Marymead	Broadwater	0.12	poor	poor
84	Poplars	Shephall	0.4	poor	average

\* Includes play areas, sites 440 and 599; see Children and Young People section.

**Aim 4: Ensure that other open space that is subject to development pressure / purposes can be replaced at an equal or better standard in the neighbourhood, or nearby existing open spaces can be improved**

2.2.14 This aim again seeks to acknowledge development pressure that the town's open space may come under. However, whilst *Aim 3* seeks to direct that pressure to open spaces of poor quality or poor accessibility, this aim recognises that it is the better quality and better located sites that are going to be more profitable for developers; the same reasons that make open spaces successful make areas attractive to develop – good location, attractive sites, established communities.

<sup>35</sup> See also Natural and Semi-natural section

2.2.15 Where open space not listed or defined in *Aim 3* is proposed for development (or part development)<sup>36</sup> the Council will be particularly careful in considering the consequences of its loss. In addition to those basic considerations (a) to (d) set out in *Aim 3*, the Council will also be looking for a like-for-like replacement of open space (and any play equipment) within the same locality as the proposed development. The contribution sought will be for new provision (or the cost of new provision), not the value of the current site<sup>37</sup>. Open space falling into this category will be of average quality or above and of average accessibility or above. An allowance should be made to reprovide the same amount of space as close to the proposed site as possible. Consultation and engagement of the local community will be essential.

2.2.16 As an alternative to the re provision of space, the Council may also consider the improvement of other local spaces within the local vicinity. Again, the emphasis will be on like-for-like; the nature of the lost space will guide the provision of new space; play equipment should be replaced with play equipment; kickabout space with kickabout space. The wishes of the local community should be gathered.

2.2.17 Local, in these terms, means a five minute walking radius.

The Council is seeking to maintain all of its defined open spaces. However, it is recognised that some valued sites may become the subject of development pressure. In these circumstances, the criteria (a) to (d) set out in *Aim 3* are applicable.

In addition, the Council will be seeking a like-for-like replacement of any open space lost as the result of proposed development. Like-for-like means replacement of a similar type, size and quality of space; replacement should be local, i.e. within five minutes' walk of the proposed development site.

As an alternative to like-for-like replacement, the Council may consider the upgrade of other local spaces to provide the type of space lost, provided that this can be accommodated without detriment to the provision of space in the local area and without detriment to the space hosting the changes.

In all cases, the views of the local community must be sought.

2.2.18 *Aim 3* and *Aim 4* seek to reflect the advice in the NPPF (para. 74), which seeks to determine the circumstances under which open space can be disposed of following an assessment, and where open spaces that are lost should be replaced with equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.

2.2.19 A number of sites in the borough are currently included as open space, and contribute to the overall quantum, but are committed as development sites or are likely to be the subject of development proposals in the medium term. These sites are set out below:

- Chells Park / Ferrier Road (Site ID 383) – the southern part of Chells Park, accessed from Ferrier Road, was allocated for housing in the adopted Local Plan (policy H3/5,

<sup>36</sup> Including sites of a higher quality, but of poor or very poor accessibility

<sup>37</sup> Refurbishment or recycling of existing equipment could be considered as an alternative.

area 1.3ha). A planning application has been received on the site for residential development. Whilst the site overall is in a good condition overall, this part is of a lower quality and offers little quality recreational use. The scheme reduces the park area to 5.7ha. The scheme does provide some formal open space within the scheme, and acknowledges the bridleway on the southern boundary;

- Rugby Club (Site ID 245) – the rugby club are known to be seeking relocation to a different site. Enabling the relocation would most likely mean the sale of the existing site for development. Any relocation would require the reprovion of the facilities lost (a requirement of Sport England). Reprovion outside of the borough will mean that the land is lost to Stevenage; reprovion within the borough, dependent on the proposal and the site<sup>38</sup>, could see public open space lost to a private sports facility.
- Lonsdale School (Site ID 196) – the site is the subject of a planning consent on the northern part of the site, which has seen the demolition of the redundant school, and will see the site redeveloped for housing. Public open space is a feature of the redevelopment, which would effectively mean the reduction of available open space, but also a transfer from the outdoor sports typology to amenity green space.
- Mead Way (site ID 566) – the outdoor sports pitches form part of the route between Gunnels Wood Road and land to the west of the A1(M), which could be developed in the plan period. There are no detailed plans for this road at the current time.
- Scarborough Road (site ID 598 and 599) – the site was allocated in the adopted Local Plan for community use (policy SC4/2). This development has not come forward, and the land remains in use as open space, though it is of a low quality. The future use of the site is uncertain and will need to be monitored. The site is also listed in *Aim 3*.
- Shephall View (site ID 135) – Shephall View was another housing allocation in the adopted plan ((H3/11, area 1.2ha). This site has not been developed in the interim and has no planning consent.

2.2.20 All of these sites, if developed, would result in the loss of open space, although some open space would be reprovided or maintained in some cases. To definitively state the effect here would be both premature and speculative. It should not be implied the loss of these sites would be acceptable in open space terms.

2.2.21 In addition, there are a number of smaller proposals that impact on existing areas of open space:

- Bragbury Lane, where a proposal for five houses would take a small area totalling 0.38ha from site 910 and 947; this has outline planning consent.
- Marlborough Road, where a proposal for two houses would take 0.16ha from site 126; this also has outline planning consent.
- Magellan Close, where a proposal for a single house would take 0.03ha from site 124. This has planning consent. Site 124 is within the list at *Aim 3*.

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<sup>38</sup> The current preferred site is Chells Park. Dependent on the arrangements for reprovion, some unfettered public open space might remain in the area.



2.2.22 Whilst the impact of these schemes going ahead would be much smaller, it lends weight to the theory that open spaces will have a greater pressure upon them in the coming years to provide development opportunities.

2.2.23 Finally, there are a number of named sites included within the Housing Revenue Account business plan that form part of the ten year plan to deliver affordable housing. Some of these sites have the potential to impact upon neighbouring open spaces. These sites are:

- Shephall Centre (site ID 14)
- Elliott Road (site ID 119)
- Land adjacent to Bedwell Crescent neighbourhood centre (site ID 144/145)
- Drakes Drive (site ID 399)
- Kenilworth Road neighbourhood centre (site ID 545/546)
- Malvern Close (site ID 938)

2.2.24 Again, the impact on the open space concerned is not, at this point, known.

**Aim 5: Seek the provision of new open space across relevant typologies<sup>39</sup> within new developments in a clearly defined way**

2.2.25 Open space standards have been a key part of open space planning since the publication of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 in 2002, and before that in the 'Six Acre Standard' that was promoted by the National Playing Fields Association (now 'Fields in Trust').

2.2.26 The reliance on standards to determine the need for open space within a place has diminished. One can speculate on the reasons for this:

- the urban renaissance that occurred during the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gave rise to a new generation of flats and apartments, particularly in town and city centres. The provision of open space for this type of dense development would have required many acres of land to be set aside in order to meet the demands of standards;
- the scarcity of land generally in towns and cities has caused locations be more creative about the provision of open space and better assess its value not only for traditional recreational and sports pursuits, but also as a visual, educational and structural resource and as an important component in encouraging biodiversity and variety away from human life and activity;
- slavish provision of space to a prescribed standard inevitably leads to a complacency – one meets the target but does not consider the way spaces are used and contribute to a quality of life in a place;
- instead of quantity, the provision of quality spaces – particularly in central urban locations<sup>40</sup> – has started to become an acceptable piece in the jigsaw of provision and

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<sup>39</sup>Typologies 1-6 are: parks and gardens; amenity green space; allotments; natural and semi-natural space; children and young people. Each has a section of this report dedicated to it. Outdoor sports have no specific standard for provision in this report and are dealt with exclusively within the Sports Facility Study.

<sup>40</sup>Urban spaces, such as Sheffield's Peace Gardens, Nottingham's Market Place and Manchester's Exchange Square have raised / transformed expectations of public space. These spaces, whilst well under any expected 'standard' can – if well managed, well designed and well-used as a result – provide for human recreation and interaction as well as any traditional park or amenity space laid down to grass. If well managed, often as part of a town centre strategy, the intensity of use in these spaces can equate to that of a much bigger one.

necessary in light of the increased density of residential accommodation that has been returning to town and city centres.

2.2.27 As a result of each of these – and possibly other factors – places have been flexible in the use of standards, making them work for their own geographic, demographic and locationally specific purposes, rather than dogmatically meeting targets. This in itself has resulted in wide variations in the application of standards across the country, even between similar places.

2.2.28 That said, there is arguably still a role for standards in providing a basis for the provision of open space in new developments. Having a standard provides some certainty for developers in terms of what the Council will expect and provides a basis for negotiation. It allows consideration of the future in a context of current provision and availability. The 2006 study established standards; the 2014 review has demonstrated a change in the quantum of open space in the town and a change in the population. Such change is inevitable, meaning that some re-evaluation of the standards is required.

The 2006 standards for each typology are set out below, alongside the total area of land. The green columns denote the areas of land in 2014, and the standards prescribed at this time to assess the need for new open space.

New residential development across the town will be assessed against these standards to determine levels of open space provision. Where provision cannot be achieved on site, a commuted sum will be sought to enable open space provision to be made or improved within the vicinity.

Further details on this process are set out in the Funding and Finance section.

	2006 area	2006 standard*	2014 Area	2014 standard*
Parks and gardens	58.46	0.73	87.94	0.88
Amenity green space	87.25	1.10	81.61	0.92
Allotments	10.38	0.09	11.92	0.14
Natural and semi-natural space	142.11	1.78	145.70	1.78
Outdoor sports	232.60	2.20	218.41	n/a
Children and young people	6.13	-	6.12	-
	108 sites	0.80	69 sites	0.82

\* hectares per 1000 population, town-wide, except children and young people, which is sites per 1000 population.

2.2.29 The standard for parks and gardens has risen to 0.88ha per thousand, which allows for the growth in population at the high growth scenario without any further provision in this typology. The transfer of six major parks into this category means that the typology is well served<sup>41</sup>. Further, there is potential for a new country park and for formal pocket parks, both of which could bolster this typology, and both of which demonstrate the crossover between

<sup>41</sup> For a full discussion, see Parks and Gardens section.

typologies (i.e. such provision also serves a need for amenity green space and natural and semi-natural space).

- 2.2.30 The standard for **amenity green space** has decreased to reflect the current level of provision, which has also decreased<sup>42</sup>. The decrease in the standard also reflects the expectation that spaces in other categories, notably parks and gardens, will also be used as amenity spaces. However, people will continue to need informal spaces around them as an important element of the creation of a town, and the creation of new amenity spaces will be an important structural element for the growth of the town.
- 2.2.31 **Allotment** use has picked up between 2006 and 2014, meaning that a resource that was waning is now over subscribed. The standard has been increased to reflect this, and to encourage the provision of new allotments at a proportionate rate to meet need. The standard reflects the current provision.
- 2.2.32 The level of **natural and semi-natural space** within the town has remained fairly constant throughout the eight year period between studies. Overall, this has meant that the availability of such space per head has decreased, because of the increase in population. It is difficult to see where new space might be created within the town (except where it's transferred from other open spaces typologies, as seen with the expansion of Shackledell Grassland in FVP), but new developments on the edge of Stevenage should offer the opportunity to protect hedgerows, copses, small woods and similar places as open spaces.
- 2.2.33 In comparison with 2006 data, the area covered by **sports pitches** has decreased with the transfer of parts of Ridlins, Peartree, Shephalbury, Hampson, King George's and St. Nicholas parks to the parks and gardens typology, but the town is still rich in outdoor playing space. When not in use for sport, these places will be capable of offering an amenity function where they are free to enter; indeed, many of them have considerable areas that aren't marked out for sport, so there is a substantial crossover of primary uses. This includes the likes of Canterbury Way, Mead Way and Chells Park, parts of which have been transferred to the amenity green spaces typology. No standard is needed in the open space strategy as contributions and standards are set out in the Sports Facility Strategy.
- 2.2.34 The number of areas available to **children and young people** has been reduced dramatically, but this rationalisation has been a deliberate filtering of the poorer quality spaces and their gradual replacement with fewer, higher quality facilities. The main investments have been in the 'destination parks' which are, as part of this strategy, being thought of and maintained as our main parks and gardens. Town Gardens, Shephalbury Park, Hampson Park and King George's have all seen their play areas expanded and/or improved, adding to the relative attractiveness of these spaces. The standard reflects the current situation; further sites are expected to be removed, but the emphasis should remain on quality over quantity and, hand

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<sup>42</sup> The decrease is largely accountable to changes in the way open space is included in the review. Most of that 'lost' remains open, but too small to include or too compromised to be considered as functional open space – road verges, for instance. Some of the road verges are picked up as green corridors. It should also be noted that the parks and gardens perform a secondary amenity green space function, as do the outdoor playing pitches when they are not in use.

in hand with the provision of amenity green space, children's play space should remain an important part of future provision for the benefit of our communities. The standard reflects the current provision. Provision should include new skate parks and MUGAs, which is covered by the Sports Facility Study.

*How do our standards compare with similar places? See Appendix K.*

2.2.35 Having established these standards, the amount of space required to maintain them though the plan period can be calculated, knowing both the amount of space currently available and the population projections.

Table 13: Amount of new open space required on low and high growth scenarios

	Area 2014	Standard 2014	Low Growth	High Growth	Land required, low growth	Land required, high growth
Parks and Gardens	87.94	0.88	82.01	87.83	-5.93	-0.11
Amenity Green space	81.61	0.92	85.74	91.82	4.13	10.21
Allotments	11.92	0.14	13.05	13.97	1.13	2.05
Natural and Semi Natural	145.70	1.78	165.88	177.65	20.18	31.95
Children & Young People	69*	0.82	76	82	7	13
	327.17		346.67	371.27	19.50	44.10

\* Rate is play areas per '000. Numbers relate to sites required.

2.2.36 The low and high growth scenarios are outlined at the beginning of the strategy (see para i.7).

2.2.37 The low growth scenario suggests that an increase of total open space is required in each category except for parks and gardens, but this reflects the fact that the provision of parks and gardens – following the transfer of some outdoor sports space – is well above that required by the standard. In practice, the focus should primarily be on providing amenity green space and natural and semi-natural space and maintaining a proportionate provision of equipped play for children and young people and new allotments.

2.2.38 Inevitably, the higher growth scenario requires the provision of a greater amount of new open space with the emphasis is again on amenity green space and natural and semi-natural space. Much of this will be required in the growth areas on the edge of the town, but consideration will need to be given to the provision of open space within more central areas where, under a high growth scenario, much of the housing provision would take place.

Under a low growth scenario, the Council will seek to deliver, across the town but with an emphasis on new communities, an additional 25 hectares of land for open space, plus 7 play areas.

Under a high growth scenario, the Council will seek to deliver, across the town but with an emphasis on new communities, an additional 44 hectares of land for open space, plus 13 play spaces.

In both scenarios:

- (a) natural and semi-natural space will be prioritised alongside amenity green space;
- (b) the provision of children's play space and allotments should be provided at the standards set out above, with children's play space provided within easy access of residential areas;
- (c) within the existing town, new provision should be directed towards recognised areas of deficiency (see para 2.12.11).

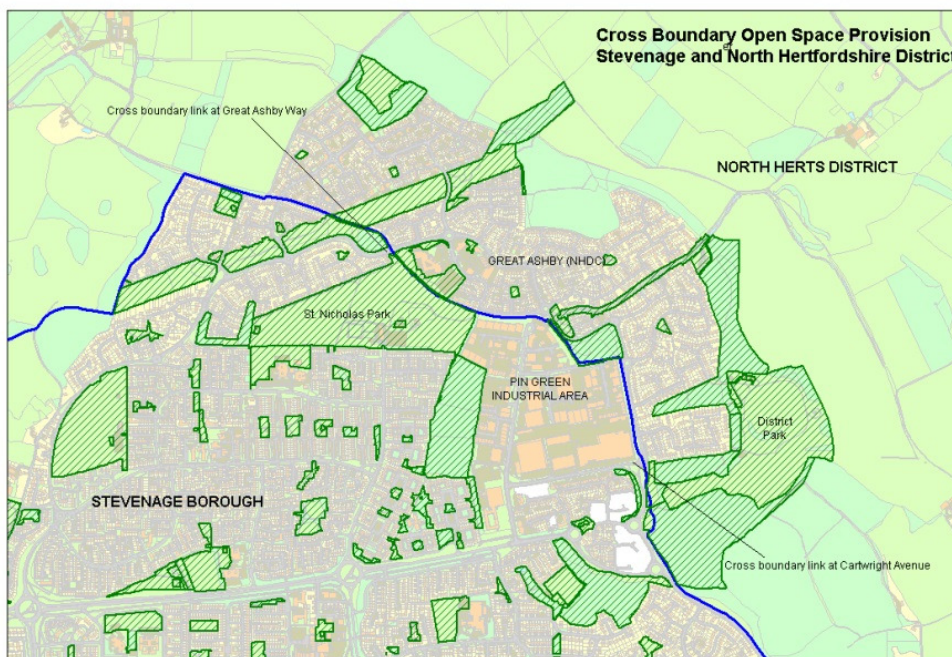
**Aim 6: Work with neighbouring authorities to acknowledge the provision of open spaces outside of the borough as an amenity for Stevenage residents (and vice versa)**

2.2.39 Stevenage is an under-bounded urban authority, meaning that parts of what many people would think of as the town are actually outside of the administrative area of the borough. This is most evident at Great Ashby, but might conceivably apply to outlying parts of Aston, Aston End and Todds Green. Further, the nature of the future growth of the town is such that it is likely to cross the administrative boundaries even more. This is conceivably of importance to both North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC).

*Current position*

2.2.40 At the current time, Great Ashby is the largest area of residential development that lies outside of Stevenage borough but forms part of the town. Great Ashby was developed from the end of the 1990s and comprises a variety of residential accommodation focused around a school and neighbourhood centre located on Great Ashby Way (parts of the estate also fell

within Stevenage's administrative boundary). The population of the area is around 4,500 and it formed a civil parish in April 2011 (separating itself from Graveley) meaning that it has some control over its area via the Community Council. The parish is wholly contained within North Hertfordshire district.



- 2.2.41 However, there are clear connections between Stevenage borough and North Hertfordshire district, both physical (e.g. roads and open space) and in terms of shared services (e.g. buses).
- 2.2.42 Great Ashby is well served by open spaces. The largest of these is the district park to the south east, which provides a broad grassed area suitable for ball games and kite flying, amongst other things, and has a circular footpath well used by dog-walkers. The park enables a connection between a number of adjacent and nearby woodland areas that have been opened up as a result of the development, and NHDC promotes these walks and provides interpretation and directional signage to help people understand the spaces and enjoy them. In addition to this, Great Ashby has school playing fields, amenity greens spaces within the residential development and children's play areas as would be found in other developments.
- 2.2.43 People living in Great Ashby use facilities and services within Stevenage borough (and vice versa) such is the ease of connection and proximity. This is particularly true of the district park which, despite its slightly contrived entrance, is accessed from the Stevenage side and may well be seen as a quieter alternative to the bustle of Fairlands Valley Park or a more rural alternative to St. Nicholas Park. Pathways link St. Nicholas Park towards the woodland areas of southern Great Ashby, and with new residential development currently being completed on the southern part of the Pin Green Industrial Estate, further links can be expected to be established towards the spaces to the east.
- 2.2.44 The quality and quantity of the open space in the northern part of Great Ashby is not as extensive, but there is a clear connection beneath the power lines across Botany Bay Lane, and parts of the Great Ashby estate exist within Stevenage Borough rather than within North Hertfordshire – in these places, the administrative boundary is perhaps more seamless. Further, the Round Diamond School is likely to draw pupils from both authorities, and the allocation of allotments for North Hertfordshire residents of Great Ashby can be fraught because the nearest allotments are within Stevenage borough, and they have no access to them because of the administrative boundary. A shared approach would seemingly make more sense.

*Is the St. Nicholas neighbourhood deficient in open space?*

- 2.2.45 When considered in the context of Stevenage's open space provision, only the St. Nicholas neighbourhood area is deficient in open space across all typologies.

Table 14: The 'deficiency' of space in St. Nicholas

	2014 standard	Provision (ha/000) <i>except '+' which is no. of sites/000</i>
	Town	St. Nicholas
Parks and Gardens	0.88	0.00
Amenity Green space	0.92	0.84
Allotments	0.14	0.06
Natural and Semi Natural	1.78	0.75
Outdoor Sports Facilities	n/a	0.48
Total (ha)	560.17	28.35

- 2.2.46 There are reasons for this; most notably, the encroachment of the Woodfield ward (part of the Old Stevenage neighbourhood) into housing areas to the north west of Great Ashby; St. Nicholas Park skews the outcomes significantly, and the presence of Pin Green industrial area means that there is no open space provision in the eastern part of the neighbourhood. The presence of the borough boundary is also a factor.
- 2.2.47 There is no sense in providing open space where it is not required simply because factors present skew the reality for people living in the area. Residents are not influenced by the borough boundary when they walk the dog. If St. Nicholas can be considered with eastern Woodfield and / or Great Ashby's open spaces, it is no longer so deficient.
- 2.2.48 The northern parts of Great Ashby already have strong links between Stevenage and NHDC. With residential development on the southern part of the Pin Green industrial estate advanced, not only does this give more people in the locality looking for open space, but also the perceived links to Great Ashby are strengthened with more housing in the area. Considering all of the space together makes for sensible planning.

Table 15: Allowing St. Nicholas access to space in Gt. Ashby and Woodfield ward

	2014 standard	Provision (ha/000) <i>except '+' which is no. of sites/000</i>		
	Town	St. Nicholas & eastern Woodfield	St. Nicholas & Great Ashby	St. Nicholas, Woodfield & Gt Ashby
Parks and Gardens	0.88	0.57	0.00	0.57
Amenity Green space	0.92	1.33	2.26	2.74
Allotments	0.14	0.06	0.06	0.06
Natural and Semi Natural	1.78	0.89	2.52	2.66
Outdoor Sports Facilities	n/a	1.33	0.58	1.43
Children and Young People	0.82	1.15	0.69	1.15
(+)				
Total without Gt. Ashby (ha)	560.17	55.27		
Total with Gt. Ashby (ha)	603.04		71.22	98.14

- 2.2.49 On the basis of this wider analysis of the available open space to the north eastern area of Stevenage, the St. Nicholas area is not as deficient in open space as might be thought, provided that the availability of land in North Hertfordshire district is considered. There are assumptions in taking this position:
- NHDC should be allowed a reciprocal consideration of the availability of Stevenage's open space to Great Ashby residents;
  - open spaces provided in future phases of development at Great Ashby could be considered as part of Stevenage's provision where they of more than local significance (i.e. more than amenity green spaces);

- any future development in Great Ashby should not diminish the availability of open space in the wider area;
- practically, (and against Stevenage's standards) Great Ashby is deficient in allotments, outdoor sports provision and children's play space, and Stevenage should work with NHDC to address this;
- it should be noted, however, that allotments within the borough are only available to residents of Stevenage borough and not to those who live in North Hertfordshire district.

Stevenage Borough Council recognises the interdependence of north-east Stevenage and Great Ashby for the provision and use of open spaces for and by its residents.

For the purposes of strategic planning in the wider Stevenage area, the Council will seek to work productively with NHDC to ensure that provision is maintained at a satisfactory level to ensure the best use of land, and will, if necessary, enter into discussions about open space standards on land made available for development which straddles the administrative boundary in this location.

#### *Future position*

- 2.2.50 Given the under-bounded nature of Stevenage, development of land between the town and the administrative boundary is likely. In the interest of making development workable, sensible and comprehensive, and also to meet the housing needs of surrounding authorities, development may straddle the boundary. This is equally applicable to NHDC and EHDC.
- 2.2.51 In addition to the provision of open spaces, there are several paths that originate within the urban area of Stevenage that radiate out into the countryside around the town. The most obvious examples are the eight link paths from various parts of the town to the orbital path, STOOP, and the Horse and Pony route. New development should accommodate these established routes into the future. This is explored further in the green corridors and green links section below (Section 2.9).

Stevenage Borough Council will seek to work with its neighbours to establish open space targets and objectives for development planned to straddle / abut the administrative boundary. In entering such discussions, the Council will have regard to:

- the overall target for open space in the borough (*Aim 5*);
- the standards for each typology set out in this strategy (*Aim 5*);
- the relative deficiency or surplus of open space in the neighbourhood area of Stevenage concerned;
- green corridors originating in Stevenage urban area that connect with networks beyond the borough boundary (e.g. the STOOP);
- other aims of this strategy where relevant.



**Aim 7: Emphasise the importance of quality of provision over quantity (whilst not using this as an excuse to remove spaces)**

2.2.52 One of the underlying aims of the strategy is the emphasis on the provision of quality of space over quantity. This demonstrates itself through:

- the effort to increase the number of formal parks and gardens throughout the borough for the benefit of all;
- broadening the appeal of a number of key spaces by widening their activities and functions;
- identifying those spaces that are assessed as poor and accepting their possible disposal;
- accepting that other sites may come under pressure and offsetting this by insisting on a maintenance or reprovision of quality spaces in the affected neighbourhood;
- the rationalisation of children's play spaces; removing the obsolete sites and investing in the main parks and gardens;
- seeking meaningful new spaces rather than ad hoc spaces that simply meet a standard.

2.2.53 It is again emphasised that the Council is not promoting the development or loss of open spaces and wishes to maintain the current quantity, but if spaces are to become pressurised and required to serve greater numbers of people as the population rises, then the quality of spaces needs to rise.

*Existing spaces*

2.2.54 There is a balance to be had between the quantity of spaces and their quality. The town cannot prosper with 600ha of open space if none of it is attractive, useful or accessible; likewise, it can't work with one fantastic 10 ha space to serve everyone. Having a good quantity and distribution of variable space is acceptable, provided the vast majority of the population can get to some good quality, accessible spaces.

2.2.55 Against this general vision is the reality of the economic position that local authorities face as the principal provider and maintainer of open spaces. Not every space can act as a quality park or green space. Not every wood can be managed as a nature reserve with quality trails and interpretation.

The individual typology sections below set out the areas of open space which are the Council's priorities. This ensures that a variety of good quality spaces are maintained across the Borough. They will also set out the approach taken to other spaces and how they serve the population locally.

*New spaces*

2.2.56 The town is expected to grow in the next twenty years. The population is expected to rise and the rate of household formation is also expected to rise. This growth puts pressure on the town's services and facilities, but new development can also contribute to such things.

2.2.57 There are four main areas where housing is expected to be accommodated. These are:

- the town centre,
- west of Stevenage (west of the A1(M)),

- north of Stevenage (between Stevenage and Graveley), and
- Bragbury End in the south east.

2.2.58 It is unlikely that the **town centre** and the immediate surroundings will have sufficient land to provide open space at the type of standards set out under *Aim 5*, but developers and promoters of town centre residential development will be expected to make contributions to open space provision elsewhere, or links to existing open spaces beyond the town centre (especially Town Gardens and KGV). The standards provide a starting point; contributions will be based upon any shortfall in what is being provided, and the cost of providing that shortfall (see Funding and Finance section).

2.2.59 It is anticipated that some civic spaces and squares will be created in the town centre as a result of the comprehensive regeneration planned for it. These spaces – as well as serving / seeking to improve / reflect on Stevenage’s image / perception - will be expected to fulfil the function of open spaces (in as much as they are a focus for human recreational activities, events, act as meeting places) and will be designed to a high standard. Such spaces will make a contribution to the overall open space quantum. For further discussion, see Funding, Finance and Implementation (Section 2.12).

2.2.60 Recent case studies for such civic spaces are set out in Appendix L.

2.2.61 The Council’s approach to civic spaces within the town centre, and to the main park, Town Centre Gardens, will be expanded upon in the Town Centre Framework, and financial contributions to these spaces, and the links to these spaces, are expected to be set out in detail there.

2.2.62 The other main source of new residential development will be the expansion **areas to the west, north and south** of the town. Here, the aim will be to negotiate appropriate levels of open space based on the standards set out in the strategy and the overall area sought.

2.2.63 There will be an opportunity to offset open space provision against the provisions made in other areas. This is foreseeable in a number of areas:

- if a managed countryside area can be created in the north of the town, concessions to the provision of open space might be possible within housing developments to the north and the west;
- if land comes forward on the western side of the A1(M) or at Bragbury End, land will be required between either the A1(M) or the railway to ensure noise levels in residential units provided are acceptable to occupants. Such space could provide formal recreation possibilities in the form of sports pitches<sup>43</sup>, or be provided as informal recreation space similar to that seen on the eastern side of the A1(M) and Symonds Green / Fishers Green;
- provision in each area could be skewed to ensure that deficiencies are met and surpluses are not enhanced (e.g. the further provision of sports facilities in Broadwater

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<sup>43</sup> Discussed in the Sports Facility Study

might not be necessary, and multiple deficiencies in north west Stevenage in particular might be addressed).

2.2.64 It is equally possible that development could come forward on the **eastern side** of the town in East Herts (representations to the East Herts Local Plan in 2014 alluded to the possibility of development wholly within East Herts but adjoining Stevenage). This would also allow the opportunity to discuss and account for deficiencies in a number of typologies experienced by Chells and allow residents on both sides of the administrative boundary to have an equitable access to varied open space.

During the period of this strategy, the Council will seek to provide open space in new areas of development located at the edge of the current settlement at the standards set out in *Aim 5* and seek – overall – to provide a quantum of open space across the town as also set out at *Aim 5*.

Where proposals straddle / abut the administrative boundary, the Council will apply the same ambitions set out in *Aim 5* in its dealings with neighbouring authorities. Where open spaces of more than local importance (i.e. parks and gardens, large amenity green space) are to be provided within these developments, but outside of Stevenage borough, the Council will consider the appropriateness of them meeting the needs of Stevenage residents and offsetting other provision within the borough (see also *Aim 6*).

## 2.3 Parks and Gardens

### *Issues*

- Sites and definition
- Destination parks
- Pocket parks – future provision
- Provision at Forster Country
- Community Action, Volunteering and Friends Groups

### **Sites and Definition**

- 2.3.1 Within the PMP Study, four parks/gardens were defined. These were the formal spaces at:
- Fairlands Valley Park (6)
  - Town Centre Gardens (147)
  - the Bowling Green (333), and
  - Millennium Gardens (334)
- 2.3.2 The category of parks and gardens includes urban parks, formal gardens and country parks that provide opportunities for informal recreation and community events. These four spaces fall into this definition. They were originally distinguished from most of the larger areas of open space within the town because of the lack of any formal sports pitch provision within them. The intention is that they remain in the parks and gardens typology.
- 2.3.3 Fairlands Valley Park and Town Centre Gardens are distinct urban parks. Millennium Gardens is a formal area of the wider KGV. The Bowling Green is a focus within the Old Town Conservation Area and is a place for quiet reflection, rather than play. The principal event to take place here each year is Remembrance Sunday.
- 2.3.4 However, Stevenage has other significant spaces that also fit the definition of the type, but have sports pitches present on them as well. Confusingly, some of these places are known as parks, host events and have a large degree of multi-functionality. In order to reflect these perceptions, it is considered that they are transferred to this typology to better reflect their role and status. These spaces are:
- Ridlins Park (1)
  - Peartree Park (3)
  - Hampson Park (203)
  - King George V Playing Fields (221)
  - St. Nicholas Park (227), and
  - Shephalbury Park (315).
- 2.3.5 Ridlins Park and Peartree Park are both predominantly spaces for outdoor sports use whilst providing an ancillary amenity green space function. However, both have some distinct features that diversify this offer. Peartree Park has a well-equipped MUGA and a skate park as well as play areas for younger children. It also accommodates good routes east-west between Shephall and Fairlands Valley Park. Ridlins Park lies adjacent to a large area of woodland and

close to the Gresley Way green corridor. It houses the athletics track and has a number of pitches. It is expected that a major refurbishment of the play area will also widen the appeal of the park locally. Both are likely to be developed with more community involvement in future.

- 2.3.6 Hampson Park lies in the north central part of town, north west of Fairlands Valley Park, and provides a range of facilities within it that attract families from around the town. Recent investment has ensured that there are three areas in the southern part of the park which provide activity for a full age range of children and young people, close to the parking provision. There is also an outdoor gym, and the park is increasingly being used for community events. The remainder of the park – principally the northern half – provides playing pitches, but also sees a significant footpath traverse east-west between Old Town and Chells<sup>44</sup>.
- 2.3.7 King George V (KGV) Playing Fields is a large area of informal recreational land and playing fields immediately north of Fairlands Way. It does have a significant use by sports clubs, but also has a number of varied uses beyond formal sports. These include the Millennium Gardens, children's play areas and well used pedestrian routes between the town centre and the Old Town and also east-west between the town centre and Pin Green. KGV also holds a number of community events each year, including Stevenage Day.
- 2.3.8 St. Nicholas Park is an expansive area of land sitting between housing areas in the north east of the town and, like Hampson Park, combines playing pitches with a number of play areas and facilities which add up to the area being more than simply a place for formal sport. The park includes a BMX track and a kick wall which is also a focus for street art workshops and an outdoor gym.
- 2.3.9 Shephalbury Park is situated in the southern part of the town and is a well contained and tranquil space with a variety of characters from the playing pitches in the middle, to the large play area at the western end, to the tree lined routes on the eastern and southern boundaries. Shephalbury Park also has outdoor gym facilities as part of a fitness trail.
- 2.3.10 These six parks are distinct from other major spaces in the town because of their multi-functioning status, their potential to hold major events and because they provide a community focus to a greater extent to other areas. Smaller spaces beyond these six major parks tend to have a more localised catchment and lack the multi-functionality of the major spaces.
- 2.3.11 To recognise the need to protect the formal playing pitches within these parks, the area of the pitches is removed from the total area of the parks. Within the study, the areas of the children's play areas and the MUGAs are already accounted for. The revised areas of these four parks are set out below:

**Table 16: Outdoor Sports to Parks and Gardens**

Ref	Name	Total	Sports provision	Total	Remainder
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<sup>44</sup> This footpath is part of the defined Old Walkern Road ancient lane. See green corridors section.

		area		sports area	to parks & gardens
1	Ridlins Park	10.32	3 x football; 3 x mini; athletics	7.36	2.96
3	Peartree Park	8.00	5 x football	5.40	2.60
203	Hampson Park	10.31	3 x junior football; 2 x mini football	4.52	5.79
221	KGV	7.57	3 x adult football / 2 x cricket; 4 x tennis; 2 x bowling	4.86	2.71
227	St. Nicholas Park	12.72	4 x junior football; 1 x bowling	5.32	7.4
315	Shephalbury Park	12.99	2 adult football, 3 junior football; 5 x tennis; 1 x bowling	4.83	8.16

2.3.12 Three further spaces are being added to the parks and gardens typology – Silvio Square, Melton Square and Ormonde Square (in the Archer Road area of Bedwell). They are all new spaces to the study, and were the subject of refurbishment in 2009/10. They demonstrate how underused amenity spaces might be given a stronger character, and are discussed further under the ‘Pocket Parks’ section below.

2.3.13 These changes to the typology of these spaces means that the total land available to them is:

- outdoor sports – **218.41ha**
- parks and gardens (including the pocket parks at Archer Road, see below) – **87.94ha**.

#### ‘Destination Parks’

2.3.14 Eight of the ten main parks listed in this typology are destination parks<sup>45</sup>. They are defined by:

- having a significant draw for much of the town;
- being destinations in their own right, places where people would go to spend time with a specific purpose;
- not being incidental open space;
- not being defined by principally organised sports activities;
- containing a variety of facilities and attractions aimed at a wide demography.

2.3.15 Fairlands Valley Park continues to have a major pull beyond the borough’s boundaries because of its size and its facilities, and evidence collected suggests that the park is well liked and well used<sup>46</sup>. Its central location and easy access by car, bus and on foot or cycle reinforces this and contributes to its high recognition as a quality park in the town.

2.3.16 The remaining seven sites do not have the same sub-regional status, but are well known and used within a large local catchment, and will have their visibility and status raised by being a focus for community events of varying sizes and importance throughout the calendar year. The investment in play areas is also likely to give rise to more people visiting these sites from further afield, and possibly by car.

<sup>45</sup> Excludes Millennium Gardens and the Bowling Green.

<sup>46</sup> See Part One

2.3.17 These eight main parks have been the focus of investment within the town and have received functions and features within the past five years that have enhanced their status:

- Fairlands Valley Park and Town Centre Gardens have received Green Flag Awards for the last two years, and Hampson Park has been nominated and is working towards such status;
- Town Gardens, St. Nicholas Park, KGV, Shephalbury Park and Hampson Park have seen play equipment upgrades in recent times which have broadened the appeal of these parks to young people. This process has been combined with a reduction of the sites across the town that had limited or poor quality play facilities and had become degraded because of their dispersed nature and the difficulty in maintaining such sites to an acceptable standard;
- Town Centre Gardens, Shephalbury, Hampson and St. Nicholas all have outdoor gym equipment which seeks to take advantage of the popularity of walking and jogging within the main parks;
- Peartree and Ridlins are expected to see significant investment in them in the short term.

2.3.18 In addition, these spaces are identified for new facilities that would serve a more than local function for outdoor recreational needs<sup>47</sup>. This includes:

- new skate parks identified for Hampson Park and, potentially, a new skate park or MUGA for St. Nicholas and Shephalbury parks;
- measured walking, jogging and running routes utilising the larger parks and traffic free routes and lanes around the parks as a means of promoting a healthier lifestyle.

2.3.19 These spaces should be the focus of new parks provision, which may include new services (such as cafes and kiosks), improved interpretations / signage and enhanced planting.

The following sites are defined as **parks and gardens**. They are:

- Millennium Gardens;
- The Bowling Green.

and the eight main spaces defined as **destination parks**:

- Fairlands Valley Park;
- Town Centre Gardens;
- King George V Playing Fields;
- Hampson Park;
- Shephalbury Park;
- Peartree Park;
- Ridlins Park, and
- St. Nicholas Park.

The Council aims to maintain the status and function of these key parks and gardens. These parks provide a significant contribution to the well-being of the town and its sense of space. They contribute to the widely held perception that Stevenage is a green and healthy place.

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<sup>47</sup> See Sports Facility Study

These parks and gardens should expect to see a significant contribution made towards their attractions, upkeep and maintenance (including their play areas and outdoor fitness facilities), especially when the image and perception of the town is a key driving factor, or where facilities being provided are intended to perform a function which is more than just local. Where appropriate, investments in major outdoor community or town wide-events should be directed toward them.

### **Pocket Parks**

- 2.3.20 The presence of Millennium Gardens as a quiet retreat within the town, featuring themed planting and artworks, points to a scope for much smaller formal neighbourhood parks as a type of quality open space provision at a localised scale. Millennium Gardens seems not to be a significant park within the town and was rarely mentioned in surveys and questionnaires about open space conducted in the town. This may be because it is within KGV, albeit separately defined and distinct, yet the space is valuable and offers a different take on open space provision. Similar areas could be provided in other destination parks along the same lines.
- 2.3.31 Further to this, some areas of the country have taken the opportunity to develop small areas of land as ‘pocket parks’. Pocket parks are discrete areas of land of less than 0.4 hectares that provide a place for community focus, rest, contemplation or gentle activity. They should contribute to making a neighbourhood greener and friendlier<sup>48</sup>. They could be particularly valuable, for instance, in providing small, quiet places in neighbourhoods where there is an older demographic and active recreation or play areas are less important. An important element of potential provision is support from within the community.
- 2.3.32 Where there is an opportunity to create such spaces – and they are likely to be limited in number due to resource - they will be protected within the definition of ‘parks and gardens’. The three small revitalised squares – Silvio Square, Melton Square and Ormonde Square – are offered that protection in this review.

### **Provision at ‘Forster Country’**

- 2.3.33 Stevenage is a small town with a tightly drawn administrative boundary. The provision of land for development, and the protection of open land for the benefit of the community, is a fine balance. Land lies undeveloped to the west, south and north of Stevenage (the eastern boundary has negligible open land available).
- 2.3.34 The land to the north, beyond Rectory Lane and Weston Lane, has literary connections to writer E.M Forster who lived at Rooks Nest House on Weston Lane (notwithstanding the historic reasons for this land having connections to the church and farmsteads in the area more generally). The area of land around the house between Stevenage and Graveley is said to have been of inspiration. It has no formal protection as a landscape, though the conservation area was widened in 2007 to include the closest fields within the Rectory Lane /

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<sup>48</sup> Pocket Parks have been a method of providing green spaces within Greater London, and the Mayor has promoted their provision by setting aside a fund to create them. The definition used here is derived from this project.



St. Nicholas conservation area as an important setting. The open area within the conservation area boundary measures over 50 hectares.

- 2.3.35 It is anticipated that land in the broader area – which traverses the administrative boundary with North Hertfordshire – will come under scrutiny from developers interested in providing housing to meet Stevenage’s need; if this does not happen in the current iteration of the Local Plan, it is likely that in a future iteration it will. The Council will seek to ensure that land in this location will remain open and accessible in recognition of both the aims of the conservation area and the literary connections.
- 2.3.36 There are two likely avenues by which this might be secured; the developer could set aside and provide the land, with a mechanism included to manage the space, or the Council could take on the land. In the case of the former, it would remain likely that management of the space would eventually come back to the Council. The Council has been keen to ensure an approach whereby the land is kept as naturally as possible and would seek to maintain this, whichever avenue was taken.
- 2.3.37 Open space created in northern Stevenage around Weston Lane would be categorised within either the parks and gardens typology or identified as an area of natural and semi-natural space, though both would provide access for the public. Provision would be beyond that required for a local need, attracting people from a wider area, which may allow some offsetting of open space in other developments in Stevenage.
- 2.3.38 The details need to be considered further as the probability of development in northern Stevenage becomes more certain. However, any protection or designation in this area has generally been referred to as a ‘country park’. This is not a vague term, and Natural England provides some details as to what a ‘country park’ should aspire to<sup>49</sup>. Essential characteristics include:
- A minimum size of 10 hectares (25 acres);
  - An identifiable boundary;
  - Readily accessible to the population which it is intended to serve;
  - Entry free of charge;
  - Equality issues considered, with indoor and outdoor facilities designed as inclusive and accessible;
  - Predominantly consisting of natural or semi-natural landscape with less than 5% total area of buildings;
  - Easily followed path, cycleways and bridleways;
  - Toilets on site or within 2 minutes walking distance;
  - Opportunities for the local community to have an influence over management and development;
  - Management working towards customer diversity to reflect the diversity of the local community;

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<sup>49</sup> Natural England run an accreditation scheme which aims to recognise those sites that deliver the core facilities and services expected of a country park.

- Daily staff presence and an up to date management plan.

In respect of any proposed residential development in the northern part of Stevenage, within land contained by Weston Road and Rectory Lane, the Council will seek to protect the openness of the countryside closest to St. Nicholas Church and within the conservation area, potentially through the means of a 'country park'. The protection will recognise the literary connection of the land to E.M. Forster and Rooks Nest House.

The extent of the protection will be the subject of negotiation between the Council and the developer, informed by relevant stakeholders including the Friends of Forster Country (or equivalent). The formation and management of the area will also be the subject of discussion, but the Council will seek financial and other contributions from developers to ensure that the area can be maintained into the longer term.

Any designation as a 'country park' will need to meet the criteria set out by Natural England and will imply some management structure. In these circumstances, the park will contribute to the parks and gardens typology. Where the area is not formally constituted, and can be protected by other means, it will contribute to the natural and semi-natural typology. Given the size of the area, any designation will allow some offsetting of open space provision elsewhere in the town.

### **Community Action, Volunteering and Friends Groups**

- 2.3.39 Volunteers, acting as individuals or as part of groups, have long been involved in the protection and championing of green spaces. This is demonstrated most obviously through the success of groups like Groundwork and the Wildlife Trusts, both of whom have grassroots campaigns and activities alongside their national activism. In recent years, and partially through the advent and promotion of local action and neighbourhood planning, small groups of people have started to come together to protect or champion green spaces and community spaces. These vary in scale and ambition, but examples exist across the country.
- 2.3.40 In Stevenage, the plans for the refurbishment and redesign of Town Centre Gardens lead to the formation of a Friends Group for the park which helped to inform the project and continues to meet to improve the environment within it. A group is recognised in connection with Mobbsbury Wood, which was once the site of Stevenage Lodge. A friends group has also been formed for Hampson Park. Stevenage also has a group of Green Space Volunteers formed of local people who give some of their free time to work with the Council to help make a difference to our community green spaces. They have been focused on work to deliver the Stevenage Biodiversity Action Plan, and works to other key locations, including bulb planting and assisting with the delivery of community events, for example.
- 2.3.41 The Council will also consider approaches from communities who want to have a greater say over the management of their open spaces. It may be the case that a particular space within a neighbourhood has a potential for a function that is hampered by the regular maintenance routines, or simply has a unique or special purpose for the community that would be better accommodated with some community management. The Council will be sympathetic to

approaches from communities and neighbourhoods where they want a greater say in how the space is used. This ambition, stated here, is consistent with a similar aim in the third SoStevenage Community Strategy<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> The third of five co-operative principles in the SoStevenage is, 'Communities empowered to design and deliver services and play a role in their local community'.

## 2.4 Amenity Green space

### *Issues:*

- size and definition
- major playing fields
- the principal amenity green space sites
- losing amenity space
- Community Action, Volunteering and Friends Groups
- wildlife sites and commons

2.4.1 Amenity green space is by far the biggest category of open space, and also the most varied in terms of size, quality and use. It is also the most generic, ordinarily having no specific use or function, and is therefore the most likely to be overlooked and lost.

2.4.2 However, its anonymity and lack of any distinguishing feature is arguably its special characteristic. Spaces like these are part of the structure of the town. They provide space between buildings, give otherwise bland and hard spaces colour and attractiveness and provide a place for trees, flowers and creatures to prosper. They may be the places that children form friendships and reflect on in later life. They are the small, necessary breaks in the built environment. Whilst almost blending into the background, we take their existence for granted. When they are threatened, we realise their value. They need looking after like the main parks, the playing pitches and the play areas.

### **Size and definition**

2.4.3 There are 282 spaces within this category, accounting for 81.61 hectares of land. Amenity green space is typically formed of smaller pieces of open land – generally under one hectare – ordinarily lain down to (mown) grass. Their extent tends to be defined by the uses around them, and they often have no specific entrance point. They are available for spontaneous and informal use, and they will ordinarily be maintained in some way by the local authority. They are normally located within residential areas; they may be planned as specific spaces for informal recreation, or ‘left over’ spaces that become used because they’re there. They often have no specific function, and may or may not have trees and/or bushes which may or may not show signs of maintenance themselves. Dependent on the combinations of equipment, maintenance, size and functionality (and hence attractiveness), these spaces may simply offer a visual or structural function.

2.4.4 Spaces under 0.05ha, and/or not practical for informal recreation of any kind (such as roundabouts, road verges, banking to footpaths and cycleways) have generally been excluded from this category, and the survey as a whole.

2.4.5 Excluding those major playing fields partly transferred to this typology (see below), there are 12 amenity green spaces that are over one hectare. They are:

- Great Ashby Way, 5.28ha (site ID 244);
- West of Grace Way, 2.71 ha (site ID 362);
- Bandle Hill, 2.19ha (site ID 66);

- Grace Way, 1.76ha (site ID 357);
- Burymead, 1.57ha (site ID 328);
- Bude Crescent, Symonds Green, 1.48ha (site ID 569);
- Campshill Park, Chells, 1.47ha (site ID 109);
- Buckthorne Flats, Bedwell, 1.29ha (site ID 183);
- Blenheim Way, Bragbury End, 1.17ha (site ID 547);
- Eastbourne Avenue, Symonds Green, 1.11ha (site ID 568);
- York Road, 1.03ha;
- Trent Close, 1.01ha.

2.4.6 Great Ashby Way is a notable entry. Its use and attractiveness is compromised by the presence of the powerlines which traverse the space – indeed the space is part of a corridor for the lines. It is a large space, but not particularly well used – it’s hard to imagine picnickers sitting on it on a summer’s day. Its longevity is assured, however. West of Grace Way, Grace Way and Trent Close are connected spaces running roughly along the length of Grace Way between Martins Way and Fairlands Way, with the former two essentially acting as deep road verges; only Trent Close offers an amenity space within a residential area. Both of these areas were proposed as ‘green lungs’ within the Local Plan 2031 consultation which took place in summer 2013 (see ‘Green Corridors and Green Links’ for further discussion, Section 2.9).

2.4.7 Bude Crescent and Eastbourne Avenue are adjacent to one another and are deep areas of road edge landscaping with connections into the residential areas that abut it, rather than being dedicated areas of open space. Arguably, their main function is the separation of the residential land to the north from the employment land to the south. The space around Buckthorne Flats is also rather unspectacular landscaping around the flats abutting Six Hills Way, so deep roadside verge once again. Blenheim Way is an area of landscaping, but linear, easily functioning as a place for play or walking.

2.4.8 York Road is a triangular piece of open land north of Martins Way which contains a couple of play areas and would be suitable for local kickabouts; close-by Burymead, south of Martins Way, is much the same. Bandle Hill and Campshill Park are approaching planned informal ‘reccs’ – small areas of grass laid out and provided with benches, bins and some definition within walking distance of residential areas.

2.4.9 Already, just with 12 sites, the variety and range of amenity green space sites is apparent.

2.4.10 The remaining 267 sites are between 0.05ha and 1ha in size; 247 of these are under 0.5ha and 177 are under 0.2ha. The vast majority are therefore small spaces.

### **Major playing fields**

2.4.11 In addition to the 279 sites accounted for within this typology, there are three further sites that warrant consideration here. Canterbury Way, Chells District Park and Mead Way were included in their entirety within the outdoor sports typology in 2006. They are not of sufficient diversity to include as ‘destination parks’ in this review, but do warrant some recognition for their secondary amenity function here. As with the destination parks, an

allowance for sports provision can be made, and the remainder of the space accommodated as amenity green space.

Table 17: Outdoor sports to amenity green space

Ref	Name	Area	Sports provision	Total sports area	Remainder to amenity space
233	Canterbury Way (OS)	5.80	4 x football	4.32	1.48
383	Chells District Park (CH)	7.10	4 x rugby	4.32	2.78
566	Meadway (OS)	2.48	2 x football	2.16	0.32

2.4.12 These changes to the typology of these spaces means that the total land available to them is:

- outdoor sports – 218.41ha
- amenity green space – 81.61ha.

2.4.13 The study has to regard the playing pitches as primarily performing a role for formal outdoor sports and the allowance for amenity green space is calculated to avoid double counting. However, in practice, it is likely to be the case that those using it as amenity space will not restrict themselves to the non-playing areas. It is also the case that the borough currently has an oversupply of playing pitches, particularly for football. For this reason, these three spaces are listed as primary amenity green spaces to protect them in their entirety even when playing pitches are not being used on these spaces.

The principal amenity green space sites

2.4.14 There is a group of key amenity green spaces which provide good local facilities for communities. On the whole, they are well located within residential areas, considered to be of a good quality and are well defined. They usually have some play equipment in them as well. Some of these sites were previously identified as Principal Open Spaces in the adopted 2004 Local Plan; the list also includes sites proposed as local open spaces within the Local Plan consultation document of 2013.

The following sites are the Council's **principal amenity green spaces** and provide significant informal local green space to their neighbourhood. These sites should be the focus for investment, maintenance and enhancement. Any reduction in their role or significance should be resisted. Size shown includes play areas\* where they exist.

ID	Name	Neighbourhood	Size (ha)	Quality	Accessibility
383	Chells District Park*	Chells	7.10	good	Good
233	Canterbury Way*	Old Stevenage	5.80	average	poor
566	Meadway*	Old Stevenage	2.48	average	Good
66	Bandley Hill*	Shephall	2.26	average	Good
328	Burymead*	Old Stevenage	1.69	good	Good
109	Campshill Park*	Chells	1.57	good	Average
547	Blenheim Way / Pembridge Gardens	Broadwater	1.17	good	Good
455	York Road B & C*	St Nicholas	1.17	average	Poor
344	Letchmore Road*	Old Stevenage	1.05	good	Good

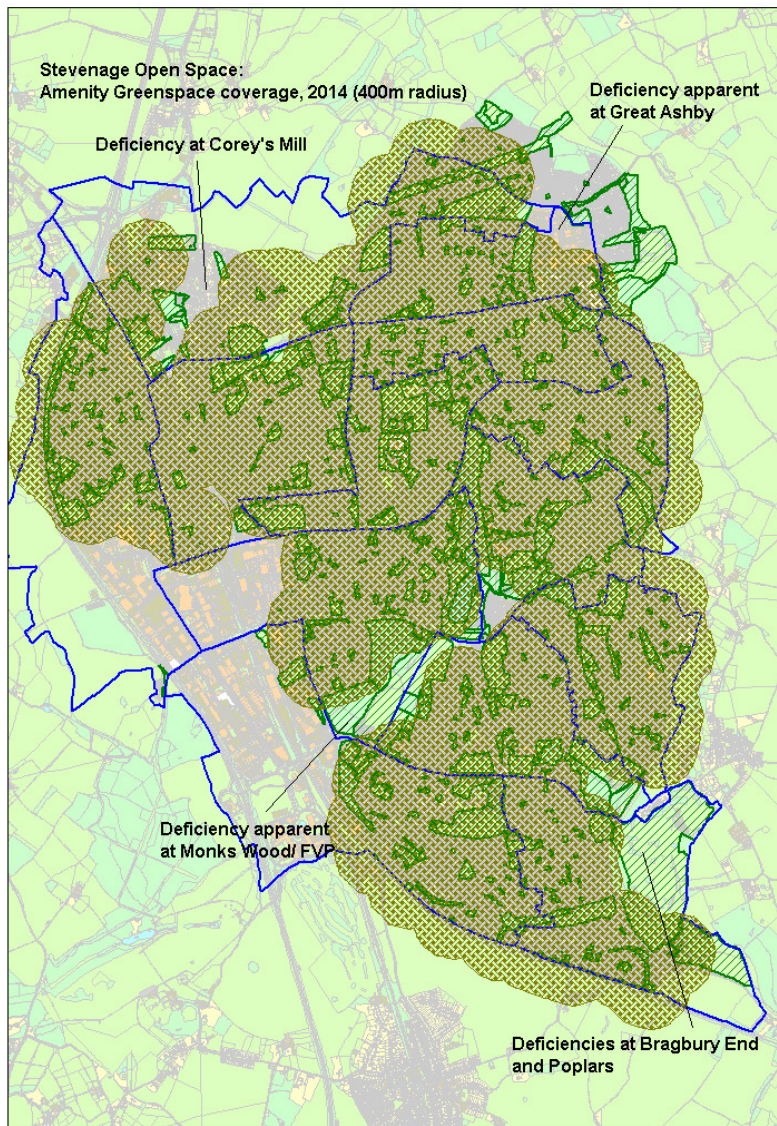
ID	Name	Neighbourhood	Size (ha)	Quality	Accessibility
363	Trent Close	Old Stevenage	1.01	Very good	Very good
144	Bedwell Park*	Bedwell	0.99	Good	Good
186	Archer Road*	Bedwell	0.98	Average	good
310	The Noke	Broadwater	0.95	Average	Average
164	Ramsdell	Bedwell	0.89	Good	Good
616	Clovelly Way	Old Stevenage	0.89	Good	Good
450	Chester Road and Canterbury Way	St Nicholas	0.84	Good	average
541	Caernarvon Close / Balmoral Close	Broadwater	0.78	Good	good
499	Chepstow Close*	St Nicholas	0.68	Average	Good
30	Shephall Green	Shephall	0.66	Good	Good
554	Blenheim Way / Stirling Close	Broadwater	0.60	Good	Average
162	Holly Copse	Bedwell	0.58	Average	good

2.4.15 Chells District Park may be lost through the plan period to a relocation of the rugby club, but this is currently not a certainty. Such a proposal would leave Chells seriously lacking in green space; Chells is already deficient across most typologies without the loss of Chells District Park.

2.4.16 Mead Way may also be lost to facilitate access to the west of the A1(M) but this could also be in the latter half of the plan period and is again the subject of some uncertainty. This side of town is, however, likely to benefit from the provision of new open spaces and playing pitches on the west side of the A1(M) (see Aim 4, above).

#### Losing amenity space

2.4.17 The loss of amenity green space is discussed in detail in the conclusion to Part One. Around ten hectares was lost between 2006 and 2014, though the majority of losses have been down to technical issues related to the approach to the review – land has been excluded where it is too small or considered not to be functional open space. However, for the most part, this land remains open and, as much as it was before, available. Only nine sites had been lost to development in the eight years, which is a promising return. However, it seems likely – because of the absence of building land within Stevenage Borough, but a continuing pressure to deliver houses – that pressure on small pieces of open space will remain.



2.4.18 Analysis of the availability of amenity green space to households shows that the spread remains good, despite the loss of the ten hectares. There are four main areas where coverage is weaker:

- **North-west**

**Stevenage at Corey's Mill:** the deficiency existed in 2006, but has worsened as a result of removals. There are a number of woodland and natural areas in this vicinity, and private space is provided by John Henry Newman School and the Rugby Club. The area also benefits from proximity to the open countryside, notably the footpath across the northern edge of the town;

- **North-east**

**Stevenage adjacent to Great Ashby:** this deficiency coincides with the location of the industrial area at Pin Green and the borough boundary. Residential areas within the boundary are generally covered and the map demonstrates that open space is evident just over the

boundary within North Hertfordshire district (see *Aim 6*, above);

- **South-central Stevenage at Monks Wood:** the lack of amenity space in the southern part of Monks Wood is partly a factor of the location at the edge of Gunnels Wood (industrial area) and Roaring Meg (retail area) where amenity green space isn't provided, and partly because of the presence of the wood and Fairlands Valley Park. This raises the question of multi-functionality; the southern part of Fairlands Valley Park is almost certainly providing a source of amenity green space for people living locally.
- **South-east Stevenage at Bragbury End:** again, the deficiency is down to the proximity to the borough boundary, the presence of the golf club and the absence of any significant residential development in the area that is not covered. The amenity



green space potential at Ridlins (and possibly Shephalbury) Park is also not accounted for on the map, and would lessen those deficiencies a little.

- 2.4.19 With the possible exception of Corey's Mill, the deficient areas have other forms of open space available or reasons why deficiency is apparent.

In providing new areas of amenity green space over the plan period, the Council will investigate the possibility of delivering new spaces within existing areas of deficiency at Corey's Mill, as defined on the map.

#### **Community Action, Volunteering and Friends Groups**

- 2.4.20 In common with the commitment set out in the Parks and Gardens section above, the Council will listen to proposals that come forward from the community to undertake projects or management related to amenity green space in their areas. This extends to green spaces that are below the threshold for inclusion within the strategy but would benefit from community ownership (e.g. by licensing).

#### **Wildlife sites and commons**

- 2.4.21 A small number of amenity green spaces – Poplars (84), Marymead (276) and Exeter Close (427) are identified as wildlife sites, and Letchmore Common (347) is an area of common land. These are dealt with further in the natural and semi-natural section.

## 2.5 Allotments

### *Issues:*

- Standards
- St. Nicholas and the cross boundary issues
- New development areas

- 2.5.1 There are fifteen allotments sites throughout the borough. The Council works in close partnership with the Stevenage Gardens and Allotment Association (SGAA) to administer, manage and maintain the allocation and provision of allotments through the town.
- 2.5.2 At the time of the previous survey in 2006, the occupancy rate at the 651 plots over those sites was 63%, and there was a very limited waiting list. Two of the sites were considered to be in a poor condition and were proposed for disposal or conversion to other open space use (Lawrence Road and Greydells) and a third (Walkern Road) was to be reduced in size.
- 2.5.3 Since that time, interest in having an allotment has picked up, and occupancy is at 100% with waiting lists on all sites. According to data on the SGAA website in October 2014, the plot numbers have risen to 919 and there were 190 people on the waiting list.
- 2.5.4 The previous open space study reduced the standard for allotments to recognise the drop in interest, but this strategy proposes raising it to reflect the current provision and the waiting list, and proposes a proportionate provision in new development areas. At the time of the review, the allotments at Edmonds Drive had not been completed, and this is considered to be part of the new provision (expected opening January 2015).

### **Standards**

- 2.5.5 There is no national standard for the provision of allotments, but there is a statutory duty upon the Council to provide allotments where it believes there is a demand. There are difficulties in Stevenage with this duty:
- land is scarce within the boundary for many uses, and this includes allotments. Even if it were necessary to provide more land for allotments, sourcing that land would be difficult;
  - the use of allotments over time will fluctuate, as has been demonstrated between 2006 and 2014. Usage can go down as well as up;
  - there is a duty upon the Council to continue to maintain sites, even when they are under-occupied. This is clearly most efficient when sites are fully occupied, and less efficient when vacancy rates grow.
- 2.5.6 Whilst there is no national standard for allotment provision, the 1969 'Thorpe Report'<sup>51</sup> provides something of a baseline from which many authorities provide a standard. It recommended 15 plots per 1000 households, but it is not legally binding. However, because of the irrevocable loss of up to 30% of allotments since 1969, the National Allotment Society

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<sup>51</sup> The 1969 Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Allotments Cmnd.4166

(NSALG) has recommended 20 standard (250m<sup>2</sup>) plots per 1000 households. This equates to 0.125ha per 1000 population, based on 2.2 people per household. The proposed standard for Stevenage is above this level.

- 2.5.7 The Council has, in 2014, undertaken a detailed survey of allotments via the SGAA and has reviewed its strategy with respect to allotments and their provision. The open space survey demonstrates an under-provision in Chells, St. Nicholas and Shephall. The SGAA have identified a need within Chells, but also in Symonds Green. Shephall's provision will be improved with the addition of the allotments at Edmonds Drive in early 2015.

In line with the identified shortfall in the borough and the recommendations of the allotment strategy and survey, the Council will seek to make new provision for allotments within the neighbourhood areas of Chells and Old Stevenage, with the latter best located within or close to Symonds Green ward.

#### **St. Nicholas and the cross boundary issues**

- 2.5.8 As discussed under Aim 6, there is an apparent deficiency of allotment provision within Great Ashby, as the consideration of St. Nicholas' provision of allotments is not improved by including Great Ashby. The provision of allotments in Great Ashby is not the responsibility of the Council, but rests with NHDC. There is also anecdotal evidence that residents of Great Ashby who wish to have an allotment need to travel to Letchworth or Baldock to achieve this. Residents living in Great Ashby are not entitled to allotments in Stevenage borough.

In order to recognise deficiencies in allotment provision in St. Nicholas and Great Ashby, the Council will negotiate the opportunity for allotment provision in any future development across the administrative boundary in north east Stevenage.

#### **New development areas**

- 2.5.9 The provision of new, large scale allotments are likely to require a piece of land between 0.5 and 1 hectare to enable new allotments to be provided at the standard set out in this strategy; allotments won't come forward on an ad hoc basis. This suggests that the most likely opportunities for realising new development to meet the growing needs of the population will be found at either north of Stevenage or west of Stevenage.

In order to maintain a proportionate provision of allotments as the town grows, the Council will seek opportunities to provide a new allotment site within the major development areas at the north and west of Stevenage. This will be achieved through negotiation with any potential developer bringing forward proposals in these areas.

## 2.6 Natural and Semi-Natural spaces

### *Issues:*

- Local Wildlife Sites
- Woodlands
- Principal woodlands and woodlands of wildlife interest
- Other natural and semi-natural spaces
- Access to Natural Green space Standards (ANGSt)

- 2.6.1 The natural and semi-natural typology is the second most numerous group of sites and, like the amenity green space typology, isn't consistent in the offer such sites have. The sites are variously woodland, grassland, scrub, wetlands or reserves of some kind. They are distinct from amenity green space generally through the nature of their cover, the use to which they're put or their designation (e.g. as a wildlife or site of biodiversity interest).
- 2.6.2 Largely because of the urban nature of the borough, and the tight administrative boundary that follows the urban form, the borough does not have large areas of natural and semi-natural space.
- 2.6.3 There were 82 sites in the review, covering a total of 145.7ha of land. In contrast to the amenity green space sites, nearly half (39) are over a hectare in size. The largest sites are as follows:

Table 18: The largest Natural and Semi-Natural sites

ID	Name	Neighbourhood	Size (ha)	Quality	Access
167	Whomerley Wood	Bedwell	14.58	Good	Good
168	Monks Wood	Bedwell	11.06	Very good	Good
618	Sound Barrier	Old Stevenage	7.66	Good	Good
34	Ridlins Wood	Shephall	7.06	Average	Average
535	Wychdell Water meadow / Stevenage Brook Marsh	Broadwater	6.65	Good	Average
381	Lanterns wood	Chells	6.44	Average	average
95	Ashtree Wood	Chells	5.23	Average	Average
431	Wellfield Wood	St Nichols	4.92	Average	Good
262	Roebuck Wood	Broadwater	4.34	Good	Good
488	Martins Wood	St Nicholas	4.09	Average	Average
37	Aston End Brook	Shephall	3.71	Good	Average
506	Ridlins End Nature Reserve	Broadwater	3.26	Good	Good
71	Great Collenswood South	Shephall	3.23	Average	Average
251	Whitney Wood	Old Stevenage	3.11	Average	Good
96	Pestcotts Wood	Chells	3.1	Average	poor

### **Local Wildlife Sites**

- 2.6.4 Local Wildlife Sites<sup>52</sup> (LWS) are sites of substantive nature conservation value and although they do not have any statutory status, many are equal in quality to the representative sample of sites that make up the series of statutory Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There are more than 40,000 LWS in England overseen by 65 Local Sites systems, including the Hertfordshire Local Wildlife Sites Partnership (HLWSP). These systems vary considerably in terms of size (both the administrative area they cover and the number of sites selected) and cover contrasting landscapes in coastal, rural and urban situations. Local Sites systems encompass both biodiversity and geological conservation.
- 2.6.5 The HLWSP oversees the management of the LWS list within Hertfordshire, and is responsible for ratifying, adding, deselecting and surveying sites. It will also support local authorities in meeting their responsibilities to meet the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 by providing the best information available regarding their important natural assets.
- 2.6.6 The adopted Stevenage District Plan 2004 identified 37 Local Wildlife Sites at policy EN17. One of these sites was also identified as a regionally important geological site. Since that time, two sites have been deselected (Fishers Green Meadow and Marymead Spring) and two sites have been identified (Barnwell School and Whomerley Wood road verge), meaning there were still 37 sites when they were reviewed by the HMWT in summer of 2013. A woodland site has been split into two sites since, which means at the current time, there are 38 identified LWS. They are largely found within the natural and semi-natural typology, and the majority of them are woodlands.
- 2.6.7 The report of the HMWT from late 2013 sets out the current condition of the LWS (where access was possible) and any management issues. The details of this report were provided to the Council's Environmental Performance and Development Manager and any recommendations can be reviewed through the BAP and the management priorities of the Council.
- 2.6.8 There are some differences between the boundaries of the LWS and the open spaces. This is because they are being defined for different purposes. The boundaries of the LWS are set by the HLWSP and are reflected in the review work done for the Council by HMWT. These boundaries are subject to annual review by the HLWSP. Those LWS that not defined as open spaces remain protected as LWS.

Sites designated as Local Wildlife Sites are afforded protection as sites of substantive nature conservation value. Development on or affecting Local Wildlife Sites will be resisted, except where the primary objective is the conservation and / or diversification of any recognised biodiversity asset. Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodlands, should be refused.

- 2.6.9 A full list of the Local Wildlife Sites is set out at Appendix M.

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<sup>52</sup> Also known as 'Local Sites'.

## **Woodlands**

- 2.6.10 The most numerous type within the natural and semi-natural category is woodlands (51). Most of these were farm woodlands that were retained within the new town as landscape features and areas for recreation. They were mainly composed of neglected hornbeam coppice with standard ash and oak trees. Many of these woodland areas are designated as ancient woodland sites, which is a nationally agreed designation and means that the land that they occupy has been wooded since at least 1600 AD. The species of tree and the composition of the wood however are not natural, having been altered by management and new plantings over the centuries.
- 2.6.11 Management of the town's woodlands is carried out in line with a series of 5-year plans which are drawn up and agreed with the Forestry Commission.
- 2.6.12 In the early years of the new town, the woodlands came into public ownership. Grants became available to replant unmanaged woodlands with a mixture of conifers and deciduous. Felling of the neglected and overgrown hornbeam coppice was carried out, followed by replanting with timber species trees such as pine and beech. This policy has changed in recent years as the value of the locally native hornbeam woodland to wildlife has been recognised. There is now a programme of re-coppicing and re-instatement.
- 2.6.13 The present five-year plan states that the town's woodlands will be managed in order to provide recreation and amenity for local residents and also to ensure their survival in a manner benefiting both the landscape of the town and local wildlife.
- 2.6.14 The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)<sup>53</sup> sets out a number of actions for some of the woodlands in Stevenage:
- Sishes Wood: remove holly and laurel wood;
  - Monks Wood West: re-coppice Hornbeam over five year period; fence repair (reported to Roaring Meg management company who have responsibility for this area of woodland);
  - Monk's Wood & Whomerley Wood: agree a five year management plan with HMWT; create a Woodland Trail and link to Shackledell Grasshopper Trail;
  - All woods: inspect annually and remove litter and fly-tipping.
- 2.6.15 The extent to which work can be done throughout the year is limited by resources and time. However, issues with woodlands can be reported by the community, and regular visits are made to the woods by the Council's officers to deal with identified problems (e.g. fly-tipping, dangerous trees, path clearance and maintenance etc). Works related to trees is not limited to the recognised woods, with projects also carried out around the ancient lanes and hedgerows (some woodlands are contained within these routes; see green corridors section), to street trees and to trees protected by tree preservation orders (TPO).

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<sup>53</sup> Biodiversity Action Plan for Stevenage' was prepared by Stevenage Borough Council and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust during 2010 and covers the five year period between 2010/11 and 2014/15. A review is expected to be carried out for the next five year period.

2.6.16 Whomerley Wood and Monk's Wood are the largest areas of woodland in the borough, and are the focus of specific works, particularly for the Council's Green Space Volunteers. An ongoing project in Whomerley Wood is seeking to re-establish a traditional woodland environment in a northern section by cutting back and coppicing over a ten-year period. The woods, which effectively form a continuously wooded space of some 25 hectares, is not only important from the perspective of social and historical development and past human habitation (which has given rise to a scheduled ancient monument in the northern area), but also by virtue of its close proximity to Fairlands Valley Park, the Millennium Woodland and Shackledell Grassland. All together these form a major asset for the town for recreation, education and biodiversity.

2.6.17 Other woods around the town are less significant in terms of their size. Most are accessible to some extent and are used by the town's communities for various purposes, including as short cut routes and for dog walking and exercise. The woods themselves vary, with some having footpaths and lighting and others being less accommodating (most are owned by the Council, but others are owned privately).

#### **Principal woodlands and woodlands of wildlife interest**

2.6.18 As with all open spaces, there is a general presumption that all woodlands will be protected for their own sake and that within the resource constraints of the Council, woodlands will be protected and maintained for open access whilst also nurturing biodiversity. There are key sites that the Council prioritises because of the needs of the borough and its population and that it protects because a specific known asset.

The following are the Council's principal woodland sites and provide significant natural open space to their neighbourhood. These sites should be available to the community for information recreation and form the focus for investment, maintenance and enhancement. Any reduction in their role or significance should be resisted. Sites of specific wildlife interest will be managed and maintained in partnership with stakeholder organisations, such as the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

ID	Name	Neighbourhood	Size (ha)	Quality	Accessibility	Reason
167	Whomerley Wood	Bedwell	14.58	good	Good	Countryside Heritage site. Wildlife site. Archaeological significance
168	Monks Wood	Bedwell	11.06	Very good	Good	Countryside Heritage site. Wildlife site. Archaeological significance
34	Ridlins Wood	Shephall	7.06	Average	Average	Wildlife site
381	Lanterns Wood	Chells	6.44	Average	Average	Principal Open Space

ID	Name	Neighbourhood	Size (ha)	Quality	Accessibility	Reason
95	Ashtree Wood	Chells	5.23	Average	Average	Wildlife Site
431	Wellfield Wood	St Nicholas	4.92	Average	Good	Wildlife Site
488	Martins Wood	St Nicholas	4.09	Average	Average	Wildlife Site, Archaeological Site
71	Great Collenswood South	Shephall	3.23	average	Average	Wildlife Site
96	Pestcotts Wood	Chells	3.10	Average	Poor	Wildlife Site
33	Loves Wood	Shephall	2.80	Poor	Poor	Wildlife Site
94	Abbots Grove Woodland	Chells	2.39	Average	Average	Wildlife Site
402	Mobbsbury Park	Chells	2.06	Average	Average	Principal Open Space
199	Sishes Wood	Bedwell	1.92	Good	Good	Wildlife Site
22	Shackleton Spring Woodland	Shephall	1.89	Good	Average	Wildlife Site
73	Sinks Spring	Shephall	1.24	Average	Average	Wildlife Site
72	Great Collenswood North	Chells	1.02	Average	Average	Wildlife Site
104	Hanginghill Wood	Chells	0.95	Poor	Average	Wildlife Site
131	Wiltshire Spring Wood (west)	Bedwell / Chells	0.74	Poor	Average	Wildlife Site, Principal Open Space
273	Hertford Road Wood	Broadwater	0.71	Poor	Poor	Wildlife Site
209	Grace Way Woodland	Bedwell	0.66	Good	Average	Wildlife Site
923	Ascot Crescent	St Nicholas	0.57	Good	Good	Wildlife Site
97	Blacknells Spring Wood	Chells	0.51	Poor	Very poor	Wildlife Site
252	Whitney Wood	Old Stevenage	0.42	Poor	Poor	Wildlife Site

\*Site 923 contains within it a children's play area; a second area (490) sits between site 488 and 923. See children and young people section.

## Other natural and semi-natural spaces

### 1. Common Land

2.6.19 There are five areas of common land in Stevenage, and four are included within the natural and semi-natural typology (the fifth, Letchmore Common (347), is included within the amenity green space typology). The four areas are:

- Fishers Green (622/623)
- Norton Green (560/561)



- Symonds Green (579)
- Six Hills Common (936)



2.6.20 The commons in Stevenage are managed under the Scheme of Regulation and Management Commons Act 1899. The Church Commission has covenant over most of our commons. This means that we must consult with them before we break ground.

2.6.21 Common land is protected under several Acts of Parliament including The Law of Commons Amendment Act 1893, National Trust Acts 1907, The Law of Property Act 1925 and Road Traffic Act 1988.

2.6.22 The commons are open to the community for informal recreational purposes, and each has some interpretation and a presentation of the by-laws to explain their importance and relevance.

2.6.23 Their protection as commons means they need no further reference within the strategy.

2.6.24 Three of the four sites are of archaeological significance. Six Hills Common contains within it an archaeological asset (the six hills) which is also protected as nationally important remains.

## 2. Grassland and Water meadow

2.6.25 There are five sites within the study that are predominantly ecologically important grasslands or wetlands. All of them are recognised as wildlife sites and are important in their own right. They are:

- 9 Shackledell Grassland
- 240 Weston Road / Martins Way semi-natural
- 259 Elder Way water meadow
- 506 Ridlins End Nature Reserve
- 535 Wychdell Water meadow / Stevenage Brook marsh

2.6.26 Shackledell Grassland is located on the eastern edge of Fairlands Valley Park midway between Six Hills Way and Broadhall Way. It is described by the BAP as, 'arguably the most important wildlife site in Stevenage,' because of the presence of a variety of cricket species made possible by the combination of grassland and scrub which is essential to the habitats of the insects. The BAP made a number of recommendations in relation to the area, including proposals for annual maintenance to assist with encroachment of scrub and the enlargement of the habitat into Fairlands Valley Park. These activities have been a key part of the work of the Green Space Volunteers in past years, and the area has been used to educate the community about this valuable biodiversity resource in the heart of the town. As a result, the area of the grassland has been significantly extended which in turn has improved the future of the site.

- 2.6.27 Martins Way is a principal highway running east west across northern Stevenage linking Hitchin Road close to the A1(M) to Gresley Way and towards Great Ashby. The south facing bank on the northern side between Hitchin Road and Grace Way is chalk grassland, with bare patches and anthills making good conditions for local butterflies. Martins Way is also a regionally important geological site (RIGS). The BAP outlines the need for an agreed annual mowing regime to be in place. Site 240 is at the eastern end of the wildlife site, with the southern section of site 247 also bounding the protected area. Martins Way is addressed further in the Green Corridors and Green Links section.
- 2.6.28 Elder Way water meadow lies close to the town centre, on the south side of the North Herts College and the north side of Roaring Meg. It is a protected area of open land through which the Stevenage Brook runs. It should support a variety of wildlife including butterflies. The BAP noted that its appearance is often more akin to a wasteland than a wildlife site because of its proximity to the retail park and the prevalence of litter and waste. The site has no public access and is not owned or maintained by the Council.
- 2.6.29 Stevenage Brook marsh is an area of grassland further down the course of the Stevenage Brook than the Elder Way flood meadows. It is a wide and long area of open land, accessible from a number of points both north and south of it where residential development predominates. The brook is a chalk stream, and one of the rarest habitats in the country. It is, however, flourishing in this location and has a thriving community of small fish. The grassland is constantly under threat from a variety of sources, including poor management, inappropriate planting, abstraction and human intervention (litter, overuse). Again, the BAP set out a plan of management to reduce the possibility of diminishing the value of the landscape, and the HMWT has been running a separate Chalk Stream project in the County to raise awareness of the streams as a resource in Hertfordshire generally.
- 2.6.30 Ridlins Mire nature reserve is the only wetland in the borough, and also the only HMWT reserve. This small area has developed where water appears in the form of a spring. The permanently wet conditions have allowed the development of peat, slowly growing over many years into a domed structure. This unusual habitat is technically called 'rheotrophic hangmire' and is only one of four in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The top of the peat dome supports unusual spring-line fen and mire vegetation with prominent tussock sedge and marsh marigold.

### **3. Barriers and Buffers**

- 2.6.31 There are five sites within this typology that are effectively landscape buffers between residential areas and transport corridors. These sites are:
- 611 Sound Barrier plantation
  - 617 Sound Barrier A
  - 618 Sound Barrier B
  - 910 Blenheim Way Amenity buffer
  - 929 Fishers Green meadow

2.6.32 With the exception of 910, these sites form a landscape gap between the A1(M) and housing in Symonds Green, and are effectively continuous. Site 910 provides a long landscaping buffer between Watton Road and Bragbury Lane on the north side of the railway line between Stevenage and Watton-at-Stone. Sites 611 and 929 are recognised wildlife sites, but all provide some amenity for local people.

#### **4. Green Corridors**

2.6.33 The following natural and semi-natural spaces are dealt with in the green corridors chapter, as they are contained within defined ancient lanes, strategically important routes or green corridors:

- 37 Aston Brook End
- 48 Barleycroft
- 57 Dene Lane (Sheepcroft Hill)
- 389 Dryden Crescent
- 932 Fairlands Way A
- 933 Fairlands Way B

#### **Access to Natural Green space Standards (ANGSt)**

2.6.34 Natural England published, 'Nature Nearby' in January 2010. The aim of the publication was to provide guidance on the provision of natural open space for communities across England. In it, they offered standards for the provision of natural space and an assessment by which places could see how well they performed in relation to other (similar) places. It sought the adoption of these standards by green space professionals. The standards were referred to as ANGSt (access to natural green space standards).

2.6.35 ANGSt was first developed in the early 1990s based on an assessment of how far people were prepared to travel to access good quality natural green space. From this, the standards were designed as a tool for improving the quality of natural green spaces, increasing the provision of them and for improving connections and linkages between natural green spaces. Clearly, it provides a basis for strategic planning, contrast and comparison.

2.6.36 Much depends on the definition of 'natural green space', which Natural England defined as, 'places where human control and activities are not intensive so that a feeling of naturalness is allowed to predominate'. They argue that this would accommodate most areas defined as natural and semi-natural space, but discrete areas could also exist in other typologies (reflecting the multi-functionality of green space). 'Nature Nearby' provides a four level definition of what might comprise natural green space. With that in mind, the standards are set out as follows; everyone, wherever they live, should have an accessible natural green space:

- of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes' walk) from home;
- at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometres of home;
- one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home; and
- one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home; plus
- a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.

- 2.6.37 Natural England commissioned The Landscape Partnership to carry out an assessment of accessible natural green space provision in Hertfordshire shortly after the publication of the 'Nature Nearby' report. Stevenage Borough Council did not provide data for this study, which was published in June 2010 and entitled, '*Analysis of Accessible Natural Green space Provision for Hertfordshire*'. It does, however, assess Stevenage against ANGSt based on its own assessments.
- 2.6.38 However, the outcome of the report would not have been significantly different with the provision of data from Stevenage. Stevenage does not have a 500ha site within ten kilometres (the nearest are Lea Valley and Epping Forest to the southeast). There are two sites of 100ha within five kilometres of Stevenage (Hitch Wood in NHDC and Bramfield Woods in EHDC), the catchment of former covering much of the western side of the town and the latter just coming into the south of the town.
- 2.6.39 There is only one site of more than 20ha within the town (Monks and Whomerley Wood) which, in combination with sites in NHDC virtually ensures that the entire borough has at least some access to natural green space at one of the levels defined in ANGSt.
- 2.6.40 The town only has limited provision of natural green space at 2ha and above. The Natural England work missed some sites (such as Wychdell Water meadow and Whitney Wood) but included others (such as St Nicholas Park and Canterbury Road playing fields), but it is expected that this give and take would have probably yielded similar results –that around a third of households have access to local natural green space.
- 2.6.41 As discussed elsewhere, the opportunity for creating more publicly accessible natural green space within the administrative boundary is slim, and for sites at the larger end of the spectrum Stevenage will always be reliant on other places. Whilst some new land might become available through future development (the country park is an obvious example) the position in respect of ANGSt seems unlikely to improve much.
- 2.6.42 The larger areas of natural and semi-natural space are protected in this strategy as Principal Open Spaces and often expressly as Local Wildlife Sites.

## 2.7 Outdoor Sports Facilities

Issues:

- *School sites*
- *Commercial sports clubs*
- *Municipal playing fields*

- 2.7.1 The strategy in respect of the outdoor sports facilities of the borough have been thoroughly assessed by the Sports Facility Strategy undertaken for the Council by Nortoft during 2014. The finding, requirements, conclusions and recommendations of that work is set out in full in that report.
- 2.7.2 There are a number of areas that cross over into this work. They are:
- the multi-functionality of open spaces that provide sports pitches and the extent to which they offer a facility as a park or amenity green space; the impact that this has on standards and provision of amenity green space and parks in particular;
  - informal recreation within green spaces, particularly jogging and cycling;
  - connections between different spaces and the green links this creates through the town;
  - the implications for protecting spaces for their own sake in the event of formal sports declining in participation rates (i.e. pitches are no longer needed, placing their existence and purpose under threat from development).
- 2.7.3 There are 52 sites within the outdoor sports category in the revision of the PMP work. These broadly comprise of school sites, commercial sports clubs and municipal playing fields<sup>54</sup>.

### **School sites**

- 2.7.4 The vast majority of sites are the primary, secondary and other schools throughout the town. Most are accommodated within the Sports Facility Study (as part of the Playing Pitch Strategy) as providing some form of sports activity. This includes sites where the playing fields are divorced from the school itself, although in those cases, the spaces might be more publicly accessible. However, in all cases, the primary function is with the school and these spaces are not considered to be general amenity space.
- 2.7.5 A number of schools are not included within the Playing Pitch Strategy. These are mainly primary schools. Even so, the primary function of the space remains with the school and on the whole these sites are not generally available to the community as a whole.
- 2.7.6 A number of school sites are included within the town's green links or can be accessed easily from the green corridors (see Green Corridors and Green Links, Section 2.9).

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<sup>54</sup> Two sites don't fall into these categories. Pear Tree MUGA and Fairlands Valley Sailing lake are, however, dealt with in the Sport Facility Strategy and need no further comment here.

### **Commercial sports clubs**

2.7.7 There are seven sites that comprise sports clubs of one type or another. These are:

- Stevenage Golf Club
- Stevenage Rugby Club / Lister Tennis Club
- Stevenage Borough Football Club (The Lamex Stadium)
- Stevenage Borough Football Club Academy (Shephalbury)
- Stevenage Borough Football Club training ground (Bragbury End)
- Stevenage Cricket and Hockey Club
- The Football Akademy

2.7.8 Of these, the football club's stadium and training ground are for their exclusive use. Of the remainder, either membership is required and / or a fee is paid. None of them have any secondary or incidental use for participatory recreation.

### **Municipal playing fields**

2.7.9 The remaining sites are public playing fields. These are:

- Ridlins End playing fields\*
- Peartree Park\*
- Hampson Park\*
- King George V playing fields\*
- St. Nicholas Park\*
- Canterbury Way playing fields
- Shephalbury Park\*
- Chells District Park
- Mead Way Park

2.7.10 Six of these spaces (\*) have been identified as 'destination parks' because of the range of activities they offer beyond the provision of sports, and an allowance has been made to distinguish sports space from the remainder of the park.

2.7.11 The remaining sites, whilst often having play areas, are principally open, level, grassed areas with a considerable area set aside for formal sports provision, including changing facilities. The Sports Facility Study concludes, broadly, that the current quantum of pitch provision in football, rugby and cricket needs to be maintained and that whilst there is current capacity – particularly in the adult football game – this capacity will be used up with the growth of the town.

2.7.11 The position this review takes is to acknowledge that these three sites are effectively used for pitch sports, but that they do have a secondary use as large areas of amenity green space for the local communities which supplements their primary provision. As with the six destination parks above, the sports pitches are accounted for, and the remainder of the space is attributed to the amenity green space typology. This is particularly welcome for Chells, which is deficient in this type of space over the plan period, and for St. Nicholas, which benefits from the Canterbury Way playing fields. This is dealt with further in the Amenity Green space section, see para 2.4.11 and Table 17.

2.7.12 Sports pitches and facilities are identified through the Sports Facility Study, and their protection is assured through para 74 of the NPPF.

## 2.8 Children and Young People

### Issues

- Definition
- Quality: completing the rationalisation
- Accessibility: addressing the gaps
- New sites
- Monitoring the use of sites

### Definition

- 2.8.1 The sites within the children and young people category are predominantly small scale (less than 0.1ha) unsupervised, equipped play spaces defined by a fence or hard area, the presence of multiple pieces of equipment (slide, swings, climbing etc) and often located within a wider open space with bins and seating present.
- 2.8.2 The number of sites within the previous study was over 100, but the Council has undertaken a full review and rationalisation programme. A list of 52 sites exists on the Council's website, but this does not reflect the whole picture. Some of these sites have been removed or developed whilst others have more than one play area<sup>55</sup>. For the avoidance of doubt, the status of each of the children's play areas in relation to this study is listed in the table below.

**Table 19: Children's Play Areas**

site ID	name		count	responsibility	status	Website ref
<b>BEDWELL</b>						
222	K.G.V.	include	1	SBC		1
200/905	Hampson Park	include	2/3	SBC		2
201	Hampson Park (Pin Green Play Area)	exclude			supervised	
202	Hampson Park MUGA	exclude			sport	
129	Fairlands Valley - Café (Funded from s 106)	include	4	SBC		3
130	Fairlands Valley - Shephall View	include	5	SBC		3
145	Bedwell Park	include	6	SBC		5
187	Archer Road	include	7	SBC		7
141	The Dell	include	8	SBC		4
148	Town Centre Gardens	include	9	SBC		6
173	Rockingham Way	include	10	SBC		8
152	Town Centre Library #	include	11	SBC		52
151	Town Centre Market Place #	include	12	SBC		52
150	Town Centre Queensway South #	include	13	SBC		52
149	Bowes Lyon House Skate Park	exclude			supervised	

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces/25669/>. Hampson Park, Fairlands Valley Park, Shephalbury Park, Peartree Park, St. Nicholas Park, York Road and the Town Centre Play Areas contain more than one play area. Mount Pleasant and Almonds Lane have been developed for housing, and Skipton Close, Kimbolton Crescent, Hopton Road, Brighton Way and Minehead Way have now been removed, the latter two with a view to possibly replacing provision on site 599.



<b>BROADWATER</b>					
544	Balmoral Close 26	include	14	SBC	15
551	Blenheim Way Central	include	15	SBC	16
534	Holly Leys	include	16	SBC	14
318	Shephalbury Park Main Entrance	include	17	SBC	9
317	Shephalbury Park west	include	18	SBC	
267	St Margarets	include	19	SBC	10
	<i>Skipton Close</i>			removed	11
	<i>Kimbolton Cresecent s/o 88</i>	exclude		removed	12
311	<i>The Noke</i>	include	20	SBC	13
947	<i>Sacombe Crescent</i>	include	21	developer	
304	<i>Braemar Close</i>	exclude		proposed	
<b>CHELLS</b>					
110	Campshill Park	include	22	SBC	20
382	Chells District Park	include	23	SBC	17
398	Cook Road	include	24	SBC	19
404	Raleigh Crescent	include	25	SBC	18
948	George Lighton Court	include	59	SBC	
406	Stanley Road	review	A	SBC	
<b>OLD STEVENAGE</b>					
-	<del>Almonds Hill</del>	exclude		removed	28
327	Burymead	include	26	SBC	27
243	Chancellors Road	include	27	SBC	25
570	Clovelly Way	include	28	SBC	31
638	Fleetwood Crescent	include	29	SBC	34
	<i>Hopton Road/Scarborough Av</i>	exclude		removed	23
619	Kessingland Avenue	include	30	SBC	22
567	Meadway (Site under review)	include	31	SBC	21
628	Skegness Road f/o 34	include	32	SBC	29
228	St Nicholas Park	include	33	SBC	43
229	St Nicholas Park Old Bourne Way	include	34	SBC	
643	Torquay Crescent s/o 78	include	35	SBC	24
345	Whitesmead Rec.	include	36	SBC	33
234	Canterbury Way Park	include	37	SBC	44
599	Scarborough Avenue	review	B	SBC	
232	Newcastle Close	review	C	SBC	50
913	Riccat Lane	include	38	developer	
914	Windrush Close	include	39	developer	
934	Watson Road	include	40	developer	
<b>SHEPHALL</b>					
67	Bandley Hill Donkey Park	include	41	SBC	38
52	Lapwing Rise	include	42	SBC	40
14	Leaves Spring	include	43	SBC	37
89	Parishes Mead	include	44	SBC	39

4	Pear tree Park	include	45	SBC	35
901	<i>Pear tree Skate Park</i>	exclude			
2	Ridlings Wood Recreation	include	46	SBC	36
78	Shearwater Close	include	47	SBC	42
81	Sparrow Drive	include	48	SBC	41
10	The Canyon Play Area	exclude			supervised
64	Bandle Hill Play Centre	exclude			supervised
76	Jackdaw Close	include	49	SBC	
87	Lime Close	include	50	SBC	
<b>ST NICHOLAS</b>					
423	Canterbury Way r/o 387	include	51	SBC	45
906	Chepstow Close	include	52	SBC	49
497	Emperors Gate	include	53	SBC	51
490	Martins Wood	include	54	SBC	48
478	The Oval Shops	include	55	SBC	47
	Wellfield Court	include	60	SBC	
440	Wellfield	review	D	SBC	
921	Glanville Crescent	include	56	developer	
923*	Ascot Crescent	include	57	SBC	
456/457	York Road f/o 372	include	58	SBC	46

2.8.3 There are therefore 60 sites within the review, plus four additional sites (A-D) that exist but in a poor condition and one site proposed. Two sites, highlighted above in yellow, are Council playgrounds provided for specific Council accommodation. Site 923 (\*) is included as a natural and semi-natural space and contains a wildlife site (see Natural and Semi-natural space section). Supervised play centres and those sites covered by the Sports Facility Study are excluded from consideration here<sup>56</sup>.

2.8.4 The supervised play areas listed above are part of a wider approach the Council takes in ensuring that children's play, and their development as a result of the provision of play opportunities, meets their needs. The Council's **Play Strategy** needs to be updated to ensure that the recommendations within the open space strategy are carried forward as part of a holistic approach to play.

2.8.5 Children have a great capacity for imaginative and creative play, and will find opportunities outside of the formal provision of 'equipment'. This review cannot account for spaces without equipment that might be used regularly by children for imaginary or creative play. Such spaces will be close to homes, well contained and are perceived to be safe. They are likely to be covered by the amenity green space typology, again emphasising the multi-functionality of open spaces and the importance of incidental green spaces.

<sup>56</sup> The MUGAs at Hampson Park and Pear Tree Park, as well as the skate parks at Pear Tree and Bowes Lyon, are addressed in the Sports Facility Study. New provision of MUGAs and skate parks is also addressed there. The MUGA at The Dell is not addressed by the Sports Facility Study.

2.8.6 This review also cannot account for opportunities that will exist for street play in Stevenage. Whilst cars and their use have increased over time, and make some streets impossible to play in, others will be quiet enough to play in, and these will offer opportunities for children as well. Street play is becoming an increasingly important element of a child's growth and Play England / London Play are instrumental in nurturing an approach to it throughout the country<sup>57</sup>. It's therefore important to acknowledge the importance of equipped play spaces as part of the offer for children, and to seek an equitable distribution, but also to acknowledge that children also need other spaces that are not equipped and that these spaces and their use are difficult to quantify here.

#### **Quality: Completing the rationalisation**

2.8.7 Much of the site rationalisation work that was planned between 2006 and 2014 has been completed. This has ensured that there is more of an emphasis on quality of provision. Poorly performing sites have largely been removed, and better performing sites – or accessible sites – have been improved. Under the accessibility definitions of the PMP work, this has left gaps in provision, which are discussed below.

2.8.8 The play areas at the destination parks are likely to have a 'more than local' appeal, and residents may be willing to drive to these locations instead of using smaller, more localised facilities. They largely, but not entirely, make provision for toddlers, juniors and teens.

Many of the play areas in the borough are located within wider open spaces. The following play areas have status within this review by virtue of being located within the borough's Principal Open Spaces:

- *Destination parks:* play areas at:
  - Fairlands Valley Park (129 and 130)
  - Town Centre Gardens (148)
  - Hampson Park (200 and 905)
  - Shephalbury Park (317 and 318)
  - KGV (222)
  - Ridlins (2)
  - Peartree (4) and
  - St. Nicholas Park (228 and 229).
- *Principal amenity green space:* play areas at
  - Chells Park (382)
  - Canterbury Way (234)
  - Mead Way (567)
  - Bandle Hill (67)
  - Burymead (327)
  - Campshill Park (110)
  - York Road (456 and 457)
  - Letchmore Road (345)
  - Bedwell Park (145)
  - Archer Road (187)

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.playengland.org.uk/our-work/projects/street-play.aspx>

- The Noke (311)
- Caernarvon Close / Balmoral Close (544)
- Blenheim Way / Stirling Close (551)
- Chepstow Close (906).
- *Natural and semi-natural*: play areas at Martins Wood (490 and 923)

2.8.9 The remaining Council play areas are largely located within amenity green spaces around the town, but they remain an important aspect of town-wide provision of play areas. Many of these sites are in good condition and offer a good quality of provision for their catchment population. They tend to cater for toddlers and juniors.

The Council will continue to manage and maintain its portfolio of play area sites outside of the borough's key open spaces as a specific provision for the catchment populations. These sites are:

ID	Name	Neighbourhood	Area	Quality score <sup>58</sup>	Access score <sup>59</sup>
52	Lapwing Rise	Shephall	0.01	131	58
76	Jackdaw Close	Shephall	0.01	128	46
78	Shearwater Close	Shephall	0.02	122	43
81	Sparrow Drive	Shephall	0.03	151	52
87	Lime Close	Shephall	0.01	126	46
89	Parishes Mead	Shephall	0.02	124	35
150	Town Centre (Queensway)	Bedwell	0.01	119	52
151	Town Centre (Market Place)	Bedwell	0.01	122	55
152	Town Centre (Southgate)	Bedwell	0.01	131	58
173	Rockingham Way	Bedwell	0.04	138	46
243	Chancellors Road	Old Stevenage	0.02	Not surveyed	
267	St. Margaret's	Broadwater	0.06	138	53
398	Cook Road	Chells	0.16	106	42
423	Canterbury Way A	St Nicholas	0.02	136	59
478	The Oval	St Nicholas	0.02	Not surveyed	
497	Emperors Gate	St Nicholas	0.02	137	57
534	Holly Leys	Broadwater	0.01	133	53
570	Clovelly Way	Old Stevenage	0.14	149	58
619	Kessingland Avenue	Old Stevenage	0.07	102	50
628	Skegness Road	Old Stevenage	0.06	145	52
638	Fleetwood Crescent	Old Stevenage	0.02	120	56
643	Torquay Crescent	Old Stevenage	0.08	142	53
948	George Lighton Court	Chells	0.01	120	35

2.8.10 However, there remains work to do to ensure that the play areas that the Council provides are well maintained, available for use and safe to use. The surveys demonstrated that there are a number of sites that are below the standard that we would expect to reach. These sites

<sup>58</sup> The benchmark maximum score based on the criteria is 170, though a variable element is added to account for the variety of play equipment at each site.

<sup>59</sup> The maximum score possible is 75.

scored 100 or less on the quality rating when scored against the criteria (see para 1.2.38 – 1.2.54). These sites should be brought up to standard or removed, whilst sites currently performing well should be maintained.

A number of the Council's play area sites have been found to be underperforming. These sites will be the subject of an early review to determine whether they should be removed, refurbished or replaced. Decisions will be informed through public consultation:

ID	Name	Neighbourhood	Area	Quality score	Access score
14	Leaves Spring	Shephall	0.07	74	39
141	The Dell	Bedwell	0.12	poor	poor
232	Newcastle Close	Old Stevenage	0.01	89	29
404	Drakes Drive	Chells	0.02	99	23
406	Stanley Road	Chells	0.01	70	20
440*	Wellfield	St Nicholas	0.01	71	18
599*	Scarborough Avenue	Old Stevenage	0.08	(116)	(47)

Any decision to remove a play area permanently must consider the effect of this on the accessibility of equipped play areas in the neighbourhood.

\* within wider areas of open space that are listed for potential disposal at Aim 3.

2.8.10 Of these poorly performing sites, two are in close proximity to one another in Chells. Chells has the lowest number of play areas of any part of the town (6); it has to be a concern that two of the six are under-performing.

#### **Accessibility: addressing the gaps**

2.8.11 The accessibility maps for the children's play areas (based on a five minute walk) are set out at Appendix J. This standard was established for the 2006 study. It is argued below that this five minute standard is no longer appropriate for Stevenage, and the maps are only included to allow comparison with 2006.

2.8.12 They show that – on the basis of a five minute walk – there are gaps in provision at certain parts of the town. The gaps are especially clear in north Stevenage at Symonds Green, the Grace Way corridor and Corey's Mill, and in the east at Chells Manor. Other gaps exist in Poplars along Gresley Way and south of the Hertford Road in Broadwater (though a new play area is planned for this final location).

2.8.13 In terms of numbers, the loss of children's play areas has been highest in Broadwater (22 sites down to 8) and Old Stevenage (33 sites down to 17), though these areas had the greatest density in the first place. This does demonstrate why some of those gaps have emerged. It is inevitable that removing sites from over 100 to below 70 will open up those gaps.

2.8.14 The rationalisation process intended to remove poorly performing sites, increase the quality of more important sites and reduce the management burden that was spread thinly across many sites. Add into this an implicit invitation to travel further to reach the best play spaces and increased use of children's accessories – like scooters – to travel and it's questionable whether the five minute radius remains a reasonable measure of accessibility for equipped play.

- 2.8.15 It is possible for the 'destination parks' to pick up some of the deficiencies that are now apparent at the five minute range, as many of these have seen significant investment in their play areas, widening their appeal to all under 18s, and updating the equipment. The consultation process demonstrated that residents are prepared to travel further for better facilities. Ridlins and Shephalbury Park can accommodate deficiencies in Poplars, particularly with major investment planned at Ridlins play area in early 2015. St. Nicholas Park and Chells Park can cover Chells Manor, which has not lost any play areas over the period. Chells also has further uncertainty given the possible use of Chells Park for a relocated rugby club.
- 2.8.16 Hampson Park could feasibly take some of the deficiency from the Grace Way corridor, particularly as walking access through Almond Spring (via a defined green corridor) is reasonable. It may be that areas of the edge of the town are still furthest from these more significant children's play areas and are not suitably provided for. Corey's Mill and Symonds Green are relatively isolated from the main destination parks and would probably need a car journey to access these facilities. This could be addressed through future development to the north and west of the town.
- 2.8.17 On balance, the destination park play areas ought to have a wider catchment than five minutes which will cover much of the town; the principal amenity green spaces with play areas, and the remaining unsupervised equipped sites serve to cover most of the town. The areas of deficiency in equipped children's play areas do not have obvious alternatives to compensate for a lack of provision, which suggests that any new provision of play sites should focus on these deficient areas as a priority. This is dealt with below under 'New Sites'. However, the Council will look to determine how well the enhanced play areas are serving our communities alongside the smaller sites. A review of provision should take place in three to five years hence.

#### **New sites**

- 2.8.18 The analysis of sites within the typology has demonstrated that, whilst there are still a good number of sites, the coverage is not always consistent, and removal of sites has opened up gaps in some areas. It is too early to determine whether the improvement in provision in destination parks compensates for this loss.
- 2.8.19 Recent rationalisation has only just been completed, and new investment is planned for play areas in the destination parks over the short term, starting with Ridlins. The Council is keen to ensure a good coverage, but is reluctant to start reproviding new sites to meet an accessibility standard that may no longer be appropriate.
- 2.8.20 The focus of investment into new provision of equipped play at the destination parks will increase their attractiveness, allowing a longer dwell time at these sites. Some of those sites, particularly Fairlands Valley Park, have other attractions and features which will make the longer trip to such destinations more worthwhile. It is possible that people would walk further to get to these sites, and it seems likely that people would be inclined to drive to them, particularly as most of these parks have easy parking, either on site or on the peripheries.

The Council will undertake an early review of the use of children's play spaces, with emphasis on the attractiveness of those play areas in destination parks, and the impact on areas where provision is seen to be more sparse.

This monitoring, and any need for reprovision should therefore be focused to areas of greatest perceived need and / or demonstrated deficiencies as shown on the map in Appendix J (in order of preference): Chells / Chells Manor, Symonds Green, Corey's Mill, Poplars, Grace Way Corridor. It should also be informed by community participation and engagement.

Any new provision, where it is deemed to be required, should be achieved through capital investment via the Council's own resources, through available external funding or through negotiated planning obligations on relevant sites, including strategic housing sites at and across the borough's administrative boundaries.

#### **Monitoring the use of sites**

- 2.8.21 The Parks team at the Council have been collecting data about the children's play areas for some time. This includes community consultation over the use and preferences of the community, data about the condition of equipment and their use / misuse and feedback about the new investment and how it is operating. This data helps the team plan the use of resources in respect of equipped play sites. This data will continue to be collected and used to best plan how and where sites should be dealt with.

## 2.9 Green Corridors and Green Links

### *Issues:*

- Definitions
- Green corridors within the PMP work
- Local Plan context
- Green corridors in this review
- Stevenage Outer Orbital Footpath (StOOP) links
- Green Links

- 2.9.1 Alongside the open space typologies already dealt with, green corridors need some consideration. Green corridors were defined as a specific open space typology within the original PPG17, and within the Companion Guide. They are arguably more important under the idea of 'green infrastructure'.

### **Definitions**

- 2.9.2 Within PPG17, the definition of green corridors is very vague, simply sitting within the overall definition of open space as, *'including river and canal banks, cycleways, and rights of way'*<sup>60</sup>.
- 2.9.3 The Companion Guide went further than this, making reference to the promotion of environmentally sustainable forms of transport (which includes walking and cycling). The Companion Guide also argued that there was no sensible way to have a standard for green corridors, but that planning authorities should promote their use and establishment to make links between the places that people may want to move (homes, employment areas, town centres, schools etc) and encourage the establishment of such routes along disused railway lines, canals, roads and the like. It does refer to green corridors as demand led, but recommended taking opportunities to provide linear routes along the likes of disused railway corridors as a means of transport<sup>61</sup>.
- 2.9.4 The definition of green corridors and what we might mean by that has developed in the intervening period. In their 2009 publication, *'Green Infrastructure Guidance'*, Natural England define green corridors as, *'rivers and canals including their banks, road and rail corridors, cycling routes, pedestrian paths, and rights of way'*, which develops the PPG17 definition.
- 2.9.5 The Planning Portal introduces reference to wildlife, making their movement as integral to the definition as the movement of people, although the provision of wildlife corridors needs to understand the possible movement needs of different species between places; *'Green corridors can link housing areas to the national cycle network, town and city centres, places of employment and community facilities. They help to promote environmentally sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling within urban areas and can also act as vital linkages for wildlife dispersal between wetlands and the countryside'*.

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<sup>60</sup> Annex, para 2(iii)

<sup>61</sup> Annex A, para 7.



- 2.9.6 Green corridors have often become entwined with the discussion about green infrastructure, and are considered to be an integral part of green infrastructure. Here, again, the emphasis is on more than just human behaviour / recreation, but on the wider benefits that can be gained from a network of green spaces all performing a particular function. The NPPF refers to green infrastructure as, *'a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities'*. The network could be argued to be connected by the green corridors – the lines of movement between larger spaces.
- 2.9.7 The Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan (Land Use Consultants, March 2011) refers to the earlier definition of green infrastructure set out in Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning<sup>62</sup>, but it is clear from their use of images and words – which includes rivers, cycleways and disused railway lines – that green infrastructure is part of a network of integrated green spaces that includes green corridors.
- 2.9.8 The Council's Green Space Strategy also makes reference to green corridors in a wider sense than expressed by PPG17 and its Companion; *'Green spaces and green corridors can provide a rich range of habits for wildlife and local biodiversity. They are useful components in stabilising urban temperatures and humidity, and can be used at a neighbourhood level as locally accessible facilities which help to reduce and mitigate the use, and over reliance on, vehicle transport'*.
- 2.9.9 It goes on to define a vision for green corridors:  
*Safe, litter free, and well maintained routes in natural and semi natural settings with formal pathways, accessible to walkers, linking major open spaces. Accessible routes should provide stopping / resting places for walkers. Or, inaccessible routes with vegetative cover to encourage the movement of wildlife between major open spaces.*
- 2.9.10 The Green Space Strategy makes a point of emphasising that green corridors are more than just sustainable transport routes (although this is, and always was, an important element in Stevenage's inception), referencing the lane hedgerows, safe routes and the needs of wildlife in respect of these networks. It also discusses the structural road verges in the town and the Horse and Pony Route which connects the edges of the town to the surrounding countryside and penetrates Fairlands Valley Park.
- 2.9.11 The consideration of green corridors in this review takes this broader position of the Stevenage Green Space Strategy; that green corridors can promote the movement of people in a place by more sustainable forms of transport between places they need to get to and from, but also that they provide routes and networks to enable the diversification and sustenance of biodiversity. Some of the actions defined by the Green Space Strategy, including the firm definition of green corridors and the inclusion and protection of routes within the borough's

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<sup>62</sup> PPS12 (June 2008) defined green infrastructure as, *'a network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities'*. PPS12 was replaced by the National Planning Policy Statement in March 2012.

statutory planning documents, are intended to be followed through in this review and the local plan that it will inform.

#### **Green corridors within the PMP work**

- 2.9.12 There were two green corridors recorded within the PMP Study.
- 2.9.13 Lanterns Lane runs north-west to south-east in the eastern side of the borough between Dryden Close and Gresley Way. The route is protected in the Local Plan, and runs to the northern side of Lanterns Wood. The wood itself is recognised within the PMP work as site 381 (6.44ha).
- 2.9.14 Gresley Way runs north-south along the eastern side of the town from Martins Way in the north east, to Broadhall Way in the south east. The entire stretch of road runs to over 4.5km. The section in Shephall constitutes about 2.1km from the junction of Broadwater Lane to the junction of Six Hills Way. Whilst the road is a key feature through this section, the road verges along this part of the route are wide and accommodate Aston End Brook for much of its length, as well as being a key part of the ancient lanes network and Horse and Pony Route.
- 2.9.15 Very little is said about either route within the PMP work. Neither appears mapped in the database, so the precise lengths referred to are unclear. There is no standard set for the green corridors and no reference is made within the PMP work to either the Horse and Pony Route or the more extensive network of ancient lanes and associated hedgerows that are a protected asset defined within the adopted Local Plan of 2004. Indeed, Gresley Way is not a corridor or route that is specifically protected within the Local Plan at all.

#### **Local Plan context**

- 2.9.16 The adopted Local Plan of 2004 defines and protects a very extensive network of ancient lanes and hedgerows throughout the town. Policy EN15 lists 18 lanes; Policy L23 defines the Horse and Pony Route.

##### *Ancient Lanes*

- 2.9.17 The narrative associated with the policy that protects the lanes (and associated hedgerows) describes how they were part of the pre-existing fabric of the area prior to the building out of the town following the designation of Stevenage as a new town. The Local Plan recognises the role of these lanes and hedgerows as part of the landscape history of the town – and certainly some of the routes can be picked out from older maps of the area. They would have been routes between the farms, homesteads and estates in the landscape prior to the significant development that followed the end of World War II.

##### *Horse and Pony Route*

- 2.9.18 As Stevenage was the last staging post before London on the Great North Road, it is particularly rich in bridleways, though not all of them are marked on the Definitive Map and some may have been lost over the period of the development of the town. The key strategic route for the town is the Horse and Pony Route.

2.9.19 The adopted Local Plan states that the Horse and Pony Route was established in 1983. The aim of the route was to link the urban areas of Stevenage to the bridleways surrounding the town. The Horse and Pony Route is predominantly around the edge of the town, linking into the wider network of country lanes, though a route through the town currently traverses Fairlands Valley Park largely along the western side from Broadhall Way / Monks Wood to Fairlands Way / Douglas Drive. The edge of town circuit is virtually complete, and relies on some country lanes outside of the borough to connect up, particularly towards Graveley, Aston End (where the Green Space Strategy makes reference to a 'missing link') and Norton Green. However, within the riding community it is uncertain how well the route is known and used<sup>63</sup>.

2.9.20 The Horse and Pony Route is treated separately outside the scope of the review.

#### *Green Links*

2.9.21 The green links were defined within the Local Plan between and within the major areas of open space through the town. There were eight links defined (Policy EN10). These are discussed further below.

#### **Green Corridors in this review**

2.9.22 This review treats the concept of green corridors at its widest extent, taking a lead from the Green Space Strategy. The Green Space Strategy did not define the green corridors, but clearly intended to include all ancient lanes, structural open space including roadside verges and the Horse and Pony Route.

2.9.23 Whilst not appropriate for all of the routes listed below, one emergent theme of both the open space review and the Sports Facility Study has been the popularity of running and jogging in Stevenage, and in particular the use of open spaces and segregated routes to enable this. One aspect of green corridors that should be nurtured is their role in accommodating safe routes for running and jogging, particularly where they are close to, or provide access to, the destination parks. Some of the routes below are wide, level, lit and well used, which makes them conducive to exercise for much of the year. In combination with the space provided by the destination parks, the green corridors can make a significant contribution to perpetuating the popularity of informal exercise throughout the town.

2.9.24 It is also apparent that a number of schools – both primary and secondary – have easy access to and from the green corridors, and during the course of surveying the routes, it was observed that the routes are well used by pupils and students. This is to be encouraged; the school run is a significant contributor to peak time traffic congestion and alternative routes to school should be utilised where possible. It also highlights the importance of ensuring that these routes are perceived as safe and attractive routes to use and maintained and managed to achieve that.

The Green Corridors identified below should be protected as a means of linking and connecting to

<sup>63</sup> Some limited research has failed to find reference to the route, or links to it, amongst the equestrian community within Stevenage or beyond.

town's open spaces. They differ in character and perform different roles, but are equally important in creating a network of green space throughout the town. Development that compromises movement along the corridors (including movement by wildlife) should be avoided.

The following routes have been identified:

#### **Ancient Lanes**

- 1 Aston Lane
- 2 The Avenue
- 3 Botany Bay Lane\*
- 4 Bragbury Lane
- 5 Broadwater Lane
- 6 Chells Lane\*
- 7 Dene Lane\*
- 8 Fishers Green Lane
- 9 Lanterns Lane
- 10 Meadway
- 11 Narrowbox Lane
- 12 Old Walkern Road
- 13 Sheafgreen Lane
- 14 Shephall Lane
- 15 Shephall Green Lane
- 16 Shepherds Lane
- 17 Watton Lane
- 18 Weston Lane

#### **Other Green Corridors**

- 19 Gresley Way
- 20 Braemar Close
- 21 Cardiff Close\*
- 22 Dyes Lane\*
- 23 Granby Road\*
- 24 Six Hills Way
- 25 Martins Way (Hitchin Road to Grace Way)

#### **Structurally important routes**

- 26 Martins Way (Grace Way to Gresley Way)
- 27 Fairlands Way
- 28 Broadhall Way
- 29 Grace Way
- 30 Gunnels Wood Road
- 31 Monkswood Way

*\* connect directly or indirectly with STOOP links*

### *Ancient Lanes*

- 2.9.25 The ancient lanes are identified within policy EN15 of the adopted Local Plan and carried forward to this review. They are an integral part of the town and its history and growth and have largely survived intact over the following years, though the character of each lane differs. A small number are, or include, adopted roads and have vehicular traffic using them; most are traffic-free but allow good access for walkers and sometimes cyclists, although the quality varies. The routes are not always clear with Meadway in particular changing its character along its route.
- 2.9.26 For the most part, the routes are well used as routes for people either on foot or in vehicles. Some are better used than others, much of which reflects their condition. However, a number serve a strategic role in getting around the town, especially those around the destination parks. The routes are important in offering an alternative to vehicular traffic, though not all are conducive to cycling, which is better located on the town's cycle network (and more appropriate on the structurally important routes).
- 2.9.27 Because of the presence of ancient hedgerows along many of the routes, and also the presence of trees and other fauna, the lanes can be colourful and busy with wildlife and birdsong, which can make for a very pleasant atmosphere when using the routes. In this way, the ancient lanes have more to offer than the other green corridors, which tend to be the space around the major roads, and less conducive to wildlife.
- 2.9.28 The Council has been involved in projects recently to improve the environment within some of the ancient lanes. Currently, a programme to regenerate Broadwater Lane is being carried out in. Here the semi-mature hornbeam is being coppiced in a gradual manner to obtain different stages of growth throughout the lane. Further projects may be commenced subject to funding, though all lanes receive ad hoc maintenance, especially in response to issues raised by the community.

The Council will continue to work to maintain the ancient lanes as a route network throughout Stevenage for the purpose of connecting places and communities within the town, and particularly as a healthier alternative to car-based transport.

The natural environment that exists in many of the lanes is recognised, and the Council will seek to maintain the ambience within them by carrying out environmental projects where resources allow, including works to trees and hedgerows. Support from external agencies will be sought where this can add value and expertise.

### *Other Green Corridors and Structurally Important Routes*

- 2.9.29 The 'other green corridors' are largely bridleways defined on the Definitive Public Rights of Way map held by Hertfordshire County Council that are not recognised as ancient lanes. They tend to be on the edge of town, or enter into the borough at the edge of town. Some are very short within the borough. The route of bridleways is maintained by the County Council on the Public Rights of Way map.

- 2.9.30 Three routes are effectively road side green corridors, but they differ from the landscaped roads defined by the structurally important routes. Gresley Way brings forward the recognition of the route as a green corridor from the PMP work, but ends the route at the junction with Six Hills Way. It contains within it the Aston Brook and is a well vegetated strip that runs towards Ridlins Mire.
- 2.9.31 Six Hills Way is included following three successful experiments – at Six Hills Common, Monks Wood and Ashtree Wood – into grassland habitat creation conducted between HMWT and the Borough Council.
- 2.9.32 The western end of Martins Way abuts the Local Wildlife Site, which is recognised in the natural and semi-natural section.
- 2.9.33 The routes of corridors 19-25 and structurally important routes are set out in Appendix J and on the maps in the same Appendix.
- 2.9.34 The ‘structurally important routes’ are major highways within the built up area of Stevenage that include significant areas within and alongside the highway that are reserved for open space, landscaping and/or cycleways. They are primarily for human movement and are particularly conducive to cycling because of the segregated routes.

The Council will nurture the role of the green corridors and the structurally important routes primarily as a means of transport between different parts of the town. We will also seek to find ways and means of productively using corridors where they can support biodiversity projects and habitat creation.

#### **Stevenage Outer Orbital Footpath (STOOP) links**

- 2.9.35 STOOP is a town and country walk circling Stevenage, opened by the town’s mayor in 2008. Using established rights of way where it can, STOOP was been devised by the North Herts Ramblers Group to provide an informal, active recreational leisure amenity readily available to the residents of Stevenage and the surrounding villages.
- 2.9.36 The STOOP circuit passes through Graveley in the north, through Walkern, along the Beane Valley, via Hooks Cross to Datchworth, Woolmer Green, Knebworth Park, St Ippollitts, Little Wymondley and back to Graveley, for the most part using local footpaths and bridleways. The paths have seen investment in the form of waymarkers, new footbridges and gates and are maintained regularly.
- 2.9.37 STOOP can be reached from Stevenage via any one of eight ‘link paths’ which lead out from the edge of town and also by bus or on foot from the town centre. The link paths generally have very small lengths within Stevenage, the longest sections being the Dyes Lane bridleway and the footpaths within Forster Country.

## Green Links

- 2.9.38 The adopted Local Plan defined a series of eight green links throughout the town that helped to define the urban structure of the town by reference to adjacent green spaces. The spaces were connected, but not necessarily accessible or walkable<sup>64</sup>, and in this sense they performed a different role to the green corridors and the individual treatment of open spaces within the hierarchy of spaces. The plan believed that the protection of the links between green spaces was as important as protecting the individual spaces in upholding the integrity of the new town as it was conceived. The links implicitly involved spaces adjacent to the described route of the link, rather than defining the extent of the links precisely; the links protect the openness of the routes, not the specific spaces that define it.
- 2.9.39 The premise of this policy remains important to the Council and to the future planning of the town. It was a feature of the emerging Local Plan consultation of 2013. One aspect of the consultation proposed the addition of two green lungs (sic) to the range of protected open space. These were Grace Way (which is proposed as a new green corridor above) and Great Ashby Way.

The eight green links defined in the adopted Local Plan (2004) should be brought forward and defined in the emerging Local Plan, and their contribution to protecting the urban structure of Stevenage formed by conjoined but not necessarily accessible or walkable spaces, recognised. The eight links are:

1. Meadway to Fishers Green and Symonds Green
2. The Bowling Green to St. Nicholas Church
3. Hampson Park via Fairlands Valley Park to (a) Roebuck and (b) Shephall Green
4. Gresley Way to Narrow Box Lane and Nobel School
5. Gresley Way via Collenswood to Fairlands Valley Park / Chells Way
6. Gresley Way via Ridlins Wood and Bandle Hill to Collenswood
7. Gresley Way via Ridlins Wood and Loves Wood to Shephalbury Park and The Noke
8. Broadhall Way to Hertford Road

In addition, two new green links should be recognised:

9. Spaces west of Grace Way, including Trent Close, running roughly along the length of Grace Way between Martins Way and Fairlands Way;
10. Great Ashby Way between the borough boundaries at St. David's Close and Botany Bay Lane.

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<sup>64</sup> For instance, private woodlands, school sites or commercial sports sites might have open and / or natural elements, but not be publicly accessible.

## **2.10 Cemeteries**

- 2.10.1 Cemeteries are included within the definition of open space. As well as having a practical function cemeteries provide well defined and tranquil spaces for quiet reflection and contemplation.
- 2.10.2 There are four cemetery sites within the town. Two include traditional churchyards and one of these is immediately adjacent to the third site, Weston Road Cemetery. The fourth site is Almonds Lane Cemetery.
- 2.10.3 The two churchyards – St. Nicholas and St. Mary’s – are within conservation areas, and the churches themselves are listed. Both of the churchyards are closed to future burials.
- 2.10.4 Weston Road Cemetery, immediately east and adjacent to the grounds of St. Nicholas Church, is the more recent of the two new cemeteries, with the first burial having taken place in 1988. The cemetery overlooks the area of countryside in northern Stevenage discussed earlier as a possible location for a country park.
- 2.10.5 Almond Lane Cemetery is the older with the first burial having taken place in 1944. This cemetery closed for new burials in 1995, but burials will still take place for reopen and reserved plots as well as the interments of cremated remains within the Rose Garden only.
- 2.10.6 Weston Road Cemetery has been extended, with land laid out to the north east. Burials are due to begin here in 2015. It is anticipated that there will be sufficient land for burials within the borough within this land into the mid-2020s.
- The Council is aware that it will need to plan for further burial land in the short to medium term. Scoping for potential sites will need to begin once plots are taken in the cemetery extension. Suitable locations for any future need will be sought in extension areas to the town, particularly to the north and west.
- 2.10.7 There are no standards set for the provision of cemeteries or burial land. However, the space attributed to the four sites in the town contribute to the overall quantum, and the role played by this open space – both in the functional sense as a setting for burials, and in the aesthetic sense of providing quiet and tranquil open space – is acknowledged.



## **2.11 Other Open Space**

- 2.11.1 In addition to the typologies discussed within the strategy, Stevenage has further open space that garners no specific recognition within the strategy but nonetheless contributes to the sense of spaciousness and openness that is a character of the town.
- 2.11.2 Over the course of the work, 185 sites were removed from consideration (see Appendix C). These sites – by and large – remain open and contribute to the nature of the town. These sites contributed around 20 hectares of land. In addition, small sites under 0.05 ha have not been included in the study at all (many would have been missed from the original study).
- 2.11.3 It is unlikely that these sites – road verges, space between houses on the Radburn estates, left over spaces and suchlike will be lost to development, but they may be nibbled for parking or planting. Some may be transferred to domestic properties for homeowners to manage.
- 2.11.4 Such sites are not formally protected, but often complement the sites that are. On the whole the loss of these sites will be tolerated, subject to other relevant policies. Should it become an issue for concern, the Council will review this position.

## 2.12 Funding, Finance and Implementation

### *Issues:*

- Sources of funding
- Order of priorities
- Geographic priorities
- Open space in the town centre

### **Sources of Funding**

Funding for the provision, maintenance, management and improvement of open spaces will come primarily from a number of sources:

#### Developer Contributions

- CIL
- Section 106
- Direct developer provision
- New Homes Bonus

#### Council's capital and revenue spending budget

#### Funding from external sources

- bids: grants, gifts, benefactors
- partnership: statutory and membership agencies (HMWT, Natural England etc)

#### Receipts from:

- sale of open spaces
- open space leisure facilities, subscriptions and fees

#### In-kind from volunteers, communities and friends groups

### *Section 106 and CIL*

2.12.1 The Borough Council is not currently pursuing CIL. This position may change. However, the consequence is a reliance on section 106 agreements to support the provision of infrastructure such as open space on new large scale housing developments. Section 106 agreements will be used to ensure the delivery of off-site open space where it cannot be provided on site, and / or to ensure payments in lieu of any provision.

2.12.2 The Council has developed a section 106 calculator to assist with negotiating on-site provision and payments in lieu of on-site provision. All residential development can be assessed against the standards, although on-site provision will only be expected where meaningful quantities<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> The Council is keen to ensure that any open space provided on site as part of new developments is useable and functional for new and existing communities. It is also keen to avoid adopting, and hence maintaining, pieces of open space that are too small to be sustainable or practical.

of open space are generated. This threshold for provision will generally be 25% below the average size in each typology, hence:

- parks and gardens: 4.40 hectares (25% below the average size of parks and gardens, 5.86ha);
- amenity green space: 0.22 hectares (25% below the average size of amenity green space, 0.29ha);
- children and young people: 1 site for every 900 people generated from a development (around 25% below the need for 1 site per 1219 people);
- allotments: 0.59 hectares (25% below the average size of allotments, 0.79ha).

2.12.3 Natural and semi natural space will be provided dependent on the context of the site and the availability of opportunities to create such space.

2.12.4 Below the thresholds above, there will be no expectation for on-site open space provision, (or off site provision / payment in lieu); above the threshold, there will be.

#### *Capital and revenue expenditure*

2.12.5 Much of the maintenance and management of the borough's open spaces will come through the capital and revenue budgets of the Council, as has been the case in the past. In recent years, budgets have been tighter, and the Council has found itself in the position of having to prioritise resources and find innovative means of successfully maintaining a high standard and coverage of open space across the borough. This will continue to be the case. This strategy prioritises certain spaces in certain locations and it will be used to direct funds to priorities to maintain quality across as wide a range of open space resources as possible. The Council will be looking for support from communities in terms of their time and ownership (in the widest sense) of their neighbourhood spaces, and will be willing to enter into partnerships with communities to help maintain valuable open spaces.

#### *Other sources*

2.12.6 In addition to its own resources and the agreements that it can make with investors and developers in the borough, the Council will be taking opportunities to gain funding from outside agencies and funding bodies. The Council has been successful in the past through this route, most notably with the refurbishment of Town Centre Gardens. The Council can also enter into partnerships with relevant bodies to deliver projects in the natural environment, for example through the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and others.

2.12.7 In addition to these sources of funding, the Council may be able to recycle income from facilities within our open spaces and will use income from the sale and disposal of obsolete land in order to improve the quality of the remainder, subject to the aims of the strategy.

#### **Order of priorities**

The ability to improve and enhance the borough's portfolio of open spaces will be defined and limited by the resources available to it from the funding sources listed above. Acknowledging the relative importance of each type of open space in serving the widest possible number of residents and visitors to Stevenage, financial and other resources will be targeted in line with the following hierarchy:

- Destination Parks and other Parks and Gardens (including play areas)
- Principal Amenity Green spaces (including play areas)
- Other children's play areas
- Principal Woodland Sites
- Other open spaces
- Allotments
- Green corridors
- Pocket Parks

2.12.8 The strategy points toward a hierarchy of importance for our many open spaces. At the top of this hierarchy are the Parks and Gardens, and within that, the 'destination parks'. These are the major parks within the Borough expected to see a high number of visitors from a wide radius. In the case of Fairlands Valley Park, this will include people outside of the borough. As investment is directed to these parks, they will grow in importance and confidence. Some of the destination parks already hold major events and festivals. The spaces are well known to our residents. They represent the perception people have of the town as a green and pleasant place.

2.12.9 The strategy defines a series of Principal Open Spaces – major parks, amenity green spaces and woodlands; large spaces often with play areas and other facilities, which serve a local function and provide a focus for neighbourhoods. These places will attract good numbers of people and will need to have some minor facilities, such as seating and bins; consequently they will need routine maintenance and commitment to them year round. The woodlands are often historic and have biodiversity interests, and we will need support from experts to assist in our treatment of such spaces.

2.12.10 The allotments are a specific form of open space that will be of interest to only a small proportion of the population. The Council's management of these spaces is supported by the SGAA and to some extent is financed through the rental system and membership. The Council has a statutory duty to provide allotments, but will manage demand on a long term basis to ensure that large numbers of vacant plots aren't a drain on resources. New allotments are coming through in 2015, which will help with demand in the short term. Over the medium term, there is a desire to address shortages in Chells and Symonds Green, some of which could be addressed through development in the north and west of the town.

### **Geographic priorities**

The strategy has determined that some areas of the town are disadvantaged in respect of some types of open space. Efforts will be made to assess the extent of this and address deficiencies where required. Particular areas of need are:

- (a) *Amenity green space*: Corey's Mill
- (b) *Allotments*: Corey's Mill, Symonds Green
- (c) *Children's Play Areas*: Chells and Chells Manor, Corey's Mill, Symonds Green, Poplars, Grace Way green corridor

2.12.11 The strategy relates to the whole town, and is based upon a hierarchy of sites and the application of standards that are defined across the town.

2.12.12 However, within this there are deficiencies within typologies within certain parts of the town that ought to be addressed. The typologies concerned – amenity green space, children’s play and allotments – should be locally provided, numerous across the town, easily accessible close to neighbourhoods and of a reasonable quality to meet local people’s needs.

2.12.13 The Corey’s Mill area in northern Stevenage is particularly deficient, as is Symonds Green in the west. The rationalisation of children’s play space has also seen gaps in the provision of children’s play spaces, an issue compounded in some areas (especially Hertford Road and Grace Way) by the geography of roads that means driving to ‘destination parks’ is contrived. However, in the case of children’s play spaces, the accessibility radius of five minutes travel ought to be reviewed, and the attractiveness of major new investment in play equipment in the destination parks assessed, prior to new sites being established.

2.12.14 Some geographic priorities within the town are, therefore, defined. Their location in the north and west of the town is conducive to seeing some improvements come about through strategic residential development in these areas.

#### **Open space in the town centre**

Within the town centre, open space is unlikely to be provided at the rates suggested by the open space standards set out in this strategy. Residential development should, however, seek to provide some outdoor communal space for the benefit of residents.

Where open space cannot be provided, or is only partly provided, the Council will seek contributions in line with any town centre framework or public realm strategy prepared for a defined town centre or central area.

In the absence of any such strategy, the Council will seek contributions to secure and improve the quality of public space that exists on the edge of the town centre ring road, or the quality and ease of access to it.

2.12.15 The town centre is expected to carry a high number of new dwellings in contributing to the overall number of residential units required over the plan period to 2031. The number of dwellings will become clearer as the Local Plan and town centre visioning work progresses, but could be as many as 2,500, formed principally of flats and apartments. This number of new residential units poses particular issues for the infrastructure of the town and requires planning to ensure that new residents are provided for.

2.12.16 There is unlikely to be the scope and the capacity to be able to provide open space to the extent that can be achieved on greenfield developments. This does not mean that open space should not be provided. As discussed at *Aim 7* (see para 2.2.58 – 2.2.61), there is an expectation that a number of civic spaces and town centre squares will be provided as part of

the regeneration of the town centre, and a benchmark has been set for the type of open space that this will comprise. In addition, the Council will be looking for open spaces to be provided for the residents of high density developments as part of a mixed use offer within such schemes, and will be seeking to ensure that such open space is practical, can be maintained and meets the needs of proposed residents (especially if this is to include families). The Council will also look to negotiate developer contributions towards nearby open spaces (especially those close to the town centre, such as Town Centre Gardens, KGV and Six Hills Common) and improve access to open spaces from the town centre (e.g. through improved public realm or improved transportation, especially non-car based travel)

### **3. ACTION PLAN**

### 3.1 Action Plan I - Typologies

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead Organisation
1	Parks and Gardens	Destination Parks	provision	no new provision of parks, except a Country Park in Forster Country if necessary	Aim 5	106, direct developer provision	SBC
			improvement	maintain quality at Town Centre Gardens and Fairlands Valley Park; raised status at Hampson, Shephalbury, St. Nicholas, KGV, Ridlins, Peartree		106, SBC	SBC
				short term improvements to Ridlins and Peartree Parks		SBC	SBC
				a focus for new park facilities, which may include new services (such as cafes and kiosks), improved interpretations / signage and enhanced planting, and major community events		SBC	SBC
				define safe running and jogging routes			
			management	cross departmental approach to general use and special events		SBC	SBC
				retention of Green Flag status once achieved; progression to Green Flag status where appropriate;		SBC	SBC
				managed as 'flagship' open spaces for Stevenage		SBC	SBC
				cross boundary working in Great Ashby (District Park)	Aim 6	SBC, NHDC	SBC, NHDC
			maintenance	ongoing		SBC	SBC, Stevenage Leisure



	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead Organisation
1	Parks and Gardens	Forster Country	disposal	not provided for			
			provision	Council to consider a preferred management approach to the maintenance of a countryside setting in 'Forster Country' in the event that development can go ahead in this area of north Stevenage		SBC, developer	SBC
			management	Financial and 'other contributions' to be sought from/with any developer – other contributions are not defined, but may include facilities and services required to ensure that a country park can be established, e.g., on-site facilities		SBC, developer	SBC

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead organisation
2	Amenity Green space		provision	new provision at standard in greenfield housing sites	Aim 5	106, direct developer provision	SBC
				replacement of lost sites to an appropriate standard	Aim 4	106, direct developer provision	SBC
				new provision in areas of need / priority		106	SBC
			improvement	improvement of existing sites as compensation for disposal	Aim 4	106	SBC
				offer of support to volunteer groups		SBC, volunteers	Community
			management	prioritise principal amenity green spaces		106, SBC	SBC
				with community agreement on new volunteer sites		External bids, SBC, Community	Community
				cross boundary working in Great Ashby (amenity green spaces)	Aim 6	SBC, NHDC	SBC, NHDC
			maintenance	prioritise principal amenity green spaces	Aim 7	106, SBC	SBC
			disposal	acceptable disposal of defined poor quality of sites	Aim 3		SBC
				disposal of other sites with appropriate compensation	Aim 4		SBC

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead organisation
3	Allotments		provision	new provision at standard in greenfield housing sites	Aim 5	106, direct developer provision	SBC, SGAA
				new provision in areas of need		106, direct developer provision	SBC, SGAA
			improvement	via monitoring and feedback of users		SBC, SGAA	SBC, SGAA
			management	cross boundary working in Great Ashby (i.e. encouraging NHDC provision)		SBC, NHDC	SBC, NHDC
			maintenance	ongoing		SBC, SGAA	SBC, SGAA
			disposal	none planned; position to be monitored and reviewed regularly		SBC, SGAA	SBC, SGAA

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead organisation
4	Natural and semi-natural		provision	new provision at standard in greenfield housing sites; possible provision of a large area in north Stevenage (Forster Country)	Aim 5	106, direct developer provision	SBC
			improvement	prioritise principal sites and Local Wildlife Sites		External bids, SBC, volunteers	SBC, HMWT, LNP
			management	prioritise principal sites and Local Wildlife Sites		External bids, SBC, volunteers	SBC, HMWT, LNP
				quick response to concerns received (e.g. litter, dumping, dangerous trees)		SBC, Community	SBC, Community
				cross boundary working in Great Ashby (woodlands)	Aim 6	SBC, NHDC	SBC, NHDC
				review of the BAP in 2015		SBC, HMWT	SBC, HMWT
			maintenance	prioritise principal sites and Local Wildlife Sites		External bids, SBC, volunteers	SBC, HMWT, LNP
			disposal	not provided for			

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead organisation
6	Children and Young People	Children's play areas	provision	new provision at standard in greenfield housing sites (including skate parks and MUGAs)	Aim 5	106, direct developer provision	SBC
				new provision in areas of need		106, SBC	SBC
				review of quantity and accessibility standards after three years (esp. in relation to travel times and perceived areas of deficiency)		SBC	SBC
				review current levels of equipped, unsupervised play provision, with a view to producing a strategy for future management		SBC	SBC
			improvement	prioritise play areas at destination parks and principal amenity green spaces		106, SBC	SBC
			management	quick response to received concerns from residents		SBC	SBC
				continued attention to all sites			
				determine favoured method of adoption and management of new sites		SBC, developer	SBC
			maintenance	continued attention to all sites with focus of destination parks and amenity green spaces		SBC	SBC
			disposal	review poorly performing play areas: remove, refurbish or replace		SBC	SBC

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead organisation
	Cemeteries		provision	new provision required for mid 2020s		SBC	SBC

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Resource	Lead organisation
	Civic spaces (town centre)		provision	defined by a town centre regeneration framework	Aim 7		SBC
				determine method of provision via s106 of CIL route	Aim 7	106, direct developer provision	SBC
				commuted sum regime (for spaces and access to spaces) needs consideration in relation to recommendations of town centre framework	Aim 7	106, direct developer provision	SBC
			management	defined by a town centre regeneration framework	Aim 7	106, direct developer provision	SBC

	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Locations	Resource	Lead organisation
	Green Corridors		provision	no new provision, though wider identification of corridors			SBC, HCC	SBC
				Consider the role, function, purpose and future of the Horse and Pony Route (esp. attitude to the 'missing link')			SBC, HCC	SBC
			improvement	Consider the role of green corridor routes, especially in respect of the audience (pedestrians, joggers, runners, ramblers, horse riders, cyclists)			SBC, HCC plus External interest groups	SBC
				Consider the need for signage to raise the potential of such routes			SBC, HCC	SBC
				environmental projects; prioritise lanes abutting destination parks and schools, principal amenity spaces and principal woodlands			External bids, SBC, HCC, volunteers	SBC, HMWT
				quick response to received concerns from residents (e.g. litter, dumping, dangerous trees)			SBC, Community	SBC, Community
				emphasise the health benefits of walking and cycling, esp. linking into recreational routes in destination parks			SBC	SBC
			management	manage and maintain key routes within green corridors to maximise the attractiveness of routes as a means of travel				



	Typology	Sub-group		Action	Aim	Locations	Resource	Lead organisation
	Green Corridors			cross boundary working on STOOP and Horse and Pony route			External bids, SBC	SBC, Ramblers
			maintenance	prioritise ongoing concerns received and projects around maintaining the safety of school routes			External bids, SBC, HCC	SBC, Ramblers
			disposal	not provided for				

### **3.2 Action Plan II - Strategy and Procedure**

- 3.2.1 The Open Spaces Action Plan is supported by a range of Council policies and procedures that feed into the maintenance of a high standard of open space and green space within the town. A number of them are mentioned within this strategy and will need revisiting as a result of this review.

#### *Update Green Space Strategy*

- 3.2.2 The Green Space Strategy was written in 2010 and is based on the 2006 PMP work. The updated open space strategy provides a new basis upon which to manage and maintain the town's open spaces.

#### *Update Play Strategy*

- 3.2.3 Open spaces and children's play areas and provision is one aspect of the play strategy, and the findings of this review will need to be considered in any future review. The current Play Strategy dates back to 2006.

#### *Revisit the provision for burials / cemeteries*

- 3.2.4 There is currently no plan for the expansion of existing burial ground and cemeteries within the borough, although sufficient land is currently available into the 2020s. There will need to be a review of this situation towards 2017-2018. Land may be best sought in expansion areas to the north and west of the town, within the administrative boundary.

#### *Revisit the Biodiversity Action Plan*

- 3.2.5 The Stevenage Biodiversity Action Plan has been key in defining priority projects in the borough's natural; and semi-natural spaces. It has also been important in defining and programming Stevenage's Green space Volunteers. The current BAP runs to 2014/2015. During the five year period of the plan, several high profile projects have been completed with and alongside partners such as the HMWT, and some of those initiatives have been considered exemplars. Momentum gained and lessons learned from this period should be carried forward into the revised BAP and help to support our most important natural and semi-natural spaces.

#### *Community Safety Strategy:*

- 3.2.6 The Council has recently adopted a Community Safety Strategy for 2015-2018. Whilst this focuses on anti-social behaviour, drug and substance abuse and the reduction of crime, the quality and management of open spaces in the town is an important factor in helping communities to feel safe in their neighbourhoods. If a neighbourhood is well maintained it encourages a strong sense of place, promotes investment and encourages responsible behaviour.

#### *Green Travel Plan*

- 3.2.7 The Council has a Green Travel Plan (2013-2018) which sets out how it will seek to increase the numbers of staff travelling for work purposes by more sustainable forms of transport. Walking and cycling are the most favourable forms of travel; good quality green spaces which are connected by green links and corridors can support this aim where they provide direct routes between key destinations (such as the town centre and employment areas).

#### *Annual Monitoring Plan*

- 3.2.8 We are required by law to monitor the effectiveness of our policies and plans. We do this through Annual Monitoring Reports and regular progress updates. AMRs set out the Council's progress in producing its local development plan and reports upon key planning indicators (such as the number of new homes built in the previous year). The AMR will monitor changes in open space using this strategy as a baseline.

#### **Town Centre Framework**

- 3.2.9 An invitation to tender for the Town Centre Framework is due to be issued in early 2015. There will follow a period of time in which the framework is researched, written and delivered. It is expected to deal with the overall vision for the town and have some guidance in respect of public realm and public space. Any future expectations upon town centre developers and landowners in respect of funding for open spaces (including civic and hard spaces) is expected to derive from this framework or supporting documents to it.

#### **Duty to Co-operate**

- 3.2.10 The Council will maintain open paths of discussion with neighbouring authorities to ensure that the provision of open spaces is appropriate in developments that will straddle administrative boundaries or have a clear impact on the facilities and services within Stevenage's administrative boundary. The authorities concerned are:
- North Hertfordshire District Council
  - East Hertfordshire District Council
  - Hertfordshire County Council

#### **Approach to CIL**

- 3.2.11 The Council has taken the approach that CIL would not deliver significant benefits over section 106 benefits in the town, though this decision was taken prior to the Local Plan 2031 consultation in summer 2013. Since that time the context for CIL, and section 106 agreements has changed significantly. A number of authorities are now operating a CIL charge and there is considerably more experience of preparing a CIL charging schedule and the evidence required to reach adoption.
- 3.2.12 In addition to this, the Government have sought to emphasise their own commitment to CIL as the favoured means of securing monies for infrastructure. This manifests itself most clearly in the restriction on pooling section 106 payments after April 2015. The effects of this broadly and on the Council specifically are not fully understood. On top of this, some commentators are concerned that even those authorities with CIL will not necessarily see sufficient funds raised to allow development to proceed<sup>66</sup>. The situation is delicate.

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<sup>66</sup> A report by Savills, sponsored by the Home Builders Federation and produced in October 2014, suggested that charging authorities had actually seen a fall in the number of new residential planning consents in the 12 months after the implementation of CIL, against a general rise across the whole of England. It also argued that the nature of forward funding meant that sufficient funds weren't in place up front to allow development to commence in areas where CIL was being collected.

3.2.13 In preparing the pre-submission version of the Local Plan, the Council will need to look at viability from a strategic perspective. This will include a reassessment of the position with respect to CIL.