



The City and District of St Albans

Greenspace Strategy
February 2011

The City and District of St Albans Greenspace Strategy

Contents		
	1 Introduction and Methodology	7
	Introduction	7
	The Purposes of this Strategy	9
	The Context for the Strategy	10
	The Content of the Strategy	11
	The Structure of the Strategy	13
	Methodology	14
	Acknowledgements	14
	2 Summary	17
	Introduction	17
	Greenspace in St Albans City and District	18
	A Better Future	21
	Key Issues	21
	A Vision for Greenspace in St Albans	23
	Spatial Planning Policy	23
	3 The Policy Context	29
	Introduction	29
	National Policy	29
	City and District-wide Plans and Strategies	30
	Key Implications	31
	Planned Growth	31
	4 Local Views, Local Needs	33
	Introduction	33
	Greenspace Strategy Household Survey	33
	Residents' Survey 2005	36
	Place Survey, 2008	37
	5 Provision Standards: General Approach	43
	Introduction	43
	Local Standards	44
	Accessibility Standards	44
	Quality Standards	45
	Quantity Standards	50
	General Trends	51
	6 Provision Standards: Allotments	53
	Introduction	53
	Accessibility	53
	Quality and Value	56

The Quantity of Provision	58
Local Views	59
Trends	60
Quantity Standard	61
Policy Conclusions	63
7: Provision Standards: Amenity Greenspaces	65
Introduction	65
Accessibility	65
Quality and Value	68
The Quantity of Provision	70
Local Views	70
Trends	71
Quantity Standard	72
Policy Conclusions	72
8: Provision Standards: Natural Greenspace	75
Introduction	75
Accessibility	80
Quality and Value	81
The Quantity of Provision	83
Local Views	84
Trends	85
Policy Conclusions	86
9 Provision Standards: Parks and Gardens	89
Introduction	89
Accessibility	90
Quality and Value	94
The Quantity of Provision	96
Local Views	97
Trends	98
Quantity Standard	99
Policy Conclusions	99
10 Provision Standards: Green Corridors	101
Introduction	101
Accessibility	101
Quality and Value	104
The Quantity of Provision	105
Trends	106
Policy Conclusions	106
11 Provision Standards: Children’s Play	109
Introduction	109
Accessibility	110
Quality and Value	115
The Quantity of Provision	119
Local Views	120
Trends	121
Quantity Standard	123
Policy Conclusions	126
12 Provision Standards: Teenagers	129
Introduction	129
Accessibility	129
Quality and Value	131

The Quantity of Provision	134
Local Views	135
Trends	136
Quantity Standard	136
Policy Conclusions	137
13 Harpenden, Redbourn and Surrounds	141
Introduction	141
Allotments	141
Amenity Greenspace	145
Churchyards and Cemeteries	147
Natural Greenspaces	149
Parks and Gardens	150
Green Corridors	153
Children’s Play Areas	154
Provision for Teenagers	156
Multi-functional Greenspace: Overview	160
14 Wheathampstead	165
Introduction	165
Wheathampstead Village Plan	165
Allotments	166
Amenity Greenspace	169
Churchyards and Cemeteries	171
Natural Greenspaces	171
Parks and Gardens	171
Green Corridors	174
Children’s Play Areas	174
Teenagers	175
Multi-functional Greenspace: Overview	175
15 Sandridge	181
Introduction	181
Sandridge Village Plan	181
Allotments	181
Amenity Greenspace	184
Churchyards and Cemeteries	186
Natural Greenspaces	186
Parks and Gardens	186
Green Corridors	188
Children’s Play Areas	188
Teenagers	191
Multi-functional Greenspace: Overview	194
16 The Central Area	197
Introduction	197
City Vision	197
Allotments	197
Amenity Greenspace	200
Churchyards and Cemeteries	201
Natural Greenspaces	204
Parks and Gardens	204
Green Corridors	210
Children’s Play Areas	210
Teenagers	211
Multi-functional Greenspace: Overview	213

17: Colney Heath and London Colney	217
Introduction	217
Village Plans	217
Allotments	217
Amenity Greenspace	221
Churchyards and Cemeteries	223
Natural Greenspaces	223
Parks and Gardens	225
Green Corridors	225
Children’s Play Areas	226
Provision for Teenagers	230
Multi-functional Greenspace: Overview	233
18 Park Street and St Stephen	237
Introduction	237
Village Plans	237
Allotments	237
Amenity Greenspace	240
Churchyards and Cemeteries	240
Natural Greenspace	240
Parks and Gardens	243
Green Corridors	243
Children’s Play	245
Teenagers	248
Multi-functional Greenspace: Overview	248
19 Key Issues	255
Introduction	255
Cross-cutting Issues	255
Greenspace Issues	259
20 Green Infrastructure	265
Introduction	265
ANGSt	267
21 Greenspace Vision, Strategic Goals and Planning Policy	269
Introduction	269
Existing Plans and Strategies	270
A Vision for Greenspace in St Albans	275
Strategic Goals	275
Planning Policy	281
22: Action Plan	287
Introduction	287
Strategic Goal 1	287
Strategic Goal 2	293
Strategic Goal 3	306
Strategic Goal 4	307
Strategic Goal 5	307
Strategic Goal 6	308
Strategic Goal 7	308
Updating of the Strategy	308



Appendices (bound separately)

- A: National Policy
- B: City Vision
- C: Proposed quality standards
- D: The Audit Process
- E: Audit summary and analysis - Allotments
- F: Accessibility assessment
- G: Audit summary and analysis – Amenity Greenspaces
- H: Audit summary and analysis – Churchyards and cemeteries-
- I: Audit summary and analysis – Natural Greenspaces
- J: Audit summary and analysis – Parks and Gardens
- K: Audit summary and analysis – Green Corridors
- L: Audit summary and analysis – Equipped Play Areas
- M: Audit summary and analysis – Teenage Facilities

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1 Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

Whenever someone steps outside their home, or place of work, they enter the public realm – the streets, squares and greenspaces which are an essential component of our villages, towns and cities. If well designed and maintained, and safe, they contribute hugely to making somewhere an attractive place in which to live. This is something which the Georgians, in particular, understood well, with their squares and crescents, all facing networks of attractive greenspaces.

Across the whole of the UK, however, greenspace planning has been much neglected since Georgian times, with a few exceptions including the great Victorian parks, the Garden City movement and of course the New Towns. Management and maintenance also suffered as a result of the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering for grounds maintenance in the mid nineteen eighties. The effect has been sharply to reduce the cost of maintaining parks and greenspaces and too many are now maintained by operatives using machines rather than gardeners using knowledge and skill.

One result has been that the quality of the public realm declined significantly for a period of about twenty years. But in the past decade, a greenspace movement has emerged in the UK which champions the value of networks of high quality greenspaces and sport and recreation facilities. Reversing the downward trend will take some time – and is obviously going to be difficult in the recession - but the last Government recognised the problem and, with the publication in July 2002 of Planning Policy Guidance PPG17, *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*, required planning authorities to undertake assessment of needs and opportunities in their area.

PPG17 represented a huge shift in public policy towards greenspace provision. It made clear that:

- Planning authorities should prepare greenspace

strategies and develop locally-determined standards for the greenspace provision they require developers to provide or fund and not continue to rely on the outmoded Six Acre Standard for “playing space” first put forward by the National Playing fields Association (now renamed Fields in Trust) in the late nineteen twenties

- Quality and accessibility are at least as important as quantity
- Councils have to plan for the full range of different types of greenspace and cannot concentrate only on “playing space”
- Planning, management and maintenance have to “sing from the same hymn sheet”
- Local communities have a greater role to play in greenspace management and maintenance than in the past

More recently, in March 2010, the then Government launched a consultation draft of a new Planning Policy Statement (PPS) entitled *Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment* and designed to replace:

- PPS9, Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
- PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation
- PPS7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* insofar as it relates to landscape protection, soil and agricultural land quality and forestry
- PPG20, *Coastal Planning*, insofar as it relates to coastal access, heritage coast and the undeveloped coast

This new draft is not yet policy, and may or may not be amended and adopted by the Coalition Government, but it is obviously desirable that this strategy should take account of it as it reflects evolving national policy thinking. Compared with PPG17, it places significantly greater emphasis on:

- Green infrastructure, defined as strategic networks of multi-functional green space both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life in sustainable communities.
- The conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including the quality, character and value of the landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and soil
- Minimising the vulnerability of places, people and wildlife to the impacts of climate change
- Delivering safe and attractive places to live in ways that respect the character of areas, promote health and wellbeing and reduce social inequalities

- Providing access and recreational opportunities in rural and coastal areas that will enable urban and rural dwellers to enjoy the wider countryside

The “policy discussion” at the start of the draft PPS specifically states that

The new policy does not require local planning authorities to produce and publish green infrastructure “strategies” and the expectation is that much of the information already collected for the PPG17 open space strategies can be used at regional sub-regional and local level to develop the evidence base for green infrastructure delivery ... The Government continues to support the need to make adequate provision of land and facilities for sport, recreation and children’s play, and intends to maintain the existing policies in PPG17.

A number of the policies in the draft PPS relate directly to this strategy. However, at the outset of this strategy it is worth highlighting Policies NE1.3 and NE1.4 under the general heading of “Evidence base for plan-making”:

NE1.3 Local planning authorities should undertake, and keep up to date:

- (i) Assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, green infrastructure, sports, recreational and play facilities; and
- (ii) Audits of the existing provision in their area of such land and facilities taking into account its quantity, quality, accessibility, typology and location

NE1.4 In preparing the evidence base for plan-making, consideration should be given to joint working across local authorities boundaries and between tiers (in two tier areas) to develop the assessments and audits set out in NE1.3

This strategy provides the initial assessment and audit required by Policy NE1.3 and Chapter 22 suggests how the Council can keep them up to date. However, as it was in draft well before publication of the draft PPS it has not been possible to change the approach and evidence base through joint working with neighbouring councils.

The Purposes of this Strategy

This strategy has what might be called “statutory” and “non-statutory” purposes. Its statutory purposes are to

provide the Council with:

- A PPG17-compliant assessment of greenspace provision for the City and District to complement its adopted strategies for sports pitches and indoor and outdoor sport and recreation provision
- Locally-determined provision standards for greenspace provision and guidance on greenspace planning policy for the Council's forthcoming Local Development Framework (LDF) in order to provide it with a sound basis for determining the greenspace provision that it can reasonably require developers to provide or fund

The non-statutory purposes are:

- To reassert the importance of high quality greenspaces within the City and District and ensuring that they remain of high quality by managing them properly. Effective provision and good management and maintenance are different sides of the same coin and one without the other is likely to waste resources. Almost all of the cost of managing and maintaining greenspaces in the City and District is met from taxation. As there are many other competing priorities for resources, there is an obvious need to ensure value for money.
- To provide a way of bringing greenspace, sport and recreation planning and management together to help deliver the aims set out in the Community Strategy and ensure that the District is an attractive place in which to live, work and play or to visit
- To provide guidance to the District, Town and Parish Councils on the most effective way of using both developer contributions and their own resources

The Context for the Strategy

Not all strategies and plans are of equal importance. For obvious reasons, aims and objectives of higher level plans and strategies should "cascade" down to lower ones and set the context for them. If they do not, planning for the future is disjointed and no-one can be quite sure what their priorities should be.

However, this Strategy is very much a local one, of specific relevance to St Albans City and District. While it has to reflect the wider policy context, it has also to reflect the local policy context. This is set primarily by the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), the Council's Corporate Strategy, the current Development Plan and its forthcoming replacement, the LDF.

The role of the LDF is to be a delivery mechanism for the land use elements of the SCS and other relevant local strategies. Its policies will play an important role in

protecting those greenspaces and sports facilities that meet local needs and ensuring that development and community infrastructure, such as greenspace, are in an appropriate balance. However, this strategy is intended also to influence the future direction of planning policy for greenspace in St Albans and provide the evidence base the Council will need to make robust decisions in relation to both planning applications that impact in some way on greenspace and the use of its own resources.

The Content of the Strategy

In the planning cascade, this strategy sits immediately underneath the Council's Corporate Strategy and forthcoming LDF, on a par with other District-wide plans such as those dealing with culture and housing. It:

- Reviews the amount, distribution and quality of existing provision
- Identifies where there is a need for more or better provision and the types of enhancements which will benefit existing facilities and spaces most
- Suggests appropriate provision standards for the District Council to use as part of the planning process
- Suggests how to tackle the key issues relating to greenspace, sport and recreation provision facing the Council and its partners

What is "Greenspace"?

The definition of "open space" given in PPG17 is:

"... 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 also act as a visual amenity".

Open space defined in this way has four main components:

- Predominantly vegetated **greenspaces**
- **Bluespaces**, or rivers, lakes and other water areas
- Predominantly hard surfaced civic or **greyspaces**
- The **coast**, but this is not relevant to St Albans

This strategy is concerned overwhelmingly with greenspaces, to a significantly lesser extent with bluespaces and not at all with greyspaces. It is not possible to derive sensible quantity and accessibility standards for either blue spaces or grey spaces. In addition, grey spaces are provided not in response to any identified need, but as an integral component of urban design. Furthermore, the Council's *City Vision* deals with hard surfaced spaces.

Greenspace is multi-functional. It enhances the amenity of urban areas; it provides opportunities for formal and informal recreation; it supports wildlife; and it performs a range of environmental functions. But not all greenspaces are identical, and our cities, towns and villages would be a lot less interesting if they were. PPG17 therefore sets out a typology of different forms of greenspaces, based on the concept of “primary purpose” – the main reasons why different spaces were provided when they were created. It is:

- **Parks and gardens:** designated urban parks, country parks and formal gardens. Many local spaces can be regarded as, and are often referred to as parks, but for the purposes of this strategy “parks” are defined narrowly as a space designed to appeal equally to all members of the community and managed primarily for amenity and informal recreation, such as strolling, sitting and watching the world go by. In addition, parks will often contain a mix of mature trees, ornamental and naturalistic planting, horticultural features and a range of specific features or facilities such as seats, statues, fountains and other public art.
- **Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces,** including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (eg downlands, commons and meadows) wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and derelict open land and rock areas (eg cliffs, quarries and pits)
- **Green corridors,** including river and canal banks, cycleways, and rights of way
- **Outdoor sports facilities** (with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned), including tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletics tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas
- **Amenity greenspace** (most commonly, but not exclusively, in housing areas), including informal recreation spaces, greenspaces in and around housing, domestic gardens and village greens
- **Provision for children and teenagers,** including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other more informal areas (eg 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters)
- **Allotments,** community gardens, and city (urban) farms
- **Cemeteries and churchyards**
- **Accessible countryside** in urban fringe areas

Note: although domestic gardens are included in the PPG17 definition of amenity greenspace it is not sensible to include them in a PPG17 assessment because the land is under the control of a very large

number of individual home owners and it would be exceptionally difficult to initiate joint action by them

PPG17 goes on to say that “This typology, or variations of it, should be used by local authorities when preparing assessments of need and audits of existing greenspace and recreational facilities”. This assessment and strategy uses the PPG17 typology except that:

- The parks and gardens typology does not include any country parks as there are none in the City and District
- The allotments typology ignores urban farms and community gardens as there are none in the City and District and no evidence of any need for them
- Green corridors and accessible countryside in urban fringe areas have been subsumed into a single typology

As PPG17 is concerned with spaces and facilities that are “of public value”, this assessment and strategy relates primarily to publicly owned spaces with everyday public access. However, it also includes some privately owned spaces with public access and some publicly owned spaces with restricted public access, such as school playing fields.

The PPG17 typology is also annexed to the draft PPS on *Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment*, which indicates that it is equally relevant to green infrastructure, although the latter can also include features such as green roofs and walls.

The Structure of the Strategy

This strategy is effectively in five main parts:

- Chapter 2 provides a **summary** of the whole document
- Chapters 3 and 4 provide **background information** on the policy context and local views
- Chapters 5-12 derive PPG17-compliant typology-specific **provision standards** for planning purposes
- Chapters 13-18 **apply the standards** to the eight planning areas suggested by the Council
- Chapters 19-22 set out the recommended **Strategic Direction** for the Council and its partners by identifying the key issues, suggesting seven strategic goals that they should adopt and highlighting how they can deliver against them

Policy Recommendations

As well as proposed provision standards, this report makes a number of policy recommendations to the City and District Council and those of its various partners

concerned with greenspace provision, management and maintenance. In all cases, these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council's current wider planning policies.

Methodology

In 2003 the City and District Council commissioned consultants to prepare three linked strategies for greenspace, pitches and sport and recreation facilities, which they completed in 2006. This is a significantly revised and updated version of the greenspace strategy and so it does not relate to sport and recreation facilities except in passing. Deliberately, it is a stand-alone document which does not require knowledge of the earlier report.

It is based on:

- A comprehensive re-audit of provision across the City and District undertaken by the Council in 2008-09, with the addition of secondary school sites, not included in the original audit, in early 2010
- Re-analysis of the data from the household survey and other local consultations undertaken by the original consultants
- The mapping and analysis of existing provision, based on the audit undertaken by the Council

In order to reflect differences between the main settlements in the City and District, the strategy refers to the eight "planning areas" shown on the map below. The estimated population of each of these planning areas, based on the 2001 census, is:

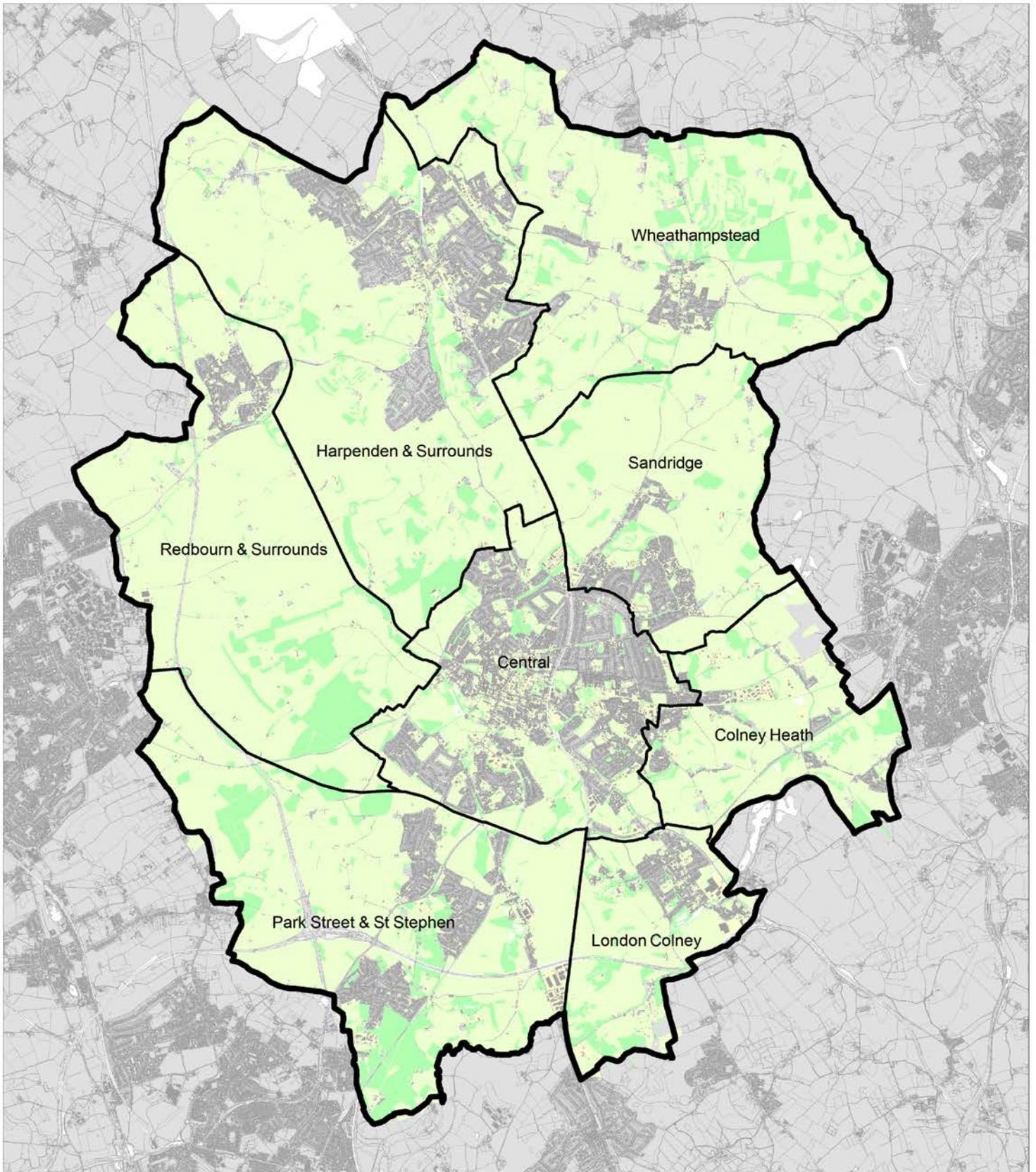
Central	51,792
Colney Heath	5,518
Harpenden and surrounds	28,434
London Colney	8,252
Park St and St Stephen	12,129
Redbourn and surrounds	5,481
Sandridge	11,186
Wheathampstead	6,058
City and District	128,850

Note: the estimate of the mid-2009 population of the City and District from the Office of National Statistics is 137,200 so these figures are an under-estimate.

Acknowledgements

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**St Albans City and District
Greenspace Strategy**



Planning Areas

2 Summary

Introduction

Greenspace matters. It performs many vital functions in villages, towns and cities, such as supporting biodiversity, it helps to mitigate pollution and the effects of climate change, it helps to boost land values and promote economic development and attract investment, it offers opportunities for people to sit quietly or take part in outdoor activities and for children to play and there is growing evidence of the benefits it offers in reducing stress and promoting well-being. In St Albans, the most recent Place Survey promoted by the City and District Council found that it came fourth in the list of qualities that made St Albans a good place in which to live, almost on a par with good education provision and health services.

For these and other reasons, the government has been encouraging local authorities to develop greenspace strategies for the best part of a decade. This strategy is the response for St Albans City and District. It follows on from an earlier draft, prepared in 2006, but has been completely rewritten to reflect changing circumstances and the views of those who responded to the original version. It is intended to serve two broad purposes:

- To respond to the open space planning elements of Planning Policy Guidance 17, *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*, published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now the Department for Communities and Local Government) in 2002 and, by doing so, provide part of the evidence base for the Council's forthcoming Local Development Framework
- To set out, in an objective and comprehensive way, what the City and District Council wishes to achieve over the next decade or so, partly as guide for its own purposes but more importantly to provide a framework for working with a range of partners such as the Town and Parish Councils across the District, the County Council, the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and many others.

This is not a stand-alone strategy. It is complemented by broadly similar strategies relating to sport and recreation facilities and sports pitches and therefore does not seek to cover these forms of provision except where it is essential to do so.

The full strategy is in three main sections, dealing with:

- The development of provision standards for planning purposes, relating to both planning policy and development management
- The application of the resulting standards to eight defined “planning areas” in the City and District to identify qualitative, quantitative or accessibility deficiencies in provision
- The identification of the key issues facing the Council and its partners in relation to local greenspaces and an action plan for tackling them

This summary highlights only the main points from the strategy. It briefly summarises:

- The overall level of greenspace provision across the City and District
- The nature of planning provision standards
- The key issues that the strategy sets out to tackle

Greenspace in St Albans City and District

The Quantity of Provision

PPG17 provides a definition of a range of different types of greenspace that councils can adapt or adopt for their own use. It is comprehensive and was therefore used for the audit on which this strategy is based. The sections of the strategy on the provision standards highlight the total amount of each in the City and District and in each of the planning areas. Generally speaking, most of the spaces to which it refers are within or close to the main settlements in the City and District, although it refers in passing to some of the major countryside developments under way in the District such as the Heartwood Forest and Watling Chase Community Forest. However, access to the countryside is discussed in detail in the District Green Infrastructure Strategy, which complements this one.

Overall, the total quantity of greenspace reviewed in detail in this strategy is:

Allotments	41.5 ha
Amenity Greenspace	163.6 ha
Children’s Play Areas	9.0 ha
Churchyards and cemeteries	22.0 ha
Natural Greenspace	359.1 ha
Parks and Gardens	145.3 ha

Teenage facilities

2.0 ha

The Quality of Provision

The City and District's residents clearly appreciate the quality of their greenspace provision. In the most recent Place Survey:

- 90% of respondents were satisfied with their local area, compared with 84% across Hertfordshire and 80% in England as a whole
- 86% of respondents were satisfied with parks and open spaces, compared with 76% across Hertfordshire and 69% in England as a whole; as a result, parks and open spaces represent one of the City and District's key strengths

This is obviously a subjective assessment and different people may well have used different criteria. In order to provide a more consistent overview, the strategy process therefore included an on-site audit of nearly 350 separate spaces and facilities undertaken by a member of the council's greenspace team. This resulted in audit scores for the quality and value of all of the various spaces, subsequently combined into a single composite score. The criteria used depended on the nature of individual spaces, so it is not possible to compare the scores for one type of space directly with the scores for another. However, in summary the scores were:

	Minimum	Median	Maximum
Allotments	7%	27%	55%
Amenity Greenspace	21%	47%	79%
Children's Play Areas	9%	50%	89%
Churchyards/cemeteries	50%	66%	75%
Natural Greenspace	18%	55%	85%
Parks and Gardens	21%	31%	62%
Teenage facilities	2%	12%	25%

Note: the median is the middle value in a range

Although these scores are not directly comparable, it is nonetheless the case that, generally speaking, the best spaces in the City and District are the cemeteries and churchyards and the worst are the various teenage facilities.

The Accessibility of Provision

If greenspaces are not accessible to people who want to use them they might as well not exist. Overall, however, the accessibility of spaces across the City and District is very good. The proportion of properties within

the distance that individuals indicated they were willing to walk to different types of space are:

Allotments	61%
Amenity Greenspace	73%
Play Areas – under 6s	44%
Play areas – older children	59%
Natural Greenspace	70%
Parks and Gardens	34%
Teenage facilities	37%

Key Findings

The main findings from the analysis of the audit were that:

- The demand for **allotments** has increased dramatically in the past few years and as a result there is a need for more across the City and District. In addition, the distribution of allotments sites reflects the availability of land in the past and not all sites are conveniently located for today's users. As well as upgrading sites, there will be advantages to be gained from "moving sites around" to a limited extent in order to enhance accessibility.
- The distribution of **amenity greenspace** is generally good, but some are of poor quality or value. There are also areas of the City and District without ready access to local spaces. However, the main priority should generally be to harness new development to enhance the least good existing spaces. There is also a general need to improve biodiversity.
- The City and District probably has too many "formulaic" children's **equipped play areas** that offer little to many children other than swings and roundabouts.
- The City and District has some excellent **natural greenspaces** but more could be done to make them welcoming and inform visitors about nature conservation. There is also a need to improve access to the urban fringe and wider countryside.
- The City and District has a handful of excellent **parks and gardens** but many residents are unable to walk to a park. As a result it will be desirable to try to create more local parks and, in particular, improve the overall quality and attractiveness of Verulamium Park, which should be the "jewel in the City and District's greenspace crown".
- **Teenage facilities** are fairly few and far between

and generally of poor quality. There is a real need to work more closely with teenagers to provide them with accessible, attractive facilities and to work with local communities to ensure that groups of teenagers are not seen as a possible threat.

A Better Future

The Council's corporate plan 2010-13 is based on a vision of St Albans as

A progressive, unique and vibrant District, which values its environment, heritage and culture, and cares for the future: an outstanding place to live where everyone can flourish

The Plan has four over-riding priorities, all of which well located, high quality, and well managed and maintained greenspaces can help deliver:

- Ensuring the District is a great place to be
- Creating a diverse and sustainable economy for the 21st century
- Keeping the District healthy
- Supporting an active community that has pride in itself and cares for its future

Key Issues

This vision, and the analysis that underpins the strategy, identified a number of important key issues for the future. In broad terms they can be considered as general, or "cross-cutting" issues and greenspace-related issues.

General Issues

- The first general issue is **adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change**. Climate change is likely to change the nature of greenspaces considerably, for example if wildlife moves to new habitats and existing trees and plants start to experience stress. The Council needs to develop a range of strategies for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, ranging from new approaches to the design and maintenance of greenspaces to actively planning to minimise the impact of flooding.
- The second general issue is **public education**. New approaches to greenspace management and maintenance, such as the creation of wildflower meadows and allowing grass to remain long in some areas will lead inevitably to changes in the appearance of spaces. Some people may assume this is poor maintenance, or simply cost-cutting, rather than deliberate and designed to promote biodiversity and sustainability.

Third, there is the inevitable issue of **resources**. As greenspace provision and management is not a statutory service it will be important constantly to stress to decision –makers the multiple benefits it generates for people and wildlife.

Fourth is the emerging **localism** agenda of the government. This is likely to result in greater public involvement in greenspace provision, management and maintenance, and create a need for mechanisms that will allow local communities greater influence over District, Town and Parish Council-managed spaces.

The fifth issue might be called “**creative thinking**”. It reflects the fact that the status quo is very probably not going to be a realistic long term option for the future simply because the country cannot afford it. It means that there can be no sacred cows and everyone will have to play a part in inventing new ways of doing things.

Greenspace-related issues

The first greenspace-related issue is ensuring that there is **adequate greenspace provision** across the City and District at a time when it is likely to face significant development pressures. A simple blanket policy of protecting all existing greenspaces is unlikely to be sustainable so the Council, as the local planning authority, will have to find effective ways of harnessing development for the common good.

The second greenspace issue is to promote access to the **urban fringe and wider countryside**. The more dense our towns and cities, and the more stressed local residents become, the more important it will be to provide them with accessible opportunities to visit the countryside to enjoy the peace and quiet it offers and see nature at work.

Promoting **biodiversity and nature conservation** is the third issue, partly because the City and District Council has a statutory duty to do so, but more importantly because it enhances the quality of spaces and promotes sustainability.

The next issue relates to the need for more **allotments**. Outside St Albans itself, most sites are owned by the Town and Parish Councils. They need to keep a close eye on the demand for plots and find affordable ways of matching supply with demand.

There is also a need for more **local parks** – probably the most inclusive and popular form of publicly funded

leisure provision. As there is not the land to create more parks across almost all of the City and District, the Council and its partners need to find ways of making existing key spaces “more park-like”.

The sixth greenspace issue is provision for **children, young people and teenagers**. The Council and its town and parish councils partners need to adopt a new approach to providing for children and young people based on a small number of “strategic” play areas and making local greenspaces more stimulating as play environments.

A Vision for Greenspace in St Albans

If it is to be effective, this Strategy has to contribute to the delivery of the Council’s corporate priorities while also meeting local needs. Therefore there is a need to set out clearly how it can do this in a way that provides a broad framework within which various Council departments, the City and District’s communities and the external agencies concerned with greenspace provision, management and maintenance can work together. The Council should therefore set an aspiration that:

The City and District of St Albans will have a safe, sustainable and accessible network of high quality greenspaces that are valued and well used by residents and visitors and support wider sustainability initiatives and economic development

Strategic Goals

This vision leads on to seven strategic goals that should be used to guide everything the Council and its partners should do and test new ideas:

- Maintain an adequate supply of greenspace
- Ensure greenspaces meet local needs and are accessible, high quality, fit for purpose and well managed and maintained
- Promote pride in the City and District
- Support physical activity and mental well-being
- Promote nature conservation and biodiversity throughout the City and District
- Harness natural systems and processes in order to promote sustainability
- Promote and support economic development

Spatial Planning Policy

One of the most important delivery mechanisms for the strategy is likely to be the spatial policies set out in the St Albans Local Development Framework. As the local planning authority, the Council effectively controls change in the use of land. Spatial planning aims to marry land use planning to the wider aims and

objectives of the Council and its partners. The strategy recommends that the Council should adopt a spatial objective which reflects the above strategic goals, along the lines of:

To enhance the City and District as an area in which to live and work, and to promote good health and well-being, by ensuring there is sufficient accessible and sustainable high quality and high value greenspace provision, and an adequate supply of well designed and managed, sustainable, accessible and affordable sport and recreation facilities to meet current and future community needs

Core Policy

This leads on to a more detailed planning policy. Policy can be set only in the Core Strategy or a Development Plan Document so that it will be subject to public examination. However, the Council also needs to use its adopted strategies as the evidence base against which to assess proposals that may affect greenspace, sport and recreation or green infrastructure provision. This suggests the following approach to the Core Policy:

The Council will be guided by its greenspace, sport and recreation facilities and playing pitch strategies when considering proposals that involve the provision, alteration or loss of any greenspace, sport and recreation facility or playing pitch and:

- Support proposals for new green corridors within settlements or that will link settlements to the countryside around them or to each other
- Support proposals for new greenspace provision designed to meet identified local needs that is in the most accessible and sustainable location possible for the communities it is intended to serve and designed and specified in accordance with its adopted quality standards and current best practice
- Promote and support the enhancement of spaces and facilities identified in any of its strategy documents as requiring improvement
- Promote and support proposals that will enhance access to the urban fringe, wider countryside and historic landscapes
- Promote and support proposals that will enhance the development, management and maintenance of wildlife habitats as part of developments in or adjacent to the urban fringe and green belt
- Permit proposals that involve the loss of any right of way, greenspace, sport and recreation facility or playing pitch only if:

- The site that will be lost is clearly surplus to requirements in terms of its current use and there is no identifiable or foreseeable need for it to be used for a different form of greenspace or sport and recreation provision and it makes little or no contribution to green infrastructure; or
- The development will result in the enhancement of other spaces or facilities that will represent a greater benefit to the community served by the space or facility that will be lost than retention of it; or
- The development will result in replacement or compensatory provision that will be at least as accessible and at least equivalent in terms of attractiveness, quality, value and sustainability as the space or facility to be lost and capable of sustaining at least the same levels of use; or
- The proposed development is ancillary to the current use or functions of the land and will not adversely affect the level of use it can sustain, its contribution to natural systems and processes or the overall quality of provision

The Council will impose conditions or seek planning obligations as necessary to make proposed developments acceptable in planning terms and may:

- Require developers to make or fund new or enhanced provision, either on or off site as appropriate, in order to comply with its adopted provision standards
- Require that any necessary new or enhanced provision will be delivered in phase with the implementation of the proposed development
- Require developers to make acceptable arrangements for the long term management and maintenance of any spaces or facilities intended predominantly for the use of the occupants of a proposed development

Delivery Mechanisms

The delivery mechanisms open to the Council in support of these policy statements include:

- The Development Management process
- Refusing planning permission for any development that is unacceptable in terms of the policy
- Imposing conditions on any planning permission, including where appropriate a Grampian condition
- Negotiating planning obligations that will result in appropriate compensatory provision or appropriate contributions to compensatory or the enhancement of existing provision (note: this is likely to be only a

short term approach; for the longer term, the Coalition Government has indicated that it will retain the Community Infrastructure Levy introduced by the previous Government but intends to amend it in some respects.)

- The allocation of Council resources through its leisure service and the seeking of external funding, where available
- The pooling and aggregation of developer contributions
- Working in partnership with the County Council as Highways Authority, the City and District's town and parish councils, land owners and local communities
- Working in partnership with national agencies such as Natural England and Sport England

Background Information



3 The Policy Context

Introduction

The first step in preparing a PPG17 Assessment and related greenspace strategy is to identify the policy context within which it is set. For obvious reasons, the more that different plans and strategies work to the same broad long term aims the better, as this will help to ensure that resources are used as effectively as possible to deliver desirable outcomes. Accordingly, this chapter highlights the most significant points of national, regional, County and District-wide plans and strategies. Appendix A gives more detail on national policy while chapter 21 gives fuller details of local plans and strategies.

National Policy

Apart from scrapping Regional Spatial Strategies, the Coalition Government has not yet made any changes to the key messages in existing national planning policies and strategies. However, the *Programme for Government* highlights its support for “localism” and states that

We will maintain the Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and other environmental protections, and create a new designation – similar to SSSIs – to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities.

We will introduce measures to protect wildlife and promote green spaces and wildlife corridors in order to halt the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity.

The key messages from national policy statements from the previous government include:

- Reliance on the NPFA (now Fields in Trust) Six Acre Standard is no longer acceptable. There is at least one area where an Inspector at appeal has adopted what is effectively a precautionary principle by refusing consent for a proposed development at a call-in inquiry. This was done partly on the basis that as the Council in question had not undertaken a

comprehensive PPG17 assessment it did not know whether the site in question should be retained or could be developed.

- The last Government's "Safer, Cleaner, Greener" agenda resulted in local communities becoming more aware of any shortcomings in the quality of their local environment and demanding action to overcome them. However, this is also encouraging opposition to any development which may affect established greenspaces. St Albans, like other Councils, needs to try to persuade local residents that development can be positive and that one of the Council's duties is to seek to harness the development process in the interests of local residents and visitors.
- Adapting to and mitigating the impact of climate change were increasingly key drivers of the last Government's approach to planning policy. The evolving green infrastructure (GI) agenda is tangible evidence of this. Policy ENV1 of the East of England Plan stated that "Green infrastructure should be developed so as to maximise benefits for communities and biodiversity as well as to contribute to achieving the goals of climate change mitigation and adaptation".
- The last Government's planning policies gave equal prominence to the creation of additional green infrastructure and the retro-fitting of existing spaces to deliver additional functions, and placed particular importance on the development of connected networks of green space and the better linking of urban areas with the surrounding countryside.

It seems likely that the Coalition Government will support and possibly strengthen this policy approach.

City and District-wide Plans and Strategies

The Council's District-wide plans offer two key messages for this strategy:

- Both the St Albans Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Council's Corporate Strategy contain a number of "hooks" on which to hang this assessment and strategy, and policies and proposals within it. The most important relate to enhancing the local environment and local lifestyles and the promotion of healthy eating and exercise. Taking positive action to improve the District's greenspace, sport and recreation provision should be seen as an important component of delivering the Local Strategic Partnership's aim of improving the quality of life for everyone.

- *City Vision* contains ambitious spatial proposals that seek to build on the City and District's strengths and expand on the aims in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Key Implications

The key requirements relating to this assessment and strategy that flow from existing plans and strategies are the clear need to include proposals that will:

- Link settlements, including the city, better to the green belt and wider countryside
- Lead to more and better walking and cycling routes between settlements and within the City
- Promote environmental sustainability and reduce the City and District's carbon footprint by harnessing natural systems and processes
- Identify, protect and in places create a strategic network of green infrastructure, including a green ring round the city
- Help the City and District adapt to climate change
- Result in more and better provision for young people
- Help to encourage community engagement and participation

Planned Growth

The East of England Plan (the Regional Spatial Strategy, or RSS) proposes an additional 7,200 dwellings in St Albans District between 2001 and 2021. However, in the Localism Bill, the Government has indicated its intention to scrap Regional Spatial Strategies. This means that local authorities, including the City and District, will have to identify their own housing targets, although the development pressures will remain.

The District Council therefore issued a Core Strategy consultation pamphlet entitled *Strategy for Locating Future Development in the District* in December 2010 in order to seek views on its proposed spatial strategy and housing targets. The consultation pamphlet proposed a housing target of 250 homes a year between 2011 and 2028, giving a total of 4,250 additional homes during the plan period.



4 Local Views, Local Needs

Introduction

The Coalition Government wants the planning system to be more responsive to the views of local communities – something which is obviously critically important in relation to community infrastructure such as greenspace. To attempt to establish local views, the original consultants used a variety of methods including:

- A self-completion questionnaire survey of local households
- Interviews with Council officers
- A workshop with town and parish council representatives
- A questionnaire survey of the views of external stakeholders

Greenspace Strategy Household Survey

Paragraph 1 of PPG17 begins with a clear statement of the need to take account of local views:

To ensure effective planning for greenspace, sport and recreation it is essential that the needs of local communities are known

The original consultants sent out around 5,000 questionnaires to households within the City and District and received roughly 1,000 completed ones back. The results therefore provide a broad guide to the views of those interested enough to complete and return the questionnaire. However, they are now about four years old and so, where appropriate, this strategy highlights more recent trends.

In addition, the original consultants arranged a workshop at which the District's Town and Parish Councils were able to express their views. The main findings from the various consultations were:

The Importance of Greenspace

- Parks, natural greenspaces and green corridors were considered to be the most important types of greenspace by household survey respondents – with

a clear preference for larger scale parks with 94% indicating that district parks were important compared to 80% for small local parks and gardens. The importance of parks and gardens was also confirmed at the Parish/Town Council workshop.

- Allotments were less well valued, with only 48% of residents feeling them to be important, and 26% suggesting that allotments were unimportant. This was supported at the Parish/Town Council workshop, which suggested that many people value allotments less than in the past. (note: recent trends contradict this view, with a rapid rise in the demand for allotments in the past 2-3 years).

Quantity

- Satisfaction with the quantity of greenspace provision in the City and District is relatively high, with only 1% of household survey respondents indicating that there is too much, and 51% suggesting that the overall level of provision is about right
- Two thirds of household survey respondents indicated that there was adequate provision of parks and gardens, although once again differences across the hierarchy of provision were evident - 77% and 70% indicating that the existing level of district parks and local parks respectively was about right, compared with 54% for small local parks and gardens
- The main areas of deficiency were perceived to be in outdoor sports facilities, natural and semi-natural greenspace and green corridors, for which between 40% and 45% of respondents suggested that provision was “not enough”
- Other consultees identified a shortfall of provision for children and young people, particularly for older children and teenagers

Quality

- The household survey responses identified a reasonably high level of satisfaction with the quality of greenspaces in the City and District, with 58% of respondents being either satisfied or very satisfied. The highest level of satisfaction was with the quality of trees as well as pathways, boundaries and planted/grass areas. Conversely, the lowest levels of satisfaction related to amenities such as toilets and cafés, with 37% of respondents dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

- The main areas of concern regarding greenspace in St Albans City and District were litter and dog fouling - 25% and 19% of respondents respectively considering these issues to be a “significant problem”
- Parish/Town Clerks and Council officers indicated that there were a number of anti-social behaviour problems in parts of the City and District.
- “Clean and litter free greenspaces” were the main aspirations of residents in the City and District

Accessibility

- In general, satisfaction with the accessibility of sites in the City and District was high, particularly in terms of accessibility on foot (with 83% of respondents satisfied or very satisfied) and the visibility of site entrances (79% satisfied or very satisfied)
- Fewer people were satisfied with the accessibility of sites by public transport and cycleways and 16% of respondents expressed concern regarding the level of direction and signage provided
- External agencies also highlighted the importance of promoting sustainable transport routes and cycleways to encourage better use of green corridors and to improve the links between greenspace sites.

Usage

- According to the household survey, usage of greenspace sites is high, with only 4% and 6% of respondents stating that they did not use district parks and natural and semi natural greenspaces respectively
- Daily/weekly usage of greenspace was greatest for local parks (44%), natural and semi natural greenspace (43%) and green corridors (42%)
- Although outdoor sports facilities were considered to be one of the areas of highest deficiency in terms of quantity of provision, only 16% of respondents used these facilities weekly or more frequently
- Only 5% of respondents used allotments daily or weekly
- According to household survey respondents, the most popular reasons for using greenspaces were to walk (69%), to take exercise (68%) and for fresh air (68%). Observing wildlife (37%) and taking children

out (33%) were also relatively popular reasons (note: these percentages do not sum to 100 as respondents could give more than one answer)

Management and Maintenance

- Community involvement is critical to the management and quality of greenspace
- The involvement of "Friends" groups in the management of greenspace sites has provided a sense of ownership and contributed to improving the quality of greenspaces.
- Respondents to both the household survey and current users of greenspace indicated that the management and maintenance of the greenspaces is good, with 60% of respondents either satisfied or very satisfied.

Opportunities for improvement

- More information and better promotion of local greenspaces would raise awareness and encourage more people to use greenspaces
- There is scope to increase opportunities for community involvement in greenspace management which could help to create local identity and ownership as well as lead to better protected and maintained areas of greenspace
- There are significant opportunities for environmental improvements, particularly in partnership with external agencies, volunteers and other key users: the enhancement of the River Ver, for example
- The household survey highlighted that the main improvements that users would like to see related to enhancements to the cleanliness and maintenance of sites, trees, flowers, shrubs and nature features

Residents' Survey 2005

The Council also commissioned Ipsos MORI in 2005 to undertake a survey of a representative sample of local residents aged 16 and over designed to identify attitudes towards the Council and the services it provides. Key findings from the survey that are relevant to this Strategy include:

- Recycling facilities and parks and greenspaces are the most used non-universal council services in the District, with 73% of respondents using the latter (note: non-universal services are those services which residents use on a discretionary basis, unlike

“universal” services such as refuse collection or street cleaning)

- 83% of respondents were satisfied with parks and greenspaces, 72% with children’s play areas and playgrounds and 54% with sports facilities. This was the third highest satisfaction rating amongst a “family” of seventeen local authority areas.
- The features or characteristics of parks and greenspaces that local residents rated most highly were the care of grassed areas, trees and flower or shrub beds; general cleanliness; and paths. Conversely the lowest rated features were catering facilities; access for people with disabilities; parking; the selection of play equipment; and the provision of dog bins.

Overall, the MORI survey indicates a high level of local use of greenspaces and sports facilities, no doubt largely because of the high levels of local resident satisfaction with them. However, there are also indications of some things that local residents would like the Council to do better.

Place Survey, 2008

The Place Survey uses a methodology designed by DCLG and the Audit Commission to inform national indicators for local authorities. Its purpose is to identify residents’ views and perceptions in relation to the area in which they live, defined as being within a 15-20 minute walk from home. The key findings relevant to this strategy are that:

- 90% of respondents were satisfied with their local area, compared with 84% across Hertfordshire and 80% in England as a whole
- 86% of respondents were satisfied with parks and open spaces, compared with 76% across Hertfordshire and 69% in England as a whole; as a result, parks and open spaces represent one of the City and District’s key strengths

In addition, the table below summarises the views of respondents by ward in relation to their satisfaction with parks and open spaces:

Ward	Very or fairly satisfied	Fairly or very dissatisfied
Ashley	87%	5%
Batchwood	92%	3%
Clarence	85%	6%
Colney Heath	81%	5%
Cunningham	70%	13%
Harpenden East	89%	1%

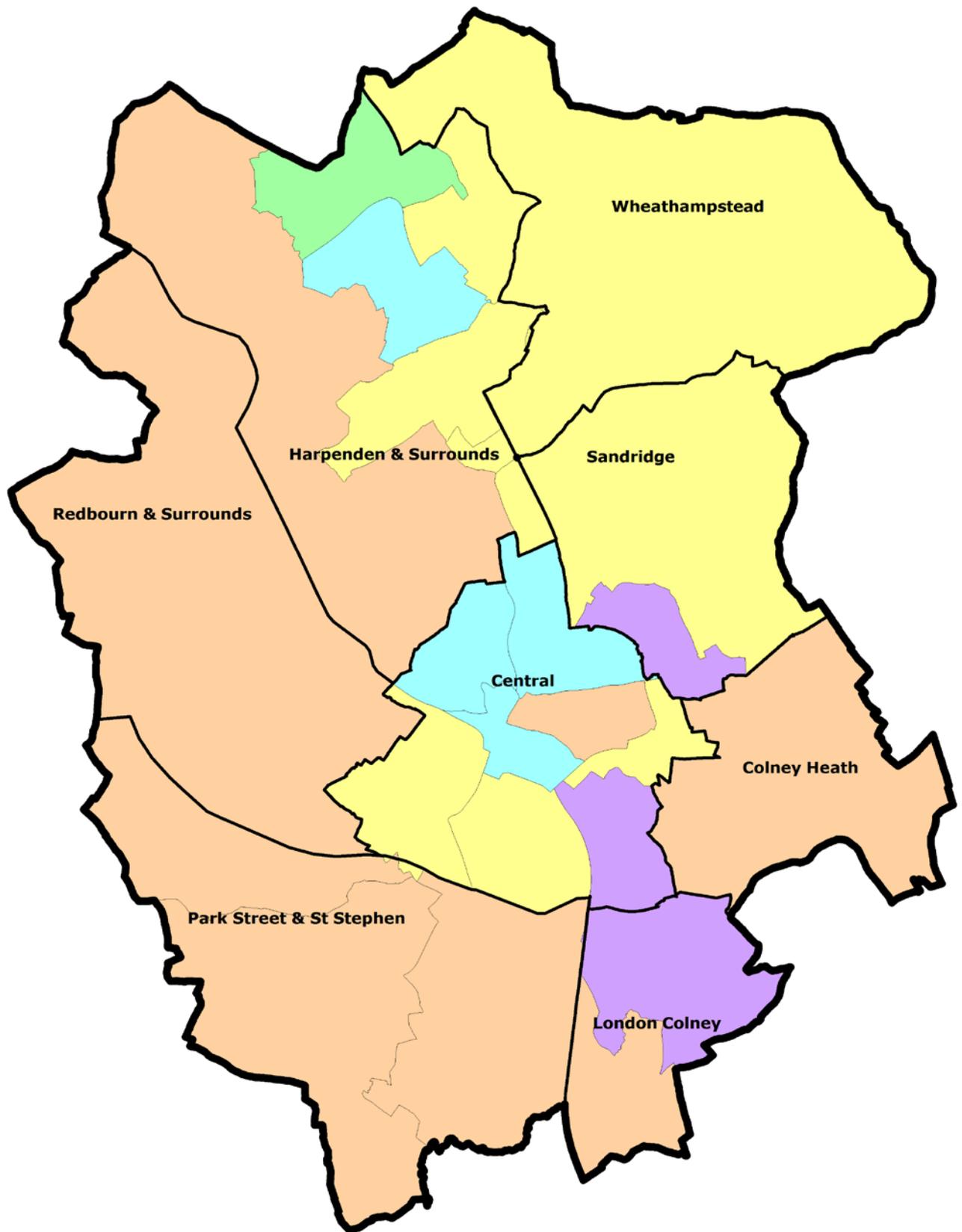
Harpenden North	96%	0%
Harpenden South	89%	0%
Harpenden West	91%	2%
London Colney	72%	11%
Marshalswick North	80%	6%
Marshalswick South	91%	1%
Park Street	82%	6%
Redbourn	83%	3%
St Peters	95%	1%
St Stephen	85%	7%
Sandridge	86%	3%
Sopwell	87%	3%
Verulam	88%	2%
Wheathampstead	89%	2%

Accordingly, the areas in which overall satisfaction is highest are Batchwood, Harpenden West, Marshalswick South and St Peters; and those in which it is lowest are Cunningham and London Colney. Map 4.1 below summarises these findings and highlights that the lowest levels of satisfaction are in the south-east of the District and the southern part of the Sandridge planning area. However, it is important to note that this map represents the average view of the residents in each ward. The London Colney ward, for example, in which only 72% of residents are very or fairly satisfied, contains Napsbury Park, one of the highest amenity housing developments in the District.

The survey asked residents to rate the importance of twenty different aspects of an area in terms of making it a good place to live. Parks and open spaces came fourth in the resulting ranking:

The level of crime	62%
Education provision	43%
Health services	43%
Parks and open spaces	41%
Clean streets	34%
Shopping facilities	30%

Accordingly it is clear that parks and open spaces make a very positive contribution to attracting new residents and provide considerable support to the City and District's economic development.



- Over 95 per cent very or fairly satisfied
- 91-95 per cent very or fairly satisfied
- 86-90 per cent very or fairly satisfied
- 81-85 per cent very or fairly satisfied

80 per cent or fewer very or fairly satisfied

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy



Map 4.1
Residents' Satisfaction
with Parks and Open Spaces,
by Ward



Provision Standards



5 Provision Standards: General Approach

Introduction

PPG17 acknowledges that nearly all greenspaces are multi-functional and therefore have both a primary and secondary purposes. For example:

- The primary purpose of grass pitches is clearly the playing of pitch sports – which, in the St Albans context, is likely mainly to be cricket, football, hockey or rugby. However, such pitches also serve secondary purposes such as providing opportunities for children to run around, jogging, casual kickabouts, sitting in the sun, and – although it should be regarded as incompatible with the primary purpose - dog walking and emptying. They also nearly always enhance the amenity of the area in which they are located by creating open-ness, although their biodiversity is very often extremely limited and visually they tend to be pretty boring. However, if pitches were designed to serve wider purposes, for example through the introduction of areas of woodland, a network of surfaced paths, public art, changes of level, areas of wildflower meadow and hedgerows, it could obviously compromise their use as pitches.
- The primary purpose of smaller spaces (such as the Municipal Garden to the north of the Council Offices in St Albans) is to provide oases of peace and quiet in which people can relax and enjoy plants, flowers and see wildlife such as birds. However, they also serve a number of secondary purposes, probably the most important of which is to support bio-diversity.

In broad terms, therefore, the basic policy approach to greenspace planning that underpins PPG17 can be described as:

- Ensure there is enough of each type of space, defined according to primary purpose, to meet local needs; for example for children's play, teenage activities, sport and active recreation, passive

- recreation and to support amenity
- Seek to ensure, as much as possible, that spaces are designed in ways that will allow them also to serve secondary purposes, but without compromising their primary purpose to an unacceptable extent. At the very least there is a duty on local authorities to promote biodiversity whenever and wherever possible.

Local Standards

PPG17 requires planning authorities to set locally determined provision standards with three main components:

- **Accessibility** – the distance that users can reasonably be expected to travel to different spaces or facilities
- **Quality** – the key characteristics of spaces or facilities if they are to be fit for purpose
- **Quantity** – the amount of provision required, expressed on a “sq m per person” or “ha per 1000 people” basis

Accessibility Standards

For obvious reasons, everyone in the City and District cannot have every form of greenspace or sport and recreation provision that they might want to use on their doorstep. Accessibility standards therefore have two broad purposes:

- They define the locally determined distances that it is reasonable to expect local residents to be willing to travel to different forms of provision and therefore help to determine an appropriate spatial pattern of provision in an area
- They provide an evidence-based way of demonstrating compliance with the “directly related” legal test for the reasonableness of planning obligations

The household survey in 2005-6 included questions relating to the length of time, in 5-minute bands, that local residents were willing to spend travelling to different forms of provision. The responses to these questions have made it possible to identify local accessibility standards.

It is impractical to use the average time or distance that people say they are willing to travel as by definition this will exclude around half of them. Equally it would not be sensible to use the minimum or median time or distance. Accordingly recreation planning generally uses the concept of the “effective catchment” – the time or distance that is acceptable to around three quarters of potential users.

In summary, therefore, the approach used in this

strategy is:

- Analyse the survey results to identify the percentage of respondents willing to travel to each different form of provision by time band
- Calculate the declining cumulative percentage of all respondents willing to travel for each of the time bands. For example, if 25% are willing to travel for 5 minutes, 25% for up to 10 minutes; 25% for up to 15 minutes and 25% for up to 20 minutes, it follows that 100% are willing to travel for at least 5 minutes; 75% for at least 10 minutes; 50% for at least 15 minutes; and 25% for up to 20 minutes.
- Prepare a chart of the declining percentages and read off the time threshold that is acceptable to 75% of respondents. This is the basic time threshold. In the example above it is 10 minutes.
- Convert the time threshold to “on the ground” distance thresholds using typical travel speeds for people walking, cycling and driving. It is impractical to derive distance thresholds for public transport as they depend on the availability of suitable services. The speeds used for this strategy are 80 m per minute, 200 m per minute and 500 m per minute respectively. The walking speed reflects government and other guidance and the cycling speed is 2.5 times the walking speed and the driving speed 2.5 times the cycling speed. Most drivers will travel faster than this, especially in the less developed areas of the City and District, but assuming an average speed of 500 m per minute includes a time allowance for parking.

Given the need to promote sustainability and “liveable neighbourhoods”, the walking distance threshold is the most important in relation to greenspace provision. Cycling and driving thresholds are more significant in relation to major sports facilities such as leisure centres which have to draw their users from a fairly wide area in order to be viable.

Quality Standards

In order to appraise the quality and value of existing provision, the Council undertook a comprehensive audit of spaces and facilities within each of the main settlements using a suite of typology-specific audit forms:

- Allotments
- Children’s equipped play areas
- Green corridors
- Multi-functional greenspaces (amenity greenspaces, natural greenspace, parks and gardens, churchyards and cemeteries and playing fields)
- Teenage facilities

These forms calculated summary quality and value scores using the following definitions of “quality” and “value”:

- **Quality:** the range of features or facilities on the site (eg trees, shrubs or seats), their basic characteristics (eg appropriate to the site or not), and their fitness for purpose and condition (eg on a spectrum from very good to very poor)
- **Value:** the value of a site to people and biodiversity. In this context value is nothing to do with monetary value.

Quality and value are therefore largely independent of each other, but linked. For example, if a particular greenspace is the only one in which young people can take part in a kickabout in an area, it is inherently of high value, even if it is of poor quality. However, if it is badly vandalised or perceived as unsafe it may be seen as being of little value by local people, but this is primarily a reflection of quality.

It is easiest to summarise the meaning of value by identifying the things that make one space or facility more valuable than another. They are:

- **The degree of public access:** spaces with free public access are more inclusive and therefore more valuable than those with paid access, which are in turn more valuable than spaces with no public access. Similarly, spaces that are easy to get to are more valuable than those which are not.
- **Purpose:** spaces that serve a clear purpose and are designed and maintained for that purpose are more valuable than those which are a compromise between lots of different uses. For example, if a bowling green was also used for 5-a-side football, it would be of very little value for bowls, at least. A tarmac multi-sports court is less valuable for tennis, say, than the same size of court with a specialist tennis surface.
- **Range of facilities:** the more facilities in a space the wider the range of people to whom it will appeal. A park with (say) a bowling green, a play area, tennis courts, pond, horticultural areas, nature conservation areas and the like will be more valuable than a park which has just paths, grass and trees. A teenage area with a skateboard ramp or two, a BMX track and a ball court will be more valuable than one with only a small shelter.
- **Context value:** as noted above, if a space or facility is the only one in an area it is more valuable than if it is merely one of many similar spaces or facilities.

- **Heritage value:** spaces with a specific heritage designation (eg conservation area status, listed building etc) have been assessed by someone as being of high value
- **Biodiversity/nature conservation value:** spaces with good biodiversity (eg canal corridors) or which are important for specific species (eg Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves) are more valuable than those which are green deserts (eg sports pitches)
- **Amenity value:** some spaces contribute positively to amenity, others don't. The focus of a Georgian square is the greenspace in the middle of it and the greenspace is a key element in the urban design. A scruffy bit of grass left over beside a block of garages in a housing area has very little amenity value.
- **Recreational value:** some spaces are inherently more valuable for formal (eg sport) or informal recreation (eg strolling, walking a dog) than others. The nature of specific facilities also has an effect on a site's overall value if they allow higher levels of use or are likely to attract a wider range of people. For example, a site with 3 or 4 pitches is more valuable than a site with only one; a floodlit pitch has greater value than one without floodlights; and an artificial turf pitch has more value than a grass pitch.
- **Play value:** while local authorities throughout the UK have provided and maintain equipped play areas specifically for children to use, very little of the total amount of children's outdoor play actually takes place in them. Children play in the street and in greenspaces of various kinds, such as parks, on playing fields and in amenity greenspaces close to home. Therefore it is desirable that most greenspaces should be suitable for play.

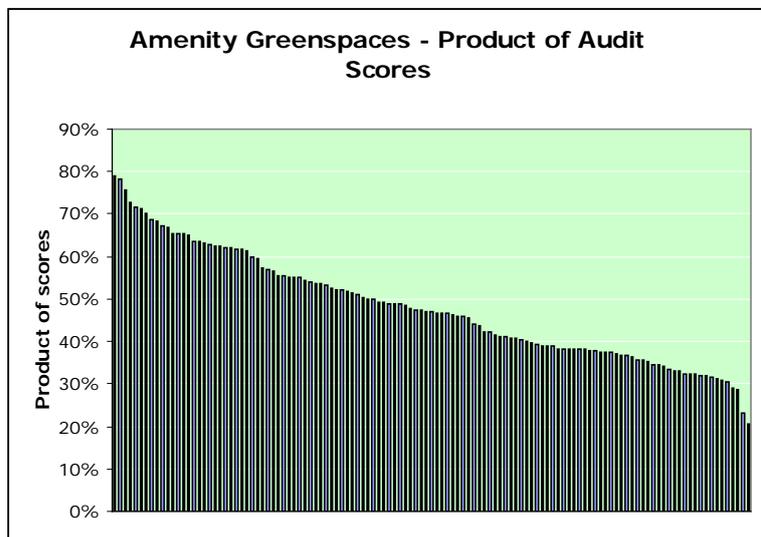
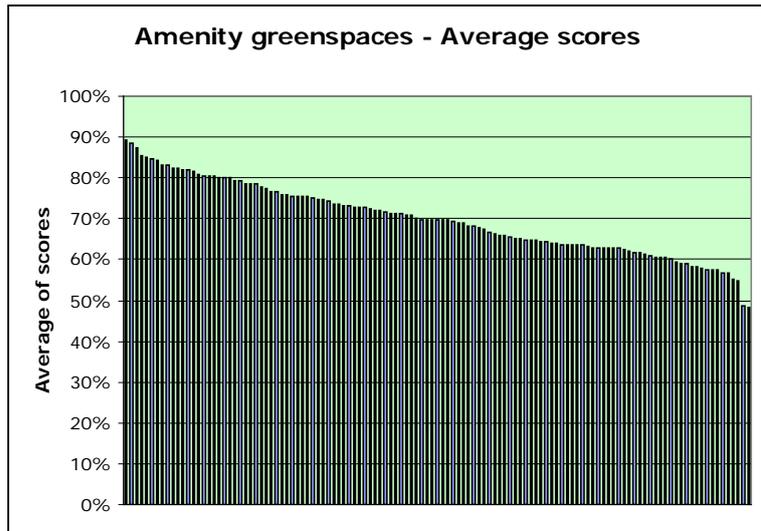
Although the audit used a single audit form for amenity greenspaces, natural greenspace, parks and gardens, churchyards and cemeteries and playing fields, it calculated the summary scores in a different way for each of these different forms of provision so as to reflect their particular characteristics.

Because quality and value are independent variables, it is possible to combine them to reach an initial policy conclusion for each space or facility:

High value	These spaces should be protected, because they are of high value, and enhanced in order to improve their quality and move them into the high value/high quality category	These spaces or facilities should be protected through the planning system as they are both high value and high quality.
Low value	These spaces may be important if they are the only ones in an area, but unless it is possible to improve both their quality and value it may be better to use them for some other purpose. PPG17 requires that using the space to remove or reduce a local deficiency in some other form of greenspace should be the first policy option; but if this is not necessary, or impractical, it may be acceptable to develop the land for some other purpose.	These spaces are of high quality but not particularly valuable in terms of meeting people's needs or bio-diversity and have little cultural or heritage value. The priority is to find ways of improving their value, while retaining their high quality. If this is not possible, it may be acceptable to use them for some other purpose. PPG17 requires that using the space to remove or reduce a local deficiency in some other form of greenspace should be the first policy option; but if this is not necessary, or impractical, it may be acceptable to develop the land for some other purpose.
	Low quality	High quality

We stress that this is only an initial policy conclusion because it ignores the context in which each site is set.

Most local people will not separate quality and value when deciding whether to make use of a particular space or facility, however. Instead, they perceive the spaces or facilities they use, or may use, "in the round" and so it is desirable to have a single audit score that summarises the quality and value of different spaces in a comparative way. There are two possible approaches: taking the average of the quality and value scores or multiplying them together. Using the average of the scores reduces differences and results in all the scores being bunched together; multiplying them exaggerates differences. This is illustrated by the two charts for amenity greenspaces below. The first shows the averages of the quality and value scores for each site, with a range from roughly 50-90%; the second shows the product of them, with a range from roughly 20-80%.



This report uses the latter approach – referred to in the remainder of this report as the “Summary Audit Scores” - as it leads to a wider range of composite summary scores and therefore leads to the clearer identification of those spaces and facilities that most require enhancement. It also allows the setting of a simple comparative quality standard benchmark. The best value regime set benchmarks for local services by appraising them across the country and then encouraging local authorities to aim to be in the top quartile (25%). While it is obviously impossible for everything in a range of scores to be in the top quartile (unless all services are identical) this provides a useful target. The quality standards in this strategy are therefore based on a policy aspiration that all sites should have a summary audit score of at least the current third quartile score. In everyday terms, the four quartile scores can be classed as:

- First quartile Very poor
- Second quartile Poor
- Third quartile Fair
- Fourth quartile Good

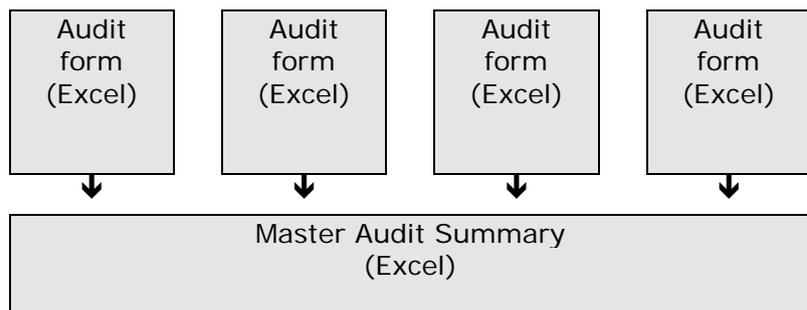
The Audit Process

While the audit results appear as a set of detailed scores, they are not “absolute scores” but represent the opinion of whoever did the audit at a particular time and under specific weather conditions and therefore are no more than a broad guide. A different surveyor would almost certainly score some aspects of a site differently, as might the same surveyor at a different time of year.

The audit process assessed a wide range of features or characteristics of each site and awarded a score to them. This resulted in a large number of scores which would be too many to allow simple analysis. Accordingly the forms group the various features and characteristics into a limited number of categories. The audit forms were Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and included various formulae which automatically calculates summary scores for each of these groups as well as overall quality and value scores, all expressed as percentages.

Presentation of the Audit Results

The full audit results are given in Appendices E-O in the form of master audit summary worksheets giving the various summary scores for each form of provision. The relationship between the individual audit forms and the master sheet is:



Quantity Standards

The total area of land in the City and District is fixed and one of the key tasks of the planning system is to make sure it is used in the most appropriate way. Therefore there is a need for a way of determining the appropriate amount of land to be allocated for different purposes. PPG17 encourages planning authorities to develop locally determined quantity standards as a way of bringing consistency to this process while reflecting local needs

and views.

This is not an exact science as different people have different requirements and expectations. There is even considerable flexibility in the size of some apparently standard forms of provision such as cricket, football and rugby pitches. However, the household survey provides a valuable evidence base. The approach taken in this strategy is therefore:

- To ascribe a specific PPG17 typology to each space or facility, according to its primary purpose
- To calculate the total area of each type of provision in each of the eight planning areas in the City and District, and divide by the relevant population to get the average amount of provision per person in each area
- Review the amount of provision in each area in relation to the views expressed by local residents in the household survey and make a judgement on the appropriate quantity of each type of provision required per person

General Trends

There are a number of recent trends worth noting in relation to general greenspace provision:

- The development of greenspace strategies has highlighted the importance of quality and accessibility. As it is not easy with limited and often declining budgets to drive up the overall greenspace quality across a council area, many local authorities have taken advantage of the funds available from the National Lottery to seek external funding to allow them to enhance their major urban parks, particularly their historic ones. St Albans submitted an unsuccessful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to enhance Verulamium Park, for example.
- Some councils are beginning to think of selling off poorly located and poorly used spaces in order to generate the capital needed to enhance others.
- The relatively recent development of high capacity artificial turf pitches (ATPs) that provide good playing conditions for football (and to a lesser extent rugby) is likely to lead to a progressive reduction in the need for grass pitches for these sports. This will have a major impact on the area of land needed for pitches, potentially freeing up some sites for other uses, whether other forms of greenspace or development that will fund ATP provision. This will obviously require a more flexible attitude amongst those who assume that playing fields should be sacrosanct, but the retention of poor quality and often unplayable pitches does nothing to promote participation in sport.

- Broadly speaking, councils are seeing the development industry as a key source of capital funding for the enhancement of parks and greenspaces through planning agreements.
- There is a growing reluctance on the part of local authorities to adopt on-site greenspaces provided by developers, even when accompanied by a commuted maintenance sum, because of the long term impact on revenue budgets for grounds maintenance when the commuted sum has been expended. Some councils have tried to extend the period for which they seek commuted sums, but this is obviously resisted by developers. As a broad rule of thumb, developers are reasonably happy to provide 10-year commuted sums, reluctant to provide 15-year ones and strongly resist anything longer than this. As a result, many councils are seeking an alternative to adoption that will ensure adequate long term maintenance.
- Developers are challenging planning authorities to justify more and more robustly their requirements for on-site provision, related commuted maintenance sums (if required) and contributions to off-site provision more robustly than in the past. Inspectors are doing the same at appeal.

The main trends are therefore qualitative rather than quantitative. CABE Space has also published considerable evidence to indicate that high quality greenspaces are effective in terms of:

- Boosting land values in their vicinity and therefore promoting economic development
- Helping to absorb atmospheric pollution and particulates
- Absorbing rainfall and therefore helping to avoid or minimise flooding
- Providing opportunities for relaxation and recreation and helping individuals to reduce their stress levels

6 Provision Standards: Allotments

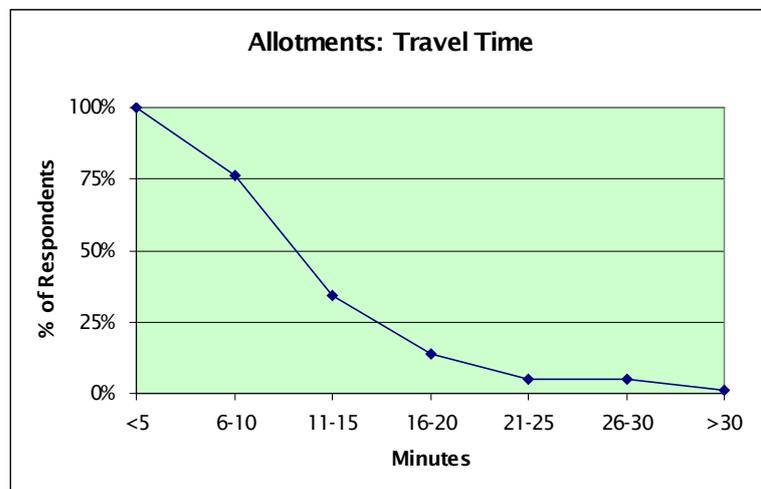
Introduction

This chapter reviews the provision of allotments across the City and District and derives provision standards for them. However, at the outset it is important to note that the size and location of sites is more an accident of history – and particularly the need to bring as much land as possible into productive use during and immediately after the Second World War - than the result of deliberate planning. Given the enormous amount of development since then, the pattern of provision does not necessarily match current needs particularly well.

Accessibility

Accessibility Standard

The chart below summarises the length of time for which household survey respondents indicated they were willing to travel to an allotments site:



As the effective catchment of any community facility is normally taken as the time or distance for which around 75% of people are willing to travel, the effective catchment of allotment sites is around 10 minutes travel or some 800 m walking at 80 m per minute. The straight line distance walked by someone is usually around 75% of the on the ground distance. This means

that the appropriate walking distance threshold for allotments is 600 m.

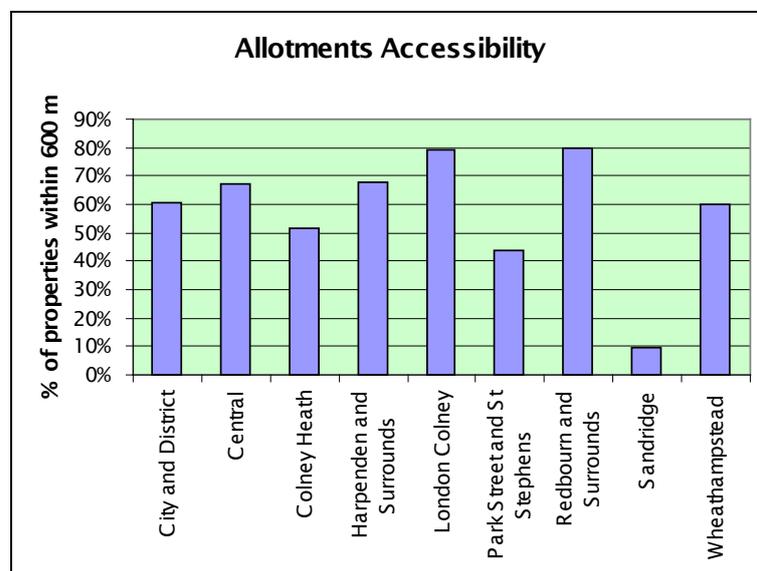
District-wide Accessibility Assessment

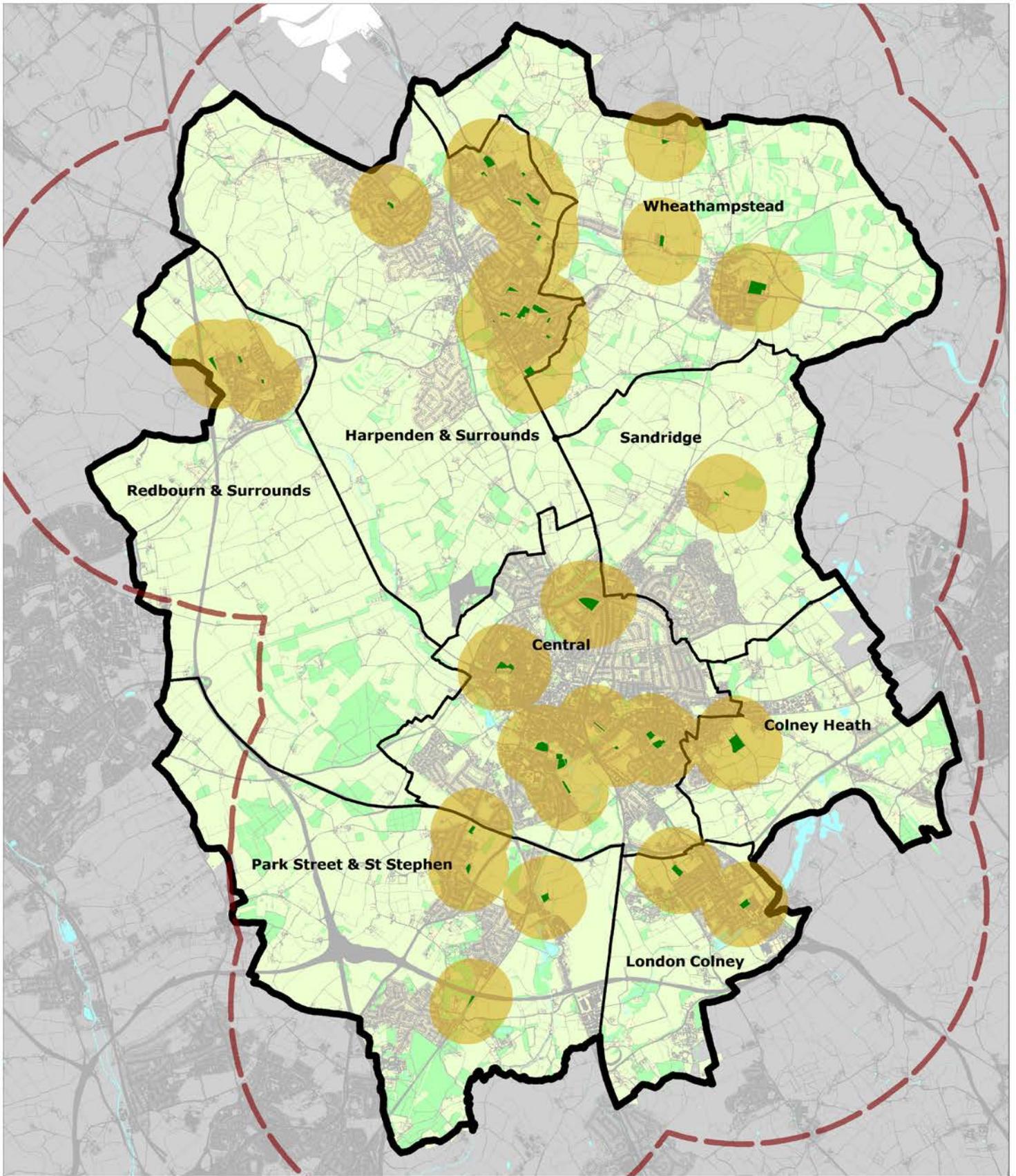
Map 6.1 shows the location of allotment sites across the City and District and also identifies the areas of the City and District that lie within the 600 m as the crow flies walking distance threshold of them. It identifies that:

- Overall, allotment sites tend to be located in areas where the density of development is highest, but mainly in St Albans and Harpenden. Harpenden, for example, has a significant number of sites in two clusters in the north eastern and southern parts of the town. In St Albans sites are more evenly distributed across the town.
- There are some developed areas, such as on the eastern side of Colney Heath, the southern fringe of Sandridge and parts of Park Street and St Stephen, outwith the 600m catchment.
- There are almost no allotment sites serving the rural parts of the City and District, ie those areas with a low overall density of development

District-wide Accessibility Assessment

The chart below gives the percentage of properties in each of the planning areas within the distance threshold of at least one allotments site:





- Allotments sites
- 10 minutes/600 m walk distance threshold
- 10 minutes/3750 m drive distance threshold

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy



Map 6.1
Allotments sites

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St Albans City and District Council LA 100018953, 2010

Accordingly, across the City and District some 60% of properties lie within the walking distance threshold of at least one allotments site, with a range from 10% in Sandridge to 80% in Redbourn and surrounds.

Quality and Value

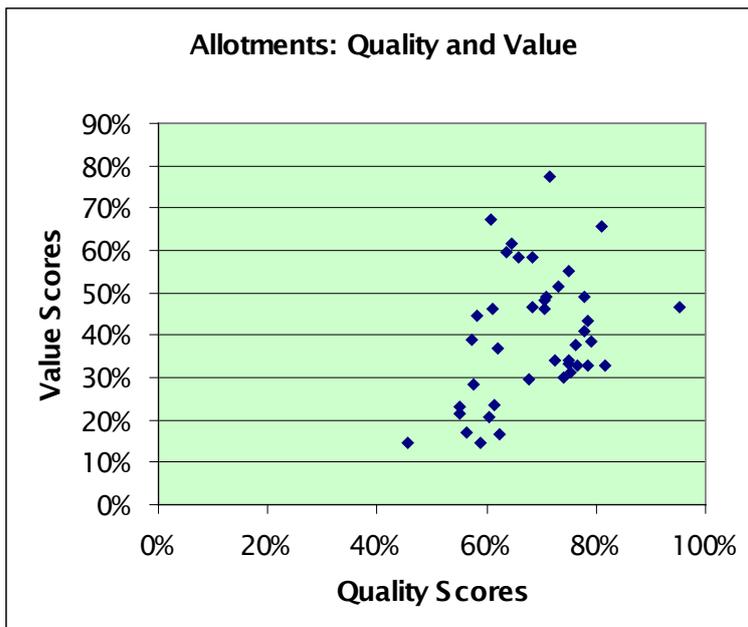
Audit Results

The overall quality audit score for each allotments site is the average of the scores for:

- The range of facilities available, based partly on site size. This reflects the fact that it is desirable for large sites to have facilities such as toilets, a trading shed (a shed used for selling seeds and other items) and communal storage, but uneconomic for small ones to have these facilities. However, all sites should have a mains water supply within a reasonable distance of each plot and as few overgrown or unworked plots as possible.
- General characteristics, such as signage, security and condition
- Accessibility, such as the availability of parking and accessibility for people with disabilities

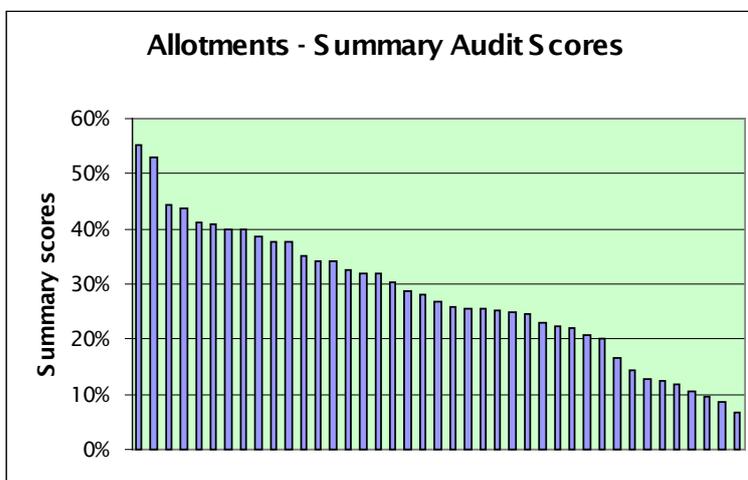
The value of a site depends on a range of characteristics such as its size (a large site is generally more valuable to potential plot holders than a small one, not least because of the opportunities for socialising), how productive the site is, whether there is a range of different plot sizes (not everyone wants a large plot) and biodiversity. Security is also a particular concern for plot holders. The overall value score for each site is given by ascribing an overall score based on site size (1 for sites with more than 75 plots, 0.8 for sites with 50-74 plots and 0.6 for sites with fewer than 50 plots) and then multiplying this by the average of the scores for the contribution of the site to local amenity, recreation and wildlife.

Appendix E gives the results of the allotments audit, for which the average quality and value scores for the 41 sites were 69% and 40% respectively. The chart below shows the distribution of the scores:



In broad terms, therefore, it will be desirable to enhance quality or value, or both, at sites across the City and District.

The chart below combines the quality and value scores into single summary scores by multiplying them together:



Quality Standard

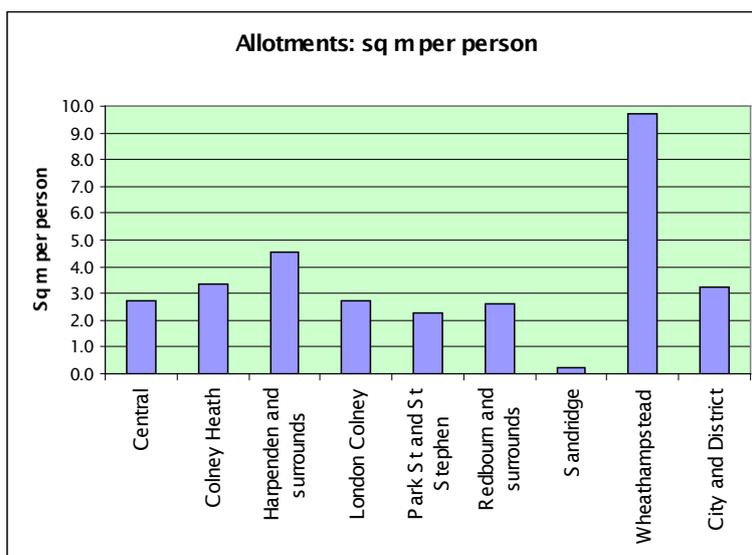
The average, median and third quartile/fair summary scores are 28%, 27% and 38% respectively. Chapter 5 explains the calculation of the summary scores and that the Council should use the third quartile score for each form of greenspace as its basic policy aspiration for the quality of sites. Accordingly the Council should adopt a quality standard that allotments sites should have a

summary audit score of not less than 38%, even although this is quite a low overall score, and work with allotment owners to enhance those sites with a lower score than this. On the basis of the audit, the main general improvements needed to allotments sites are:

- Better facilities, particularly toilets, trading sheds and communal storage
- Better signage and security and improvements to boundary hedges and fences
- Better parking and disabled provision

The Quantity of Provision

The total area of the 41 allotments sites in the City and District is some 41.5 hectares and although the Watercress site in St Albans city (1 plot) is likely to close in the near future, this will make a negligible difference to the overall level of provision. There was also a recent proposal to use most of the Westfield site in Harpenden for affordable housing. However, access to the site is owned by the City and District Council, which has refused permission for the access to be used although it is considering revised proposals. Taking account of the closure of the Watercress site, the quantity of provision in each of the eight planning areas is shown on the chart below:



The average level of provision is 3.3 sq m per person. Excluding the two “outliers” of Sandridge and Wheathampstead, in which the level of provision is abnormally low or high, reduces the average level of provision slightly to 3.2 sq m per person.

The number of tenanted and vacant plots on most sites is a “moving target” as plots are subdivided or if individual tenants neglect their plot for a period.

However, in early 2008 there were approximately 1,750 plots in the City and District, 88 vacant plots and 187 people on waiting lists. As at April 2010, the position was:

	Plots available	Waiting list	Vacant plots	% net waiting list
Central	598	336	1	56
Colney Heath	56	35	0	63
Harpenden	685	73	16	11
London Colney	67	12	2	18
Park Street/St Stephen	150	28	4	19
Redbourn	82	-12	16	-15
Sandridge	15	3	0	20
Wheathampstead	166	23	0	14
City and District	1,819	498	39	27

Note: the “% net waiting list” is the net number of people on waiting lists expressed as a percentage of the number of plots available

Overall, therefore, in only two years the number of plots has increased slightly and the people on a waiting list has nearly trebled and now equates to about 27% of the total number of available plots.

There are nearly always some vacant plots in any area, even where there is a waiting list, because empty sites may not be acceptable to prospective tenants. The most common reasons for this are size (the plot is seen as too small or too large) or because it has been neglected and is overgrown.

To accommodate all of those people on a current waiting list for a plot would require two things: bringing all of the vacant plots into use and providing around 500 more plots across the City and District, but mainly in the Central and Harpenden and surrounds areas. It is also surprising that Wheathampstead, with by far the highest level of provision per person, should also have the fourth highest net waiting list.

Local Views

Town and Parish Council Views

Most allotments are owned by the District’s Town and Parish Councils, although those in St Albans City are owned by the District Council. The various councils provided details of the occupancy of their sites in 2009 and some also commented on the adequacy of provision in their area as follows:

Harpenden TC	About right
London Colney PC	Slightly more needed
Redbourn TC	About right
Sandridge PC	About right

covered in weeds which then spread to adjoining plots.

- A need for facilities such as toilets on sites, driven particularly by the rising number of women plot holders. There is also greater potential for trading sheds and communal purchasing and storage of tools such as rotovators that are best shared by a number of plot holders as a result of higher average disposable income amongst plot holders. Finally, there is greater need than in the past for parking and disabled access, primarily to enable the disabled partners of plot holders to visit their sites. The Council has found that the demand for raised beds from people with disabilities is negligible.
- A reduction in the average size of a plot. Traditionally, plots have been 10 rods (around 253 sq m) but many have been subdivided into 5 or even 2.5 rod plots. This makes it possible to accommodate more plot-holders without increasing the total area of land used for allotments.

Local Trends

Within the City and District, the main trends over the past few years have been:

- A demand for enhanced security
- Rising demand for allotments amongst young professionals and women
- An increase in lettings
- An increasing need for better site infrastructure such as storage facilities

Implications

These trends mean that:

- The City and District needs a significant increase in the overall number of allotment plots
- Site owners should seek to promote allotment gardening and be willing to invest in bringing untenanted plots up to workable standard in order to let them
- There is a steadily rising need to invest in site infrastructure

Quantity Standard

The popularity of allotment gardening clearly varies significantly across the City and District, making it difficult to derive a sensible quantity standard that will apply across the whole of the City and District. For example:

- Allotment provision in the Sandridge area equates to only 0.2 sq m per person but there is a waiting list of

- only three people
- Allotment provision in the Wheathampstead area equates to just under 10 sq m per person but there is a waiting list of 23 people

To some degree, these discrepancies are explained by differences in the average size of plots:

Central	240 sq m
Colney Heath	330 sq m
Harpenden and surrounds	193 sq m
London Colney	434 sq m
Park Street and St Stephens	182 sq m
Redbourn and surrounds	176 sq m
Sandridge	169 sq m
Wheathampstead	355sq m
Average	235 sq m

Note: the average plot size includes a proportion of the common areas of each site

What matters in any area is not so much the total area of land occupied by allotments, but the number of people that may want a plot. If there are enough plots they can then decide if available plots match their requirements. Dividing the population of each planning area by the number of plots available plus the number of people on waiting lists gives an average number of residents per actual or intending plot holder as follows:

Central	87
Colney Heath	99
Harpenden and surrounds	42
London Colney	123
Park Street and St Stephens	81
Redbourn and surrounds	67
Sandridge	746
Wheathampstead	37
Average	71

Sandridge and to a lesser extent London Colney therefore stand out as areas in which allotment gardening is significantly less popular than other areas of the City and District; conversely is it very popular in Harpenden and Wheathampstead. Accordingly there is a need for more than one quantity standard. The quantity of allotment provision that would be required in each of the planning areas to allow all those on a waiting list to have a plot, assuming the current average plot size in each area remains the same, is:

		Sq m per person
Central	2.7 + 56%	4.3
Colney Heath	3.3 +63%	5.4

Harpenden and surrounds	4.6 + 11%	5.0
London Colney	2.7 + 18%	3.3
Park Street and St Stephen	2.2 + 19%	2.7
Redbourn and surrounds	2.6 - 15%	2.3
Sandridge	0.2 + 20%	0.3
Wheathampstead	9.7 + 14%	11.1
Average	3.2 + 28%	4.1

A quantity standard of 4.1 sq m per person will therefore result in sufficient provision across the City and District to accommodate all the current demand, although there will be shortfalls in provision in the Central, Colney Heath, Harpenden and surrounds and Wheathampstead areas and surpluses in the other planning areas.

It is also possible that the demand for allotments will continue to increase, especially as average housing densities rise, and therefore desirable to build in an additional margin, of say 10%, for this into the quantity standard. This suggests quantity standards of approximately:

Colney Heath	6.0 sq m/person
Harpenden	5.5 sq m per person
Wheathampstead	12.2 sq m/person
All other areas	4.5 sq m/person

Policy Conclusions

Local Provision Standards

On the basis of the above analysis, the Council should adopt the following provision standards for planning purposes:

- **Accessibility standard:** 10 minutes walk, which equates to around 600 m on an “as the crow flies” basis
- **Quality standard:** Appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of allotment sites.
- **Quantity standard:** 4.5 sq m per person, except in Colney Heath (6.0 sq m per person), Harpenden (5.5 sq m per person) and Wheathampstead (12.2 sq m per person)

Broad Approach to Allotment Provision

The Council should:

- Protect those allotment sites with an audit score of at least 38%
- Review waiting lists for allotments plots at regular intervals (eg every two years) and adjust its approach to the application of its local standards in the light of prevailing demand
- Not allocate land that is liable to frequent flooding for

new allotments

- Not allow the redevelopment of any well located allotments sites unless (a) the developer or land owner seeking planning permission agrees to provide appropriate compensatory provision and, for residential development proposals, additional land to meet the additional need for plots likely to arise from the proposed dwellings and (b) the replacement site(s) will result in a better overall distribution of allotment provision. In such instances, the Council should impose a Grampian condition requiring that any compensatory provision is in at least a comparable workable condition to the site that will be lost before redevelopment starts.
- Encourage the owners of sites with an audit score of 38% or less to enhance them

Note: these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council's current wider planning policies.

7: Provision Standards: Amenity Greenspaces

Introduction

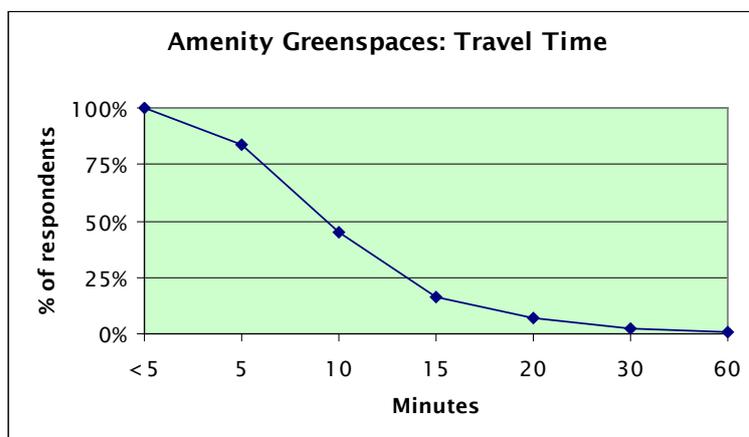
This chapter provides a City and District-wide overview of amenity greenspace provision and from it derives a set of local standards for this form of provision.

Accessibility

Because of the multi-functional nature of most greenspaces, it can be difficult to determine how best to class some spaces for planning purposes. Harpenden and Redbourn Commons, for example, can be regarded as either amenity or natural greenspaces. Both have large areas of mown grassland, but also large more naturalistic areas. Therefore in this strategy, and with the agreement of the City and District Council, they are classed partly as amenity spaces and partly as natural greenspaces.

Accessibility Standard

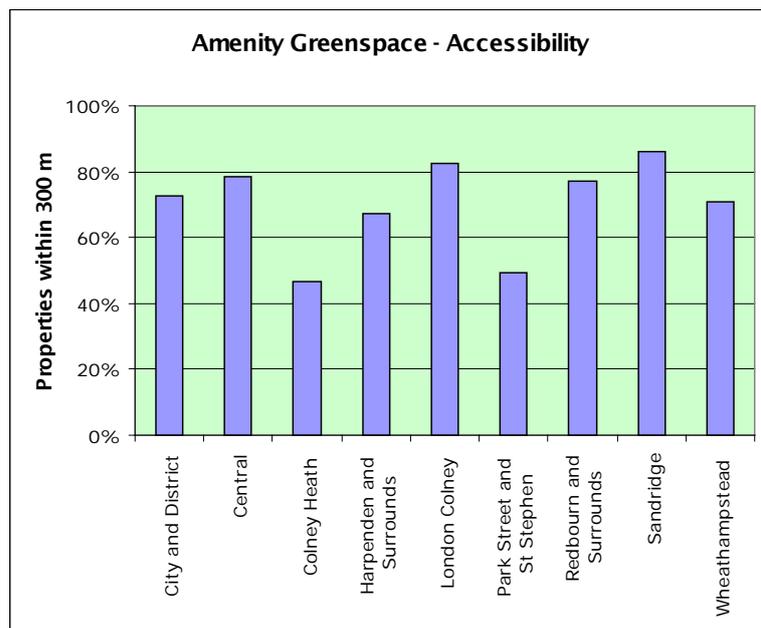
The chart below uses the results of the residents' survey to identify the percentage of people willing to travel for various times to visit an "amenity greenspace", defined for the purposes of the survey as "grass areas in housing estates":



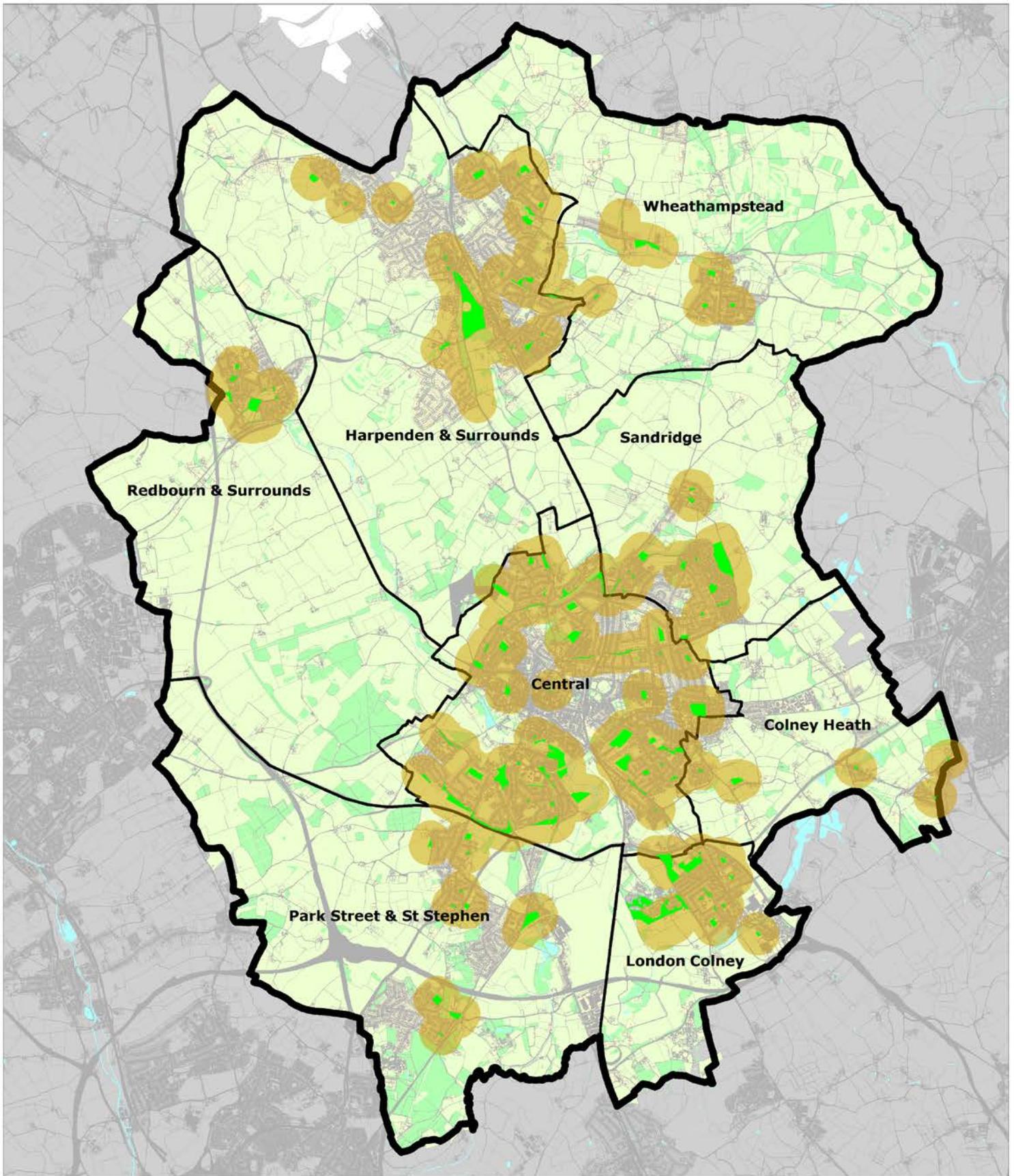
The time threshold for amenity greenspace is therefore a

little over 5 minutes. This translates into an on the ground distance of around 400 m and an “as the crow flies” distance threshold of 300 m. No-one should have to drive or cycle to visit their nearest amenity greenspace so there is no need to convert the 5-minute threshold to other forms of transport.

Map 7.1 shows the location of the various amenity greenspaces in the City and District, together with 300 m walking distance thresholds and the chart below summarises the percentage of properties in the City and District and each of the planning areas within this distance of at least one of them:



Accordingly the overall accessibility of amenity greenspace is around 80% or more in the Central, London Colney and Sandridge areas, but below 50% in Colney Heath and Park Street and St Stephen. However, the spatial priorities vary according to the percentage or total number of properties outwith the distance threshold of at least one amenity greenspace. In terms of the *percentage* of properties, the priorities for more provision located to improve overall accessibility are Colney Heath and Park Street and St Stephen; however, in terms of the total *number* of properties, the priorities are Central, Harpenden and surrounds and Park Street and St Stephen.



- Amenity Greenspaces
- 5 minutes/300 m walk distance threshold

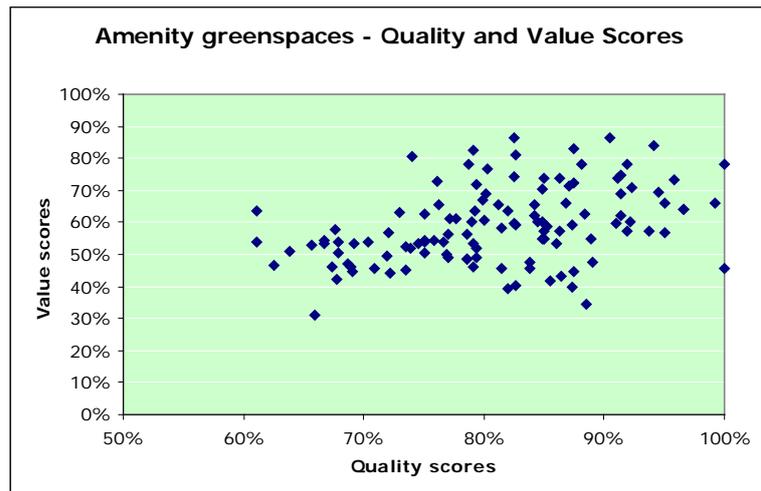
**St Albans City and District
Greenspace Strategy**



**Map 7.1
Amenity Greenspaces**

Quality and Value **Audit Results**

The full results of the audit of amenity greenspaces are given in appendix G. Overall the audit encompassed 119 spaces with an area of 1,000 sq m or more plus one of 998 sq m, only marginally below the 1,000 sq m threshold. In summary, the average audit scores for the quality and value of the various types of space were 81% and 59% respectively. The full range of scores is given in the chart below:



In general terms, the criteria used for the audit reflected the Green Flag Award standard. As well as purely factual information, such as each space's location, the range of facilities present, the degree of public access and predominant nature (eg grass, woodland or whatever) they covered:

Quality

- A welcoming place: signage, physical access, inclusiveness and design and specification
- Healthy, safe and secure: health and well-being, safety and security, control of dogs,
- Well maintained and clean: litter and waste management, grounds maintenance and horticulture, the design, management and maintenance of buildings, and the condition of public toilets and infrastructure such as paths and railings
- Conservation and heritage
- Negative features which detract from the space

Value

- Context value
- Historical/heritage value
- Contribution to local amenity, vitality and sense of

- place
- Recreational value
- Play value for children
- Ecological/biodiversity value

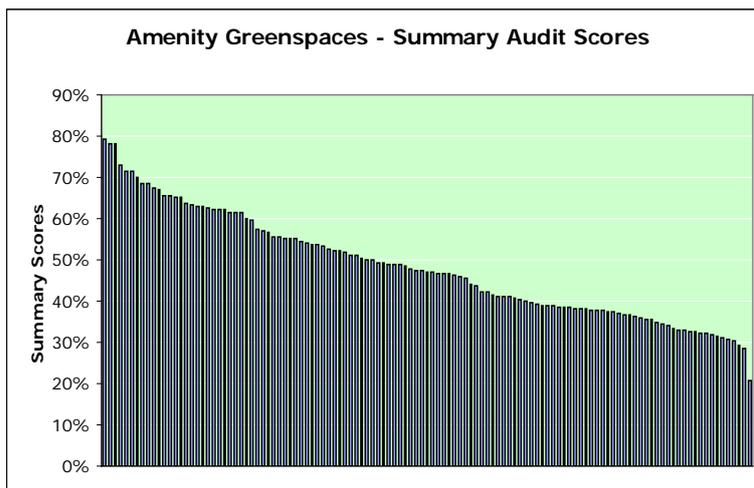
The fairly wide spread of scores indicates that both the quality and value of spaces across the City and District are far from consistent. This wide variation is slightly unusual as in most areas the grounds maintenance contractor works to a consistent specification. It may reflect different management regimes in different parishes or different levels of expectation.

It will therefore be desirable for the Council to work with the parish and town councils to drive up the quality and value of the lowest scoring spaces. The main improvements that will be generally desirable to amenity greenspaces in the City and District include:

- Better signage to and within spaces, with some existing signs replaced with new ones worded more positively
- Better disabled access, including designated disabled parking bays in appropriate locations
- Better maintenance of seats – a favourite target for vandals
- Larger or more litter bins
- Changes to promote biodiversity and nature conservation and make spaces more attractive to children for play

Quality Standard

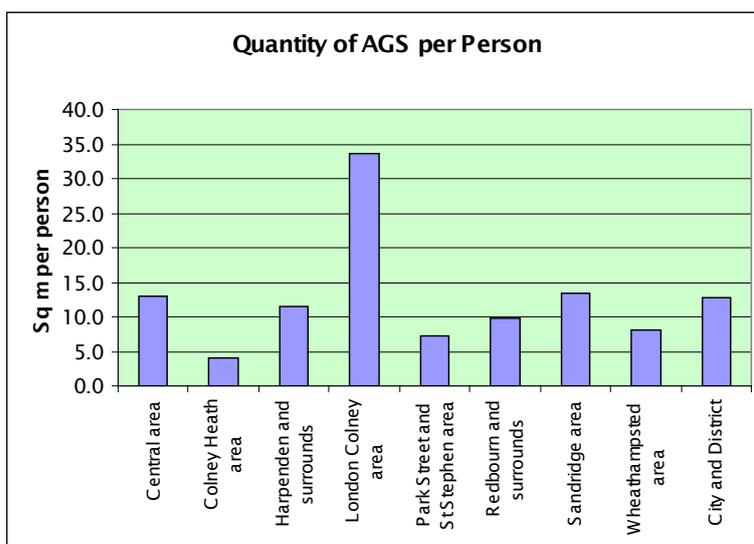
Multiplying the quality score by the value score results in an overall summary score for each space or facility which also reflects how it is likely to be perceived by users in comparison with other spaces and facilities of the same type. These composite summary scores are shown in the chart below:



The average, median and third quartile/fair summary scores are 48%, 47% and 57% respectively and so the Council should set a quality standard that sites should have a summary audit score of not less than 57%.

The Quantity of Provision

Appendix G calculates the total amount of amenity greenspace per person in each of the planning areas as follows:



On this measure, there is considerable variation in the amount of amenity greenspace across the City and District, with three of the eight planning areas having more than the average quantity of provision and five less. This suggests a possible need for more amenity spaces across much of the City and District.

Local Views

The household survey therefore asked respondents to indicate their views on the amount or quantity of amenity greenspaces, natural greenspaces and parks.

The percentage of respondents who thought there is too much, about the right amount or too little amenity greenspace in each of the planning areas was:

	Too much	About right	Too little
Central	1%	39%	48%
Colney Heath	0%	46%	49%
Harpenden area	0%	55%	36%
London Colney	0%	29%	45%
Park St & St Stephen	4%	42%	47%
Redbourn area	0%	39%	52%
Sandridge	0%	51%	39%
Wheathampstead	2%	50%	40%
City and District	1%	44%	44%

Note: percentages do not sum to 100 because some respondents answered "don't know" or did not respond at all

The net percentage of respondents in each area believing there is a need for more amenity greenspace was therefore:

	Amount sq m/person	Net % Wanting more
London Colney	33.7	16
Redbourn	9.9	13
Central	13.0	9
Colney Heath	3.9	3
City and District	12.7	0
Park St and St Stephen	7.1	-5
Wheathampstead	8.1	-10
Sandridge	13.4	-12
Harpenden area	11.4	-19

Note: the net percentage of respondents thinking there is a need for more provision is the percentage thinking there is a need for more provision minus the percentage thinking the current level of provision is about right or too much. Therefore a minus percentage indicates that more respondents thought existing provision is about right or there is too much than though there is too little; a positive percentage indicates that more respondents thought there is a need for more than thought the current provision is at least adequate.

There are clearly significant inconsistencies in these results. For example, a significant net majority of those expressing an opinion in London Colney regarded 33.7 sq m as inadequate while an even larger majority in Harpenden and Surrounds thought that 11.4 sq m per person is about right or more than enough.

Trends

National Trends

The main national trends are summarised in Chapter 5.

Local Trends

There are no obvious local trends, other than growing concern amongst local communities for the quality of greenspace maintenance.

Implications

The Council has not adopted new amenity greenspaces provided by developers for several years and so there is a clear need to review the mechanisms it uses to ensure that:

- New on-site greenspaces provided by developers are well located, designed and laid out
- Those greenspaces are subsequently appropriately managed and maintained

Quantity Standard

Local views are inconclusive in relation to the adequacy of existing provision and so the results for the Central area are probably the best guide as this is the most densely developed part of the City and District. This suggests that around 15 sq m of amenity greenspace per person is “about right”, on the basis that a small majority of respondents regarded 13.0 sq m per person as inadequate.

Policy Conclusions

Local Provision Standards

The proposed locally determined provision standards for amenity greenspace are:

Accessibility	300 m walk
Quality	Appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of amenity greenspaces
Quantity	15 sq m per person

Broad Approach to Amenity Greenspace Provision

Existing Amenity Greenspaces

The Council should:

- Protect those amenity greenspaces with an audit score of at least 57%
- Not allow the development for a non-greenspace use of any spaces with a third quartile/fair or fourth quartile/good summary audit score unless the development will result in compensatory provision that is at least as accessible to users, at least as large and of higher quality and/or value to people and wildlife than the space or spaces that will be lost
- Seek to harness development to enhance existing greenspaces with a first quartile/very poor, second

- quartile/poor or third quartile/fair audit score
- Be flexible in allowing the development for a non-greenspace use of spaces with a first quartile/very poor or second quartile/poor audit score provided that (a) there are other similar spaces of the same type but with a third quartile/fair or fourth quartile/good audit score in the vicinity and (b) the benefits of the proposed development, for example in terms of securing the enhancement of one or more of these other spaces, outweigh the loss
- Seek opportunities, where there is a deficiency of one type of greenspace in an area and a surplus of another, to redesign one or more of the surplus spaces to reduce the deficiency and deliver high quality spaces with a new greenspace use
- Promote the enhancement of those amenity greenspaces with the lowest audit scores

New On-site Amenity Greenspaces Provided by Developers

- Be flexible in its application of the above standards and take account of the location, size and quality of other multi-functional greenspaces in the vicinity of new developments - particularly natural greenspaces and parks and gardens - when deciding what to ask developers to provide or fund.
- Require developers to design and layout new on-site amenity greenspaces in accordance with the quality standards recommended in this strategy
- Review and if appropriate amend the mechanisms it currently uses to ensure that new on-site greenspaces will be well managed and maintained

Note: these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council's current wider planning policies.



8: Provision Standards: Natural Greenspace

Introduction

This chapter provides a City and District-wide overview of natural greenspace provision within the main settlements and from it derives a set of local standards for this form of provision.

Paragraph 6 of PPG17 both explicitly requires planning authorities to develop locally determined standards and explains why:

The Government believes that open space standards are best set locally. National standards cannot cater for local circumstances, such as differing demographic profiles and the extent of existing built development in an area.

The consultation draft PPS on *Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment* equally required councils to set locally determined standards. Policy NE5.2 states:

Local planning authorities should include local standards in their local development frameworks for the quantity, quality and accessibility for open space, and facilities for sport, recreation and play

In *Nature Nearby (2010)*, however, Natural England, (2010) states that it "... is encouraging all local authorities to adopt ANGSt (the Natural England Accessible Natural Green Space Standard) as their local standard". This obviously runs counter to PPG17 as if all councils adopt the same national standard there will be no locally-determined standards. ANGSt requires that:

- No-one should live more than 300 m (5 minutes walk) from their nearest natural greenspace of at least 2 ha (20,000 sq m)
- No-one should live more than 2 km from a natural greenspace of at least 20 hectares (200,000 sq m)

- No-one should live more than 5 km from a natural greenspace of at least 100 hectares (1,000,000 sq m)
- No-one should live more than 10 km from a natural greenspace of at least 500 hectares (5,000,000 sq m)
- There should be 1 ha of statutory local nature reserves per thousand population

In partnership with the other Hertfordshire councils, St Albans is developing a county-wide green infrastructure strategy. As part of this process, it has engaged consultants to undertake an assessment of the various Districts in relation to ANGSt. The results for St Albans were that:

- 52.1% of households lie within 300 m of an accessible natural greenspace of at least 2 ha
- 80.5% lie within 2 km of a site of at least 20 ha
- 97.8 lie within 5 km of a site of at least 100 ha
- 4% lie within 10 km of a site of at least 500 ha

The Hertfordshire analysis was a desk study and did not include any on-the-ground audits so the results can be regarded as only approximate. It defined natural greenspaces as sites with unrestricted access in which “human control and activities are not so intensive so that natural processes are allowed to predominate”. This is a different definition from that used in PPG17 and subsumes a wide range of different types of space into a single very broad typology. For obvious reasons, however, the results depend almost completely on which spaces are classed as “accessible natural greenspaces”. For example, the assessment included only four sites of 100 ha or more in the District – Harpenden Common, Nomansland Common, part of the Heartwood Forest and Bricket Wood Common. The addition of the Watling Chase Community Forest would marginally increase the number of dwellings within 5 km of a space of this size.

There is also a second component of ANGSt – that there should be 1 ha of local nature reserve (LNR) per 1,000 residents. St Albans has six LNRs with an aggregate area of 87.9 ha, compared with the 129 ha needed to comply with ANGSt. However, Bricket Wood Common, with a total area of some 85.5 ha, contains a Site of Special Scientific Interest extending to approximately 72.5 ha.

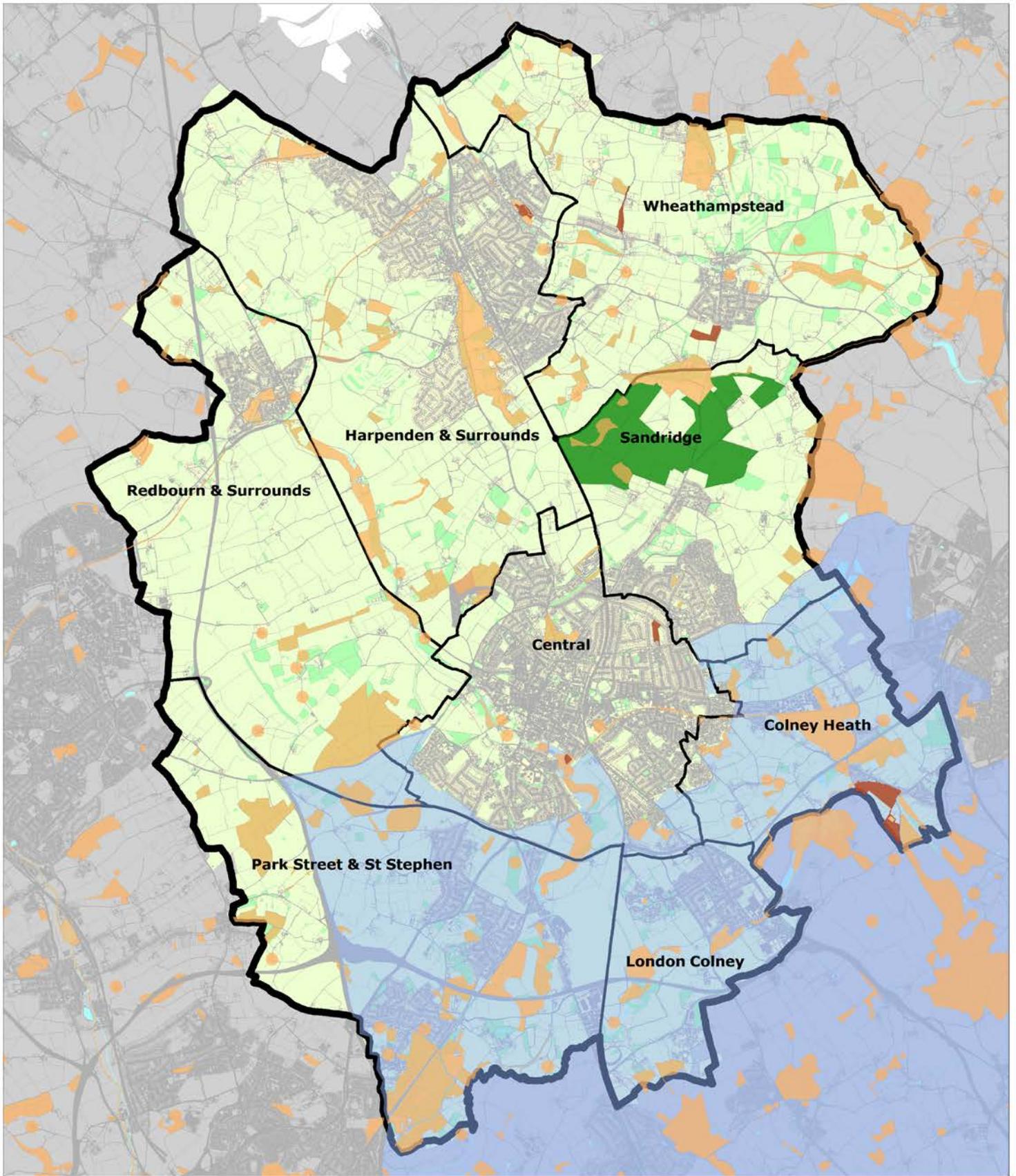
It is therefore clear that St Albans is unlikely ever to comply with all aspects of ANGSt, but especially the bottom tier as meeting it would almost certainly require the demolition of a large number of buildings. Green infrastructure should be seen primarily in terms of

harnessing natural systems and processes in support of sustainable development rather than a land use.

The Woodland Trust actively promotes a similar aspirational standard to ANGSt called the Woodland Access Standard (WAT) that will also be difficult to achieve in many areas. It states that:

- No-one should live more than 500 m from at least one area of accessible woodland of not less than 2 hectares in size
- No-one should live more than 4 km (8 km round trip) from at least one area of accessible woodland of not less than 20 ha

This strategy does not use ANGSt or WAT but takes a different approach, not least because it is based on PPG17 in which natural greenspace is merely one of a number of different types of greenspace and not an over-arching typology. This significantly reduces the number of natural greenspaces compared with the ANGSt study; for example, in this study, Verulamium and the other parks in the City and District, the larger amenity greenspaces and several other typologies are considered separately, whereas in the ANGSt study they are all classed simply as “accessible natural greenspaces”. Map 8.1 shows the location of the sites in and around the City and District with a nature conservation designation, together with the Heartwood Forest and the Watling Chase Community Forest. Map 8.2 adds the spaces classed as natural greenspaces and included in the audit that underpins this strategy.

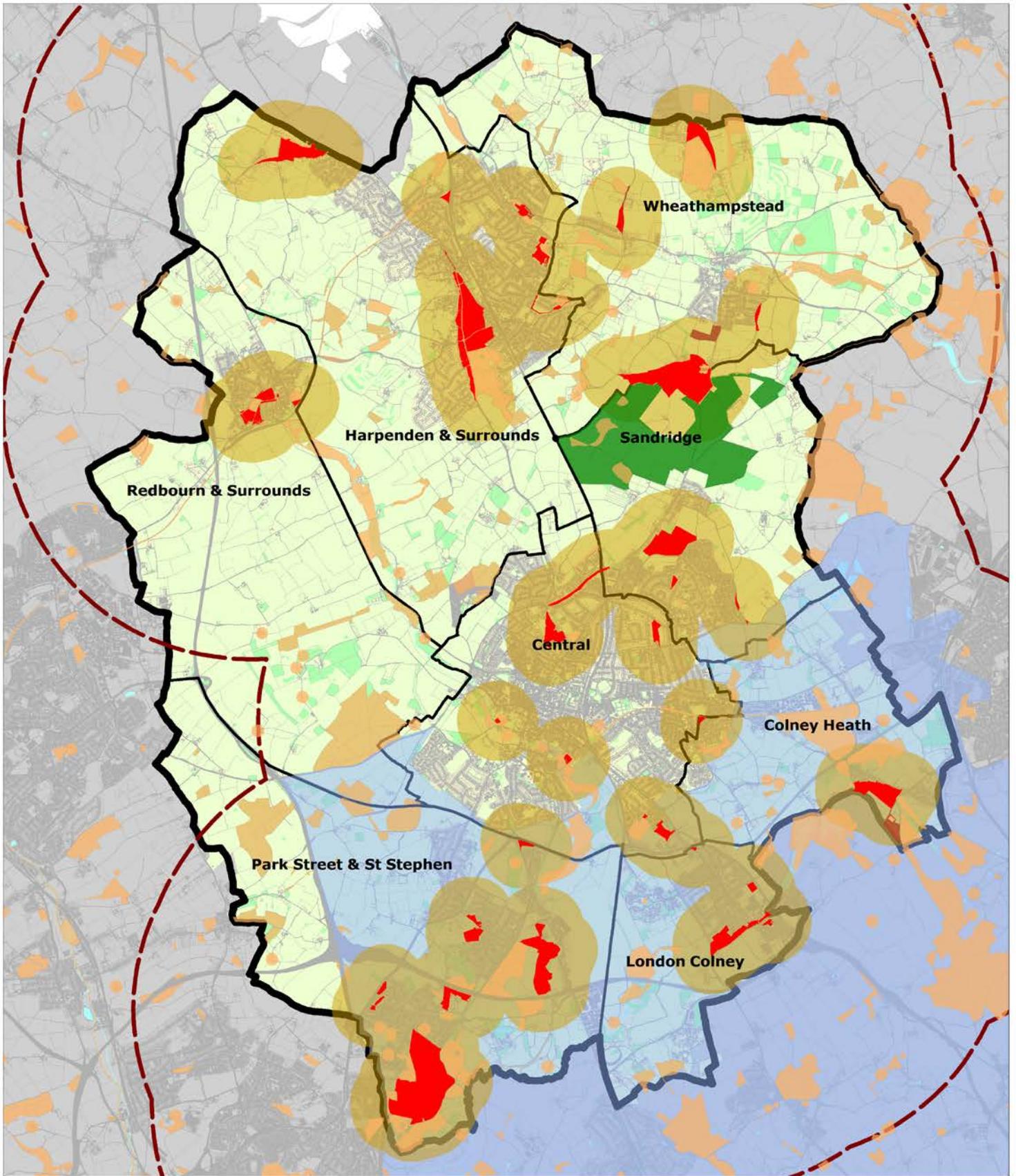


- Local Nature Reserves
- County Wildlife Sites
- Heartwood Forest
- Watling Chase Community Forest

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy



Map 8.1
Designated
Natural Greenspaces



- Local Nature Reserves
- County Wildlife Sites
- Heartwood Forest
- Watling Chase Community Forest

- Natural greenspaces included in audit
- 10 minutes/600 m walk distance threshold
- 10 minutes/3750 m drive distance threshold

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy

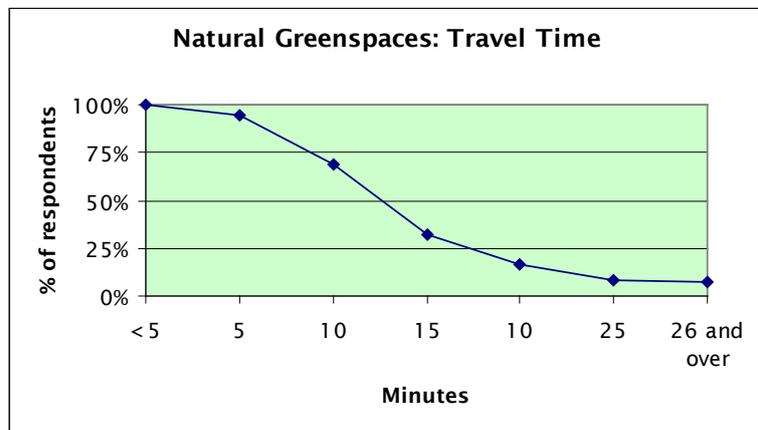


Map 8.2
Natural Greenspaces
Included in Audit

Accessibility

Accessibility Standard

The chart below shows the percentage of respondents in the residents' survey willing to travel for various times to visit a natural greenspace:

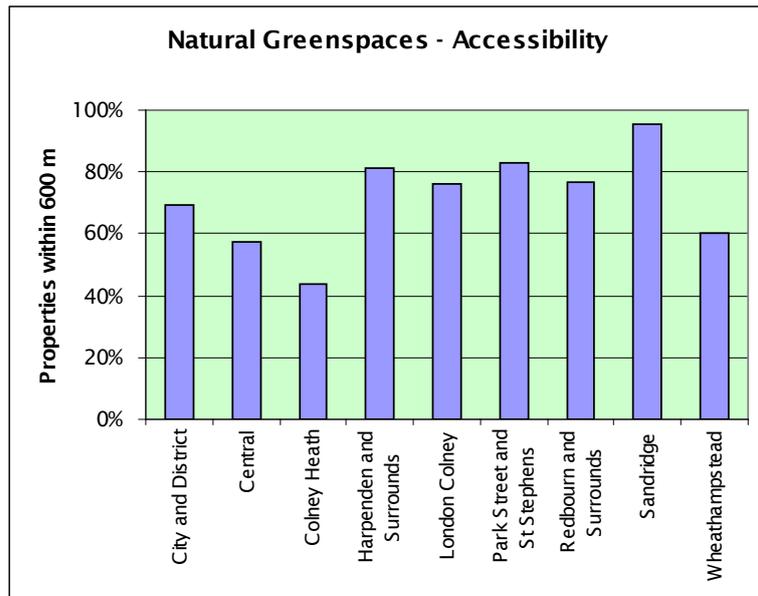


Therefore the time threshold for natural greenspaces is just under 10 minutes. This translates into the following distance thresholds for planning purposes:

- A walk of around 800 m on the ground or 600 m "as the crow flies"
- A cycle of around 2000 m on the ground or 1500 m "as the crow flies"
- A drive of around 5000 m on the ground or 3750 m "as the crow flies"

District-wide Accessibility Assessment

It is obviously desirable that as many people as possible should be able to walk to a natural greenspace rather than cycle or drive. The chart below shows the percentage of properties in the City and District and each of the planning areas within the basic 600 m walking distance threshold of at least one natural greenspace in the audit:



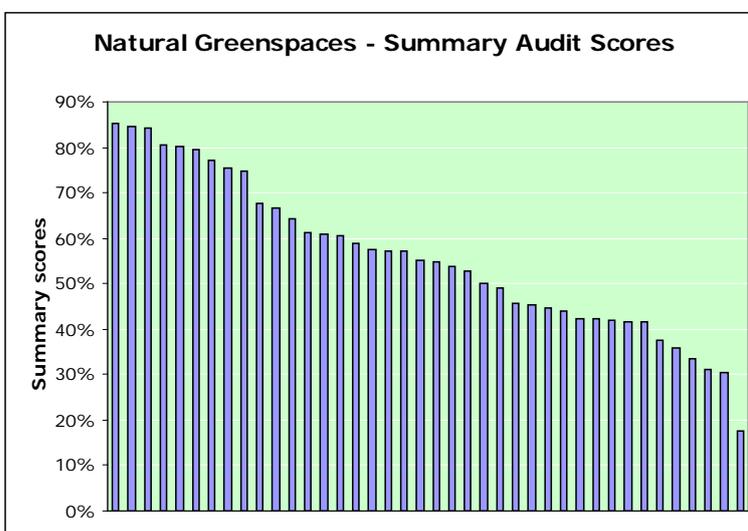
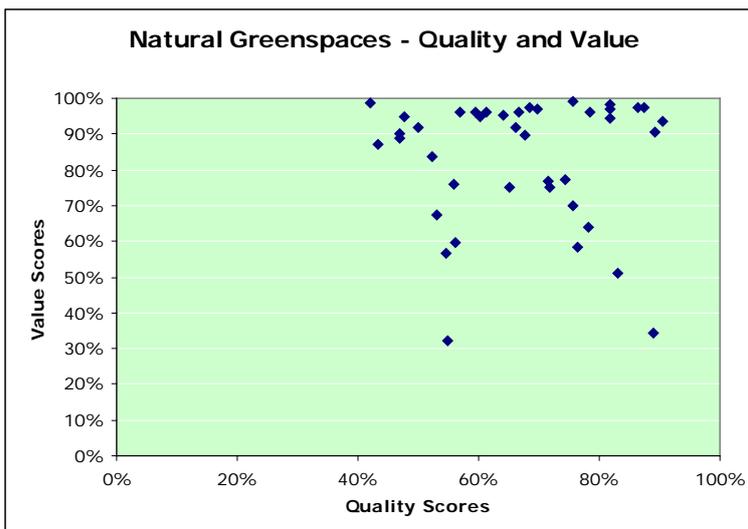
Accordingly about 70% of properties across the City and District lie within 600 m of at least one of the natural greenspaces in the audit, with a very wide range from only 43% in Colney Heath.

Quality and Value

Audit Results

Appendix I gives the full results of the audit of natural greenspaces. Overall it encompassed 40 sites, nearly all within or on the edge of settlements, and the average quality and value audit scores were 56% and 52% respectively. The audit followed a similar format to the audit for amenity greenspaces, but with a different weighting of the component sub-scores.

The charts below summarise first the various quality and value scores for the City and District's natural greenspaces and then the summary scores:



Both of these charts show a quite wide variation in audit scores, especially the summary scores which range from a little under 20% to well over 80%. This indicates that the quality and value of sites is inconsistent and therefore it will be desirable to enhance those with the worst scores. On the basis of the audit, the main improvements required include:

- Better signage and interpretation
- Better parking and disabled provision
- Better control of dogs

Quality Standard

The average summary score is 52%, the median 43% and the third quartile/fair 53% and therefore the Council should adopt a quality standard of a summary audit score of at least 53%.

The Quantity of Provision

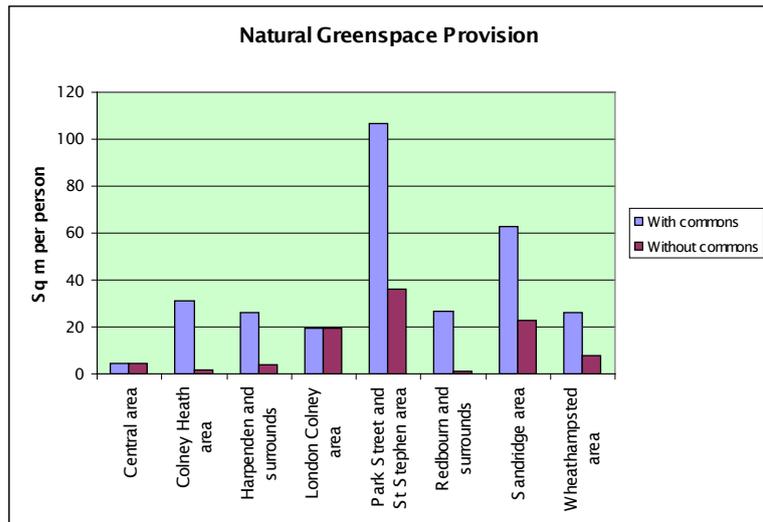
The quantity of natural greenspace in an area can be difficult to define; should it include land on the urban fringe, for example, and if so how far should it extend from the urban edge? The natural greenspace audit concentrated on natural spaces within urban settlements plus the large commons within or immediately adjacent to settlements. Overall, however, almost 75% of the total NGS provision of around 359 ha, or nearly 21 sq m per person, is accounted for by just nine sites:

Bricket Wood Common	85.5 ha
Colney Heath Common	16.2 ha
Harpenden Common	45.8 ha
Jersey Farm Woodland Park	23.7 ha
Kinsbourne Green Common	17.3 ha
Nomansland Common	44.6 ha
Gustardwood Common	10.8 ha
Broad Colney Lakes	11.2 ha
Redbourn Common	14.0 ha
Total	269.1 ha

Note: both Harpenden and Redbourn Commons are larger than the sizes given above but some of the area has been allocated to amenity greenspace

The inclusion of these large spaces considerably increases the average figure for the amount of existing provision. It is very unlikely that anyone would provide new comparable spaces today except in the form of country parks or new forests and then on an opportunistic rather than a standards-based manner. However, they are important sites in a District-wide context. The Council is also committed to the further development of the Watling Chase Community Forest and the Heartwood Forest.

Appendix I gives details of each of the NGS sites in the audit while the chart below summarises the amount of natural greenspace per person in each of the planning areas and the City and District as a whole. It presents the information in two ways: with and without the nine large sites noted above.



Local Views

The percentage of respondents in the household survey thinking that there is too much, about the right amount or not enough natural greenspace in each of the planning areas was:

	Too much	About right	Too little
Central	0%	44%	50%
Colney Heath	0%	46%	49%
Harpenden area	0%	65%	30%
London Colney	0%	50%	37%
Park St & St Stephen	0%	50%	47%
Redbourn area	0%	48%	44%
Sandridge	2%	57%	37%
Wheathampstead	2%	65%	27%
City and District	1%	52%	42%

Note: percentages do not sum to 100 because some respondents answered "don't know" or did not respond at all

The table below gives the net percentage of respondents in each area believing there is a need for more natural greenspace plus the current amount of provision per person excluding the nine strategic sites and, in brackets, including them. However, it is probably not sensible to allocate at least some of them to a single planning area; for example, Nomansland Common is in Sandridge but on the boundary with Wheathampstead:

	Amount sq m/person	Net % Wanting more
Central	4.3 (4.3)	6
Colney Heath	1.4 (30.8)	3
Harpenden area	3.7 (25.9)	-35
London Colney	19.5 (19.5)	-13
Park St and St Stephen	36.2 (106.7)	-3

Redbourn	1.3 (26.8)	-4
Sandridge	23.0 (62.8)	-20
Wheathampstead	8.0 (25.9)	-38
City and District	9.7 (27.9)	-10

Note: the net percentage of respondents thinking there is a need for more provision is the percentage thinking there is a need for more provision minus the percentage thinking the current level of provision is about right or too much. Therefore a minus percentage indicates that more respondents thought existing provision is about right or there is too much than though there is too little; a positive percentage indicates that more respondents thought there is a need for more than thought the current provision is at least adequate.

Accordingly in only two of the planning areas did a net majority of local respondents think there is a need for more NGS, and then only by a small margin. Conversely large net majorities in Harpenden and Wheathampstead saw no need for further NGS provision.

It is understandable that overall a small majority of those residents of the Central area with an opinion wish to have more NGS, given that it contains the City and is almost wholly developed. In the less developed areas - but particularly Redbourn and surrounds - it is possibly the case that respondents took the view they have reasonable access to the urban fringe and therefore relatively little need for additional NGS.

Probably the best guide for the amount of NGS needed within settlements, rather than overall, comes from the Central area. Residents of this area have no large areas of NGS within the planning area boundary. Therefore this suggests a provision standard for NGS within settlements a little higher than the 4.3 sq m per person in the Central area. Accordingly the Council should adopt a quantity standard of some 5 sq m per person. This will not require the creation of significant areas of additional NGS within settlements – which may well be impossible to achieve - but support measures to enhance the biodiversity of existing greenspaces and enhance access to the urban fringe and beyond to the wider countryside.

Trends

National Trends

Natural England is actively promoting its view that conserving the natural environment is of fundamental and increasing importance. The recent draft Planning Policy Statement entitled Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment (although prepared under the auspices of the previous government) appears to agree and gave this a higher priority than planning for people or growth. It remains to be seen whether the coalition government endorses this view, but the Conservative Party's Quality of Life agenda suggests that it regards

the promotion of biodiversity as very important.

Local Trends

The Watling Chase Community Forest and Heartwood Forest proposals are very important locally and should result in better opportunities for countryside recreation in the City and District.

Implications

The Council will need to work with various partners, not least the County Council, to ensure local residents have good access to the new forests, ideally by walking and cycling.

Policy Conclusions

Local Provision Standards

In summary, the proposed locally determined provision standards for use within settlements are therefore:

Accessibility	Local spaces: 600 m walk
Quality	Appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of natural greenspaces if they are to meet the proposed quality standard.
Quantity	5 sq m per person

Broad Approach to Natural Greenspace Provision

The Council should:

- Protect those natural greenspaces with an audit score of at least 53%
- Be flexible in the application of its standards and take account of the location, size and quality of other multi-functional greenspaces in the vicinity of new developments - particularly amenity greenspaces and parks and gardens - when deciding what to ask developers to provide or fund.
- Not allow the development for a non-greenspace use of any spaces with a third quartile/fair or fourth quartile/good summary audit score unless the development will result in compensatory provision that is at least as accessible to users, at least as large and of higher quality and/or value to people and wildlife than the space or spaces that will be lost
- Seek to harness development to enhance existing greenspaces with a first quartile/very poor, second quartile/poor or third quartile/fair audit score
- Be flexible in allowing the development for a non-greenspace use of spaces with a first quartile/very poor or second quartile/poor audit score provided that (a) there are other similar spaces of the same

type but with a third quartile/fair or fourth quartile/good audit score in the vicinity and (b) the benefits of the proposed development, for example in terms of securing the enhancement of one or more of these other spaces, outweigh the loss

- Seek opportunities, where there is a deficiency of one type of greenspace in an area and a surplus of another, to redesign one or more of the surplus spaces to reduce the deficiency and deliver high quality spaces with a new greenspace use
- Promote the enhancement of natural greenspaces with an audit score of below 53%
- Support measures to enhance the biodiversity of all types of greenspace, and not only natural greenspaces
- Work with the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre to improve the management of existing and new Local Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Sites

Note: these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council's current wider planning policies.



9 Provision Standards: Parks and Gardens

Introduction

Urban parks are probably the most inclusive form of all publicly funded leisure provision. This chapter provides an overview of those in the City and District and from it derives a set of local standards for this form of provision.

In all, St Albans has 17 urban parks and public gardens, (16 if Abbey Orchard is regarded as part of Verulamium Park) ranging from the 58.6 hectare Verulamium Park and Abbey Orchard to the tiny 227 sq m Glossop Memorial Garden. They contain a range of disparate facilities which will make them attractive to potential visitors, some from a wide area and others primarily local to a particular park or garden. The size and number of distinct features in each of the parks and gardens identified through the audit is:

Parks	Size (ha)	Features
Clarence Park, St Albans	10.0	4
Cumberland House, Redbourn	0.5	1
Greenwood Park, Chiswell Green	24.3	3
Highfield Park, St Albans	27.2	7
Lydekker Park, Harpenden	1.0	1
Rothamsted Park, Harpenden	20.2	3
Verulamium Park, St Albans	58.6	7
Victoria Playing Field, St Albans	2.6	0
Total area	144.4	

Note: Verulamium Park includes Abbey Orchard

Note: the list of possible features is equipped play area; teenage area; café or coffee kiosk; glasshouses/plant houses; historic buildings; other buildings with no public access; other buildings with public access; sports or leisure centre or swimming pool; toilets; and visitor/interpretation centre/museum/art gallery

Gardens (all in St Albans)	Size (sq m)	Features
Glossop Memorial Garden	227	0

Municipal Gardens	1,746	1
Quakers Burial Ground	318	0
Romeland Garden	2,208	1
St Peters War Memorial Garden	766	0
Sumpter Yard	395	4
Vintry Gardens	2,719	1
Waxhouse Gate	653	0
Total area	9,032	

There are also three parks included in the *English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens* – Gorhambury, Napsbury Hospital and Brocket Park on the extreme eastern edge of the Wheathampstead area. Napsbury now provides a very high amenity setting for housing within the former hospital buildings while the other two remain substantially as open landscapes. In addition, the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust maintains a “local list” of 23 sites which includes Clarence, Rothamsted and Verulamium parks. Batchwood, Sopwell Nunnery and St Albans Cemetery are also in the local list but included in other typologies for the purposes of this strategy.

The 1994 District Local Plan Review includes a “Recreational Open Space Hierarchy” which defines District, Local and Small Local Parks, primarily by size. More recently, the Council has introduced a new category by referring to Verulamium as the City and District’s “Premier Park” by virtue of its size and historical interest. It is also the park in which District-wide rather than local community events are most likely to be staged.

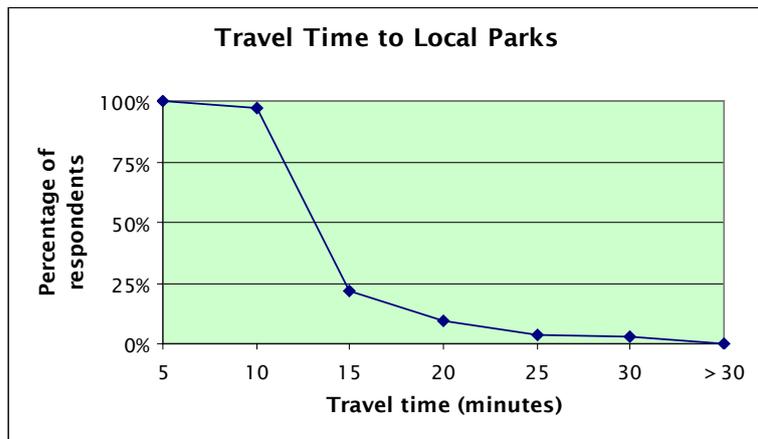
For the purposes of this assessment, it is appropriate to adopt a slightly amended version of the Local Plan hierarchy, consisting of:

- Verulamium Park
- District Parks (typically over 20 ha)
- Local Parks (the smaller parks)
- Public Gardens (area 0.8-2.0 ha)

Accessibility

Accessibility Standard

The household survey asked local residents the time they were willing to travel to District and Local Parks and the charts below summarise the results:



This means that a sensible accessibility standard for District Parks is around 12 minutes and for Local Parks around 8 minutes. People may visit district parks by almost any form of transport, but should be able to walk to their local park. These travel times therefore translate into the following straight line distance thresholds by different forms of transport:

District Parks

- Walking 700 m
- Cycling 1800 m
- Driving 4,500 m

Local Parks

- Walking 500 m

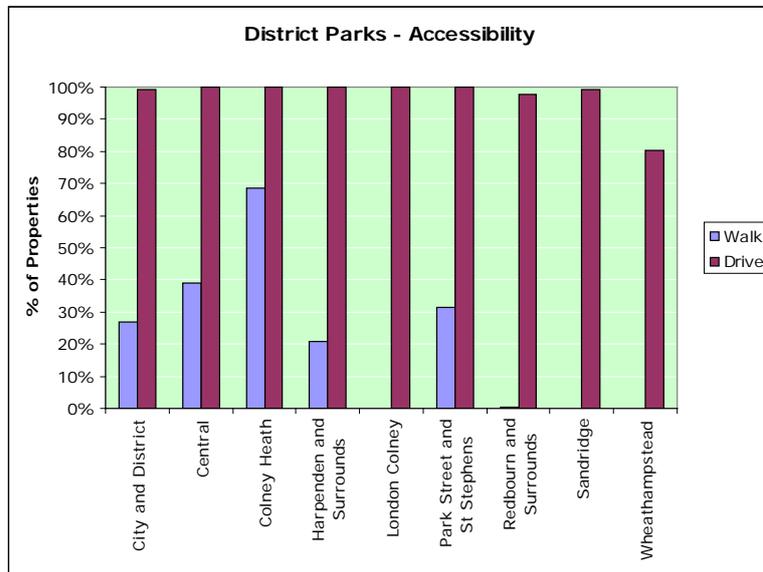
Note: these distances are based on a walking speed of 80 metres per minute; a cycling speed of 200 m per minute; and an average driving speed of 500 m per minute, which includes an allowance for parking time. The threshold is 75% of the total distance rounded to the nearest 50 m.

Map 9.1 shows the location of the historic parks and the urban parks and gardens highlighted above with a 500 m

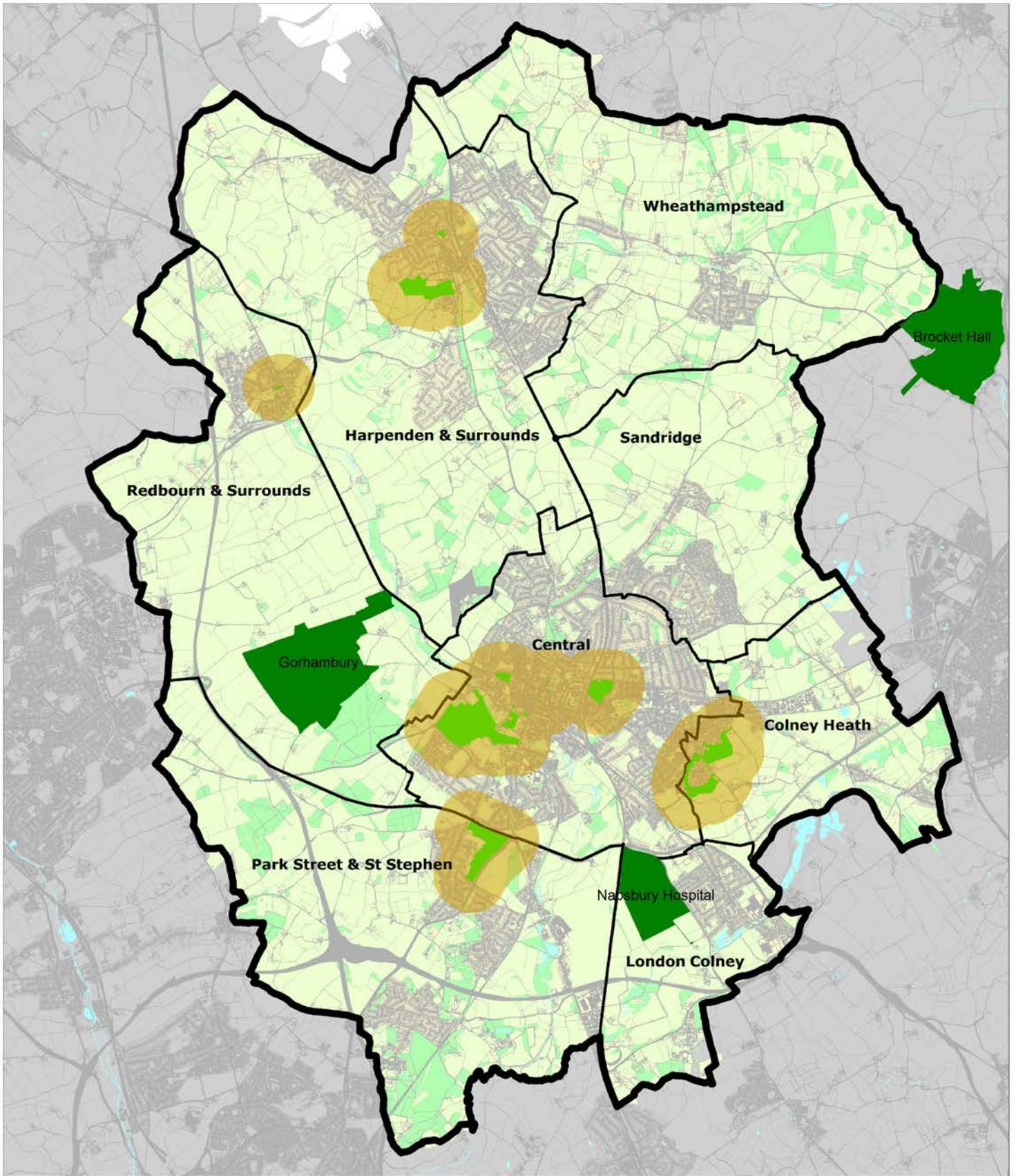
distance threshold round the various urban parks.

District-wide Accessibility Assessment

The chart below shows the accessibility of the District Parks by walking (with a 700 m distance threshold) and driving (with a 4500 m distance threshold):



Note: although Verulamium Park is classed as a Premier rather than a District Park, it will act as a District Park for those residents living within the distance threshold of it. Similarly, the various District Parks also function as local parks for those residents living with the distance threshold of them.



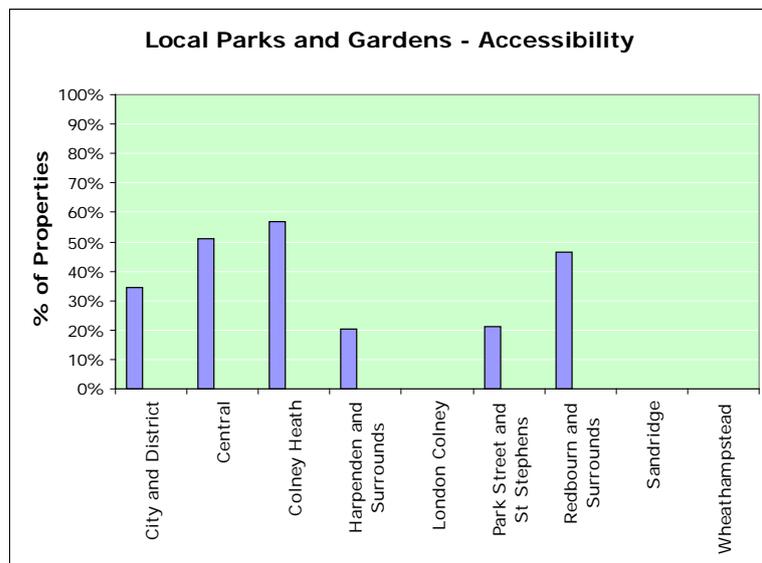
- English Heritage Registered Parks and Gardens
- Urban Parks and Gardens
- 8 minutes/500 m walk distance threshold

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy



**Map 9.1
Parks and Gardens**

Accordingly District Parks are very accessible by car to all of the City and District except the Wheathampstead area; but only in the Colney Heath area are over 40% of properties within the walking threshold of a district park. However, walking accessibility improves if the analysis includes all of the parks and gardens in the City and District, although the distance threshold shrinks to 500 m for local parks and gardens:



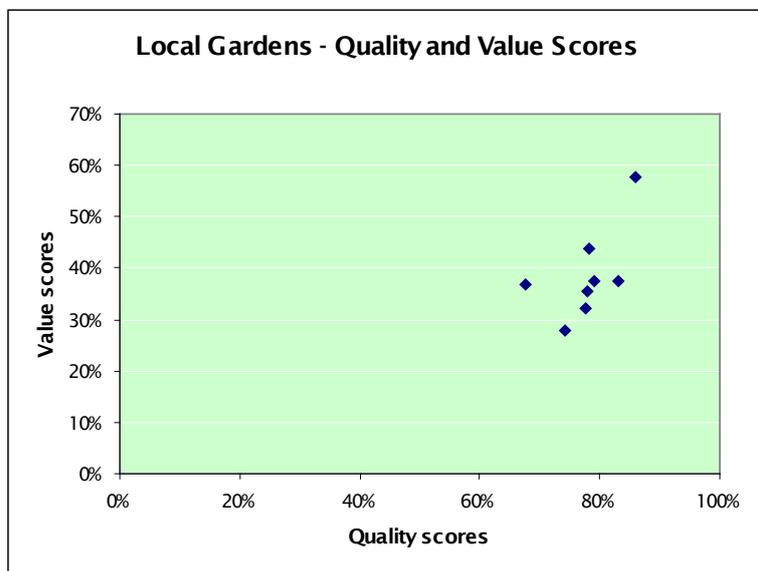
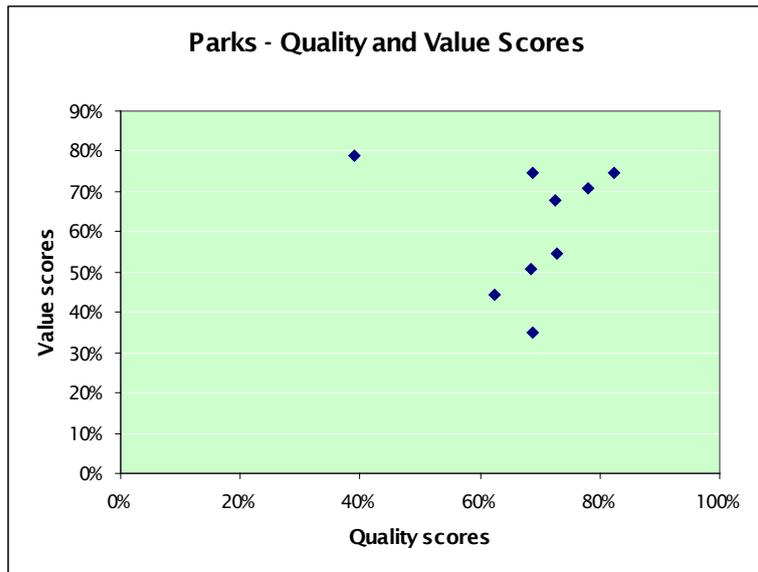
Note: some of the percentages for all parks and gardens are lower than for District Parks alone because the distance thresholds are shorter.

Although driving accessibility is at least fairly good in all areas, it will nonetheless be desirable for the Council to seek to improve the accessibility of parks on foot. While it is perfectly reasonable for only a low proportion of residents to be able to walk to a park in the rural parts of the City and District, such as most of the Redbourn and surrounds or Wheathampstead areas, the Council should set an objective of making it possible for at least a majority of residents in each of the main settlements to be able to walk to at least one park. This inevitably means creating more parks, or more park-like spaces.

Quality and Value

Audit Results

Appendix J sets out the full results of the audit of parks and gardens. It encompassed all 17 sites and the charts below summarise the various quality and value scores. The first relates to the City and District's parks, the second to its local gardens:

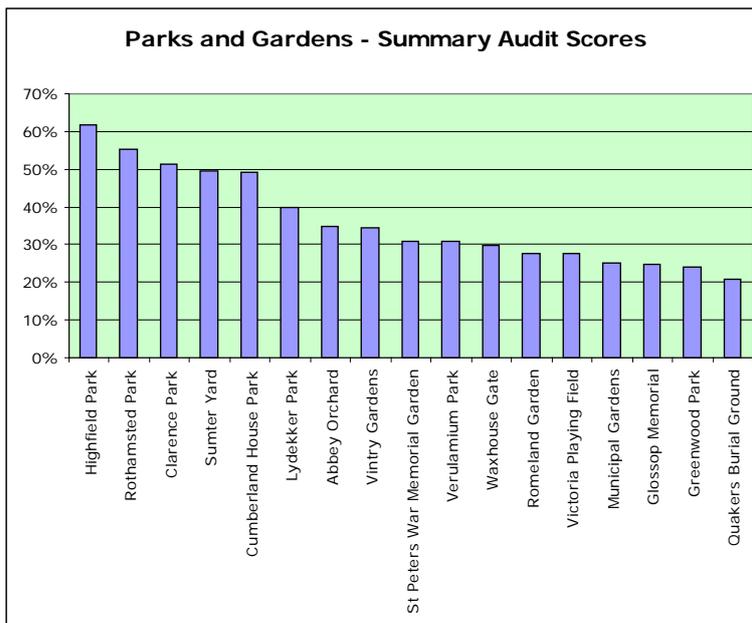


There is therefore a significant difference in the quality and value scores for parks, on the one hand, and local gardens on the other. The average scores are:

	Quality	Value
Parks	68%	61%
Local gardens	78%	39%

On average, the City and District's parks are therefore of slightly lower quality than its local gardens, but of significantly higher value.

The chart below gives the summary scores for all of the City and District's parks and gardens:



Once again, there is a wide variation suggesting a need to enhance a number of the sites. The average summary score is 36%, the median 31% and the third quartile/fair 49%. The main general improvements needed to parks and gardens are:

- Signage
- Toilets
- Lighting (but only for those parks open at night)
- Parking
- Paths
- Health promotion – for example, the promotion of health walks or jogging routes
- Better marketing
- Uniformed park-keepers
- Enhanced play value – which need not mean play equipment, but feature such as logs, rocks and sand areas that children will find stimulating
- Better interpretation and higher educational value
- Enhanced biodiversity

The desirable improvements to the City and District's local gardens relate mainly to signage and interpretation relating to their historical significance.

Quality Standard

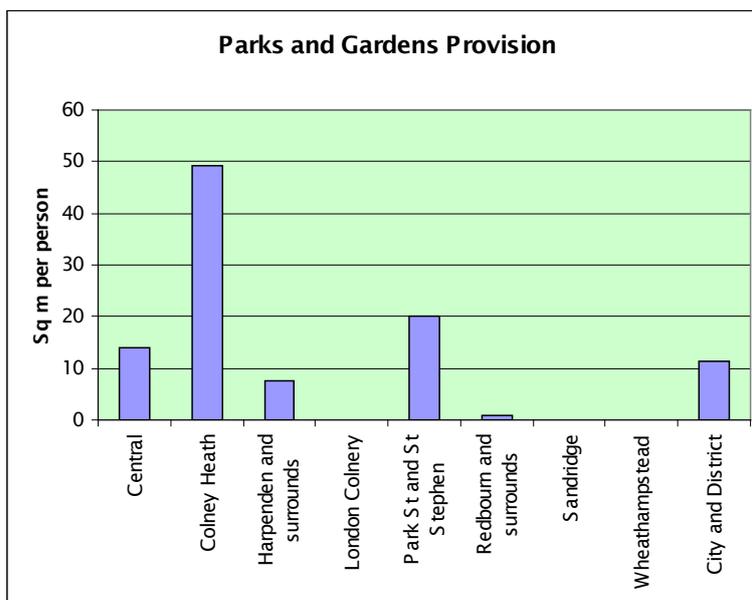
The Council should adopt a quality standard of a summary score equivalent to at least the third quartile/fair score, ie 49%.

The Quantity of Provision

The total area of the City and District's parks and gardens is approximately:

District parks	1,264,833 sq m	126.5 ha
Local parks	179,346 sq m	17.9 ha
Local gardens	9,028 sq m	0.9 ha
Totals	1,453,207 sq m	145.3 ha

Across the City and District, these levels of provision equate to an average of 9.8, 1.4 and 0.07 sq m per person respectively and a total of 11.3 sq m per person. However, these average figures are slightly misleading as London Colney, Sandridge and Wheathampstead have no park or garden provision:



Local Views

The percentage of respondents in the household survey thinking that there is too much, about the right amount or not enough parks and gardens in each of the planning areas was:

	Too much	About right	Too little
Central	0%	44%	50%
Colney Heath	0%	46%	49%
Harpenden area	0%	65%	30%
London Colney	0%	50%	37%
Park St & St Stephen	0%	49%	47%
Redbourn area	0%	50%	45%
Sandridge	2%	57%	37%
Wheathampstead	2%	65%	27%
City and District	0%	77%	16%

Notes:

The survey asked respondents to comment on District Parks, Local Parks and Local Parks and Gardens. The percentage results were the same for each type of park or garden. Percentages do not sum to 100 because some respondents answered

“don’t know” or did not respond at all

Given the same results for each type of park or garden; it appears that respondents did not differentiate between them. The net percentage of respondents in each area wanting more parks and gardens provision, with the total current provision per person is:

	Amount sq m/person	Net % Wanting more
Central	13.9	6
Colney Heath	49.3	3
Redbourn	0.9	-13
London Colney	0	-13
Sandridge	0	-20
Harpenden area	9.5	-35
Park St and St Stephen	20.1	-35
Wheathampstead	0	-38
City and District	11.7	-61

Accordingly only in two of the eight planning areas do a slim net majority of respondents with an opinion see a need for more parks and gardens, one of them the area with by far the highest level of current provision. However, the fact that a majority of respondents with an opinion in London Colney, Sandridge and Wheathampstead regard the amount of park and garden provision as “about right”, although there is none, suggests that respondents have interpreted “parks and gardens” quite widely. The current provision splits into:

District parks	9.8 sq m/person
Local parks	1.8 sq m/person
Local parks and gardens	0.1 sq m/person
Total	11.7 sq m/person

Trends

National Trends

Nationally, parks have had something of a renaissance over the past decade, driven by a number of factors including:

- Growing concern about the state of the UK’s parks, first highlighted by a House of Commons Select Committee inquiry
- The 2001/2 revision of PPG17
- The recommendations of the Urban Greenspace Task Force and the “urban renaissance” agenda
- The availability of Heritage and other lottery funding
- Increasing evidence in support of the health and well-being benefits of parks and their positive impact on the image and therefore potential contribution to the regeneration of towns and cities

Local Trends

The Council's unsuccessful bid for Heritage Lottery funding towards the regeneration of Verulamium Park reflected both the national trend and the Council's view that the park requires considerable enhancement.

Implications

The need to enhance Verulamium Park obviously remains and should be a high priority for the Council. At the same time, however, it will also be desirable to promote smaller scale enhancements at other parks in the City and District and to increase the number of parks so that a higher proportion of local residents can walk to a local park.

Quantity Standard

For simplicity in use it will be desirable to adopt a quantity standard of around the current average level of provision, rounded up to 12 sq m per person. The most appropriate way of distributing this provision will depend upon the context and is considered further in the chapters on each of the planning areas later in this strategy.

Policy Conclusions

Local Provision Standards

In summary, the proposed locally determined provision standards are therefore:

Accessibility	4,500 m drive (district parks) 500 m walk (local parks)
Quality	Appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of parks and gardens
Quantity	12 sq m per person

Broad Approach to Park and Garden Provision

The Council should:

- Protect all of the City and District's parks and gardens
- Promote and maximise access to the historic parks
- Be flexible in its application of the standards and take account of the location, size and quality of other multi-functional greenspaces in the vicinity of new developments - particularly amenity greenspaces and parks and gardens - when deciding what to ask developers to provide or fund.
- Not allow the development for a non-greenspace use of any spaces with a third quartile/fair or fourth quartile/good summary audit score unless the development will result in compensatory provision

that is at least as accessible to users, at least as large and of higher quality and/or value to people and wildlife than the space or spaces that will be lost

- Seek to harness development to enhance existing greenspaces with a first quartile/very poor, second quartile/poor or third quartile/fair audit score
- Be flexible in allowing the development for a non-greenspace use of spaces with a first quartile/very poor or second quartile/poor audit score provided that (a) there are other similar spaces of the same type but with a third quartile/fair or fourth quartile/good audit score in the vicinity and (b) the benefits of the proposed development, for example in terms of securing the enhancement of one or more of these other spaces, outweigh the loss
- Seek opportunities, where there is a deficiency of one type of greenspace in an area and a surplus of another, to redesign one or more of the surplus spaces to reduce the deficiency and deliver high quality spaces with a new greenspace use
- Promote the enhancement of those parks and gardens with an audit score of less than 49%

Note: these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council's current wider planning policies.

10 Provision Standards: Green Corridors

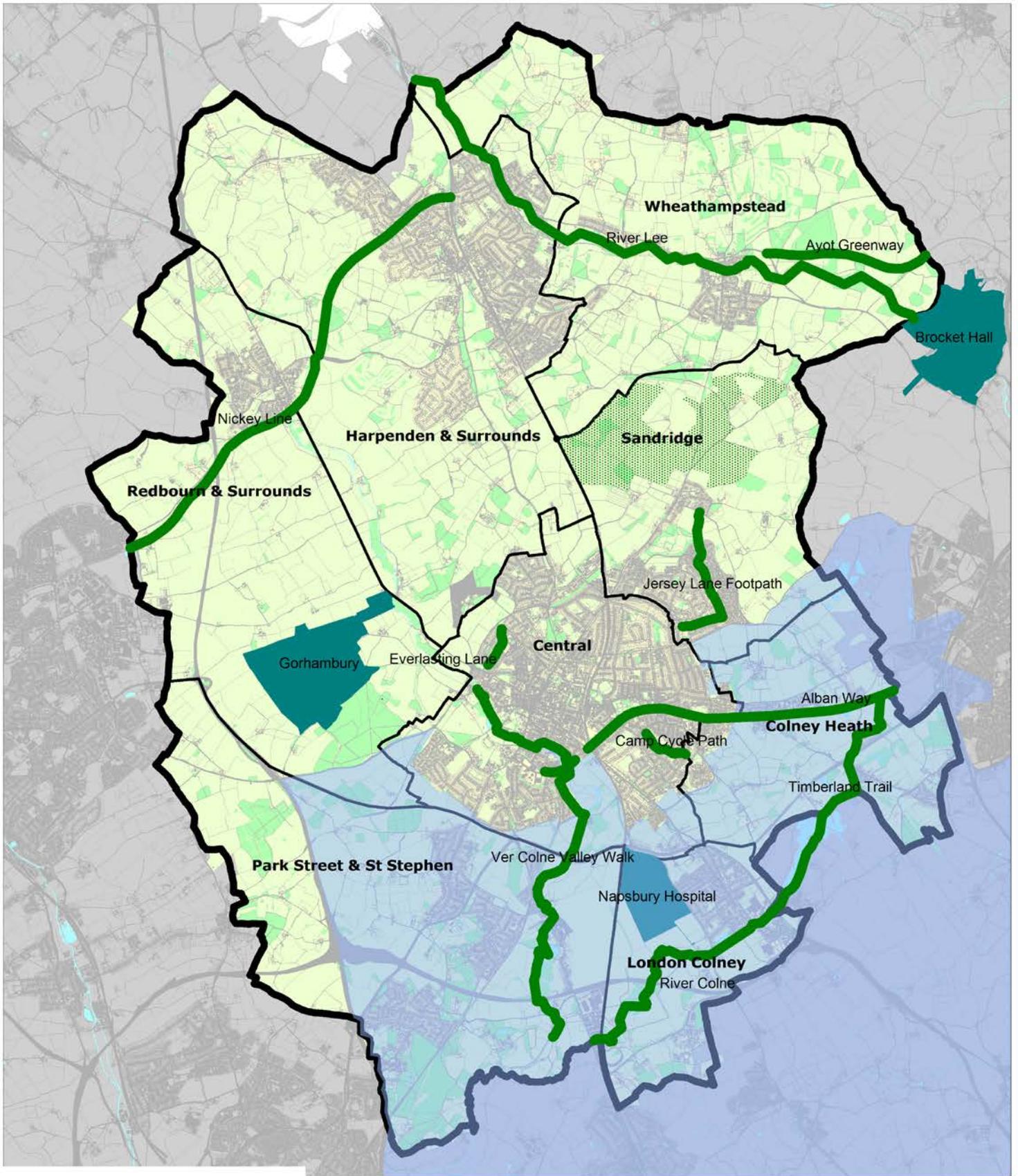
Introduction

Local residents and visitors should be able to walk and cycle within and between the city and various towns and villages on routes that are separate from trafficked roads. In the urban fringe and countryside they should also be able to ride horses. This is a key element of persuading people to use these sustainable modes of transport more and their cars less. When dedicated walking and cycling routes are within settlements, they are “green corridors”. So too are other non-trafficked but walkable or cyclable corridors such as rivers and canals. Ideally there should be a network of corridors within towns and cities that link greenspaces within them and housing areas to community facilities such as shops, schools and sports facilities and also connect to rights of way, bridleways and other paths on the urban fringe and in the wider countryside. In addition, it is desirable that rights of way and other paths provide routes around urban areas that allow people to do circular walks of varying lengths without having to retrace their steps. This is one of the principles underpinning the “Green Ring” proposal in the St Albans City Vision.

Map 10.1 shows the location of the main green corridors for people in the City and District together with the Watling Chase Community Forest, Heartwood Forest and the English Heritage registered parks and gardens. Map 10.2 adds the rights of way network. However, groups of adjacent spaces without any public access, such as contiguous back gardens, can also create green corridors that provide opportunities for wildlife to move from one area to another.

Accessibility

Ideally, everyone should live close enough to a green corridor that will take them to whatever destinations or community facilities they wish to visit. However, because our towns and cities have evolved based on road networks, the provision of green corridors has necessarily been largely opportunistic. Accordingly it is not possible to set an accessibility standard.

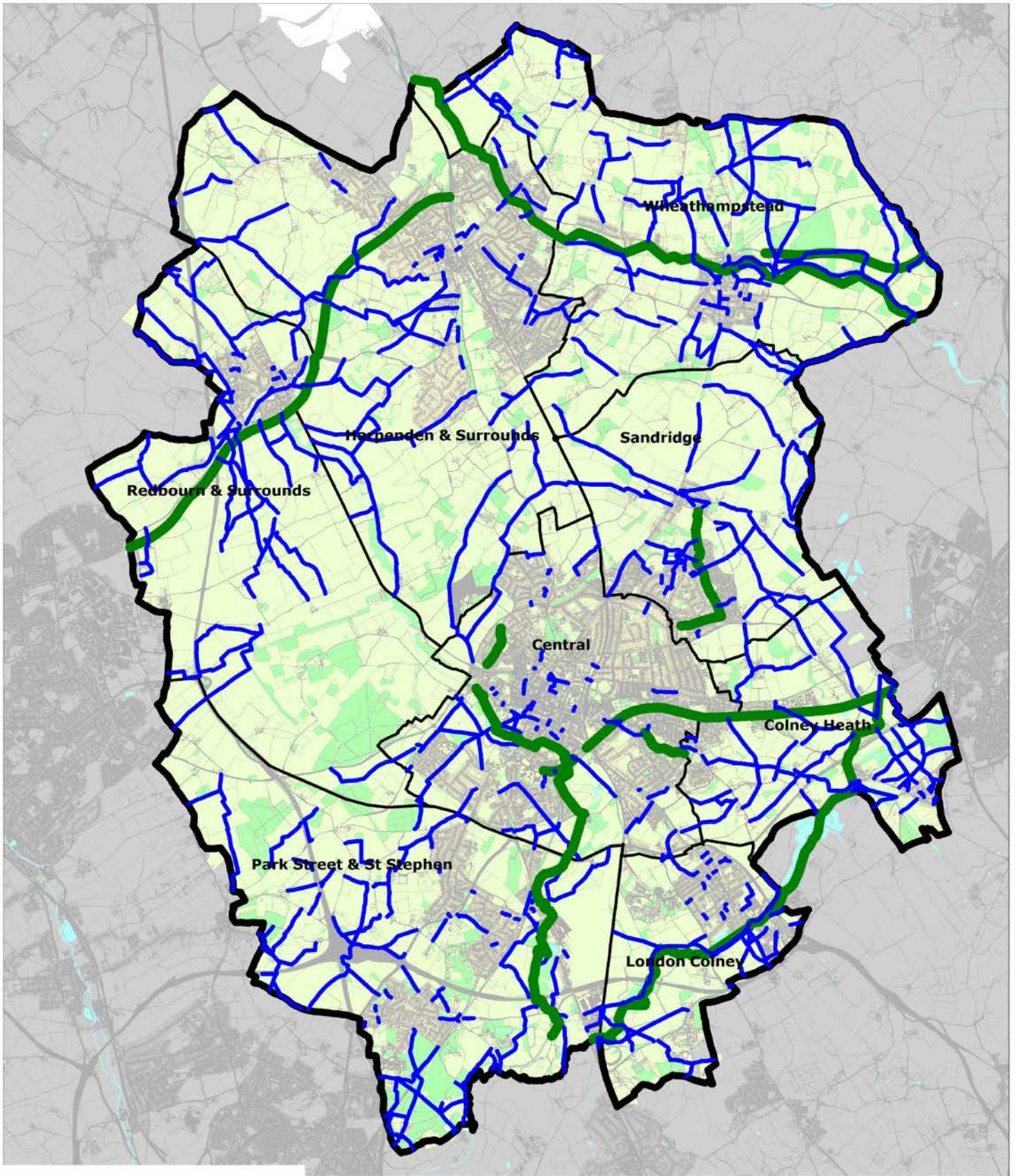


- Amenity greenspaces
- Natural greenspaces
- Parks and gardens
- Open access sports facilities
- Green corridors
- English Heritage Registered Parks and Gardens
- Heartwood Forest
- Watling Chase Community Forest

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**Map 10.1
Green Corridors**



- Amenity greenspaces
- Natural greenspaces
- Parks and gardens
- Open access sports facilities

- Green corridors
- Rights of way

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy



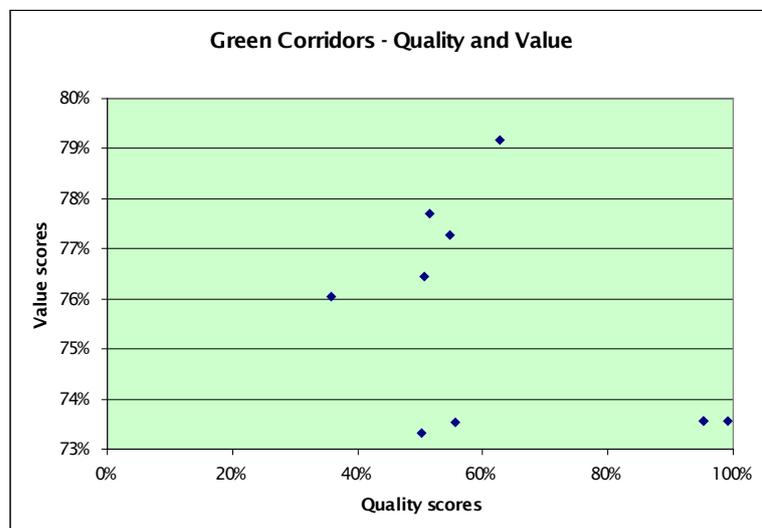
Map 10.2
Green Corridors
and Rights of Way

A number of points stand out from these maps:

- Most of the existing green corridors follow rivers or old rail tracks and connect adjacent settlements and opportunities for connections of larger green spaces should be explored.
- Roughly half of a circular walk around St Albans is already in place in the form of the Alban Way, the River Ver Walk and Everlasting Lane. The City Vision aims to complete a green ring around the city.
- It will be desirable to create green corridors linking Verulamium Park and Gorhambury and the River Lee walk with Napsbury Hospital
- The rights of way network contains many isolated “legs” that do not join up with other paths. The Council should work with the County Council to maintain and extend those routes to form a comprehensive network that will allow people to enjoy walks of varying lengths without having to retrace their steps and encourage both sustainable transport and healthy lifestyles.

Quality and Value Audit Results

The chart below summarises the quality and value audit scores for those identifiable green corridors in the City and District within the main settlements, with full details of the audit in Appendix K:

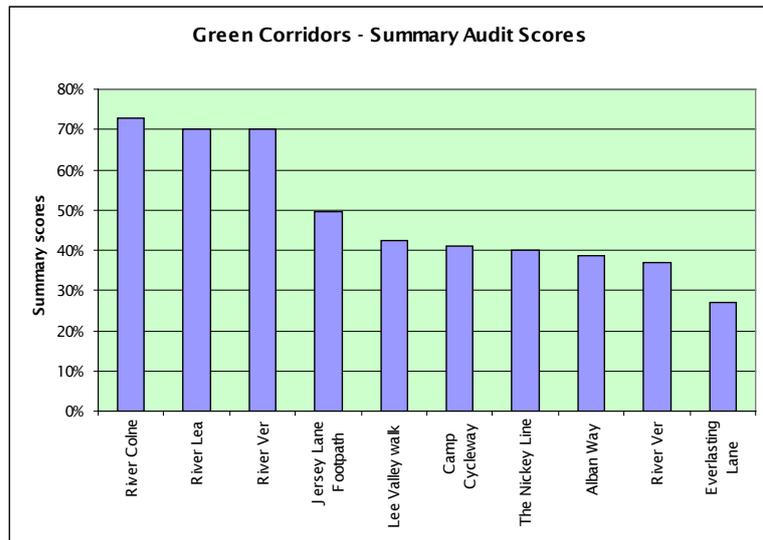


Overall, therefore, the various routes are much of a muchness in terms of value but vary considerably in quality. The average value score is 65% and the average quality score 76%.

The main improvements required to green corridors are:

- Better signage
- Better disabled access
- Better litter management and control of flytipping
- Better surfaces - ideally footpaths and cycleways through green corridors within settlements should have hard but porous surfaces so they do not require drainage and can accommodate significant levels of pedestrian or cycle traffic without becoming muddy in wet weather; this will also make them suitable for wheelchairs and child buggies
- Better cutting back of overhanging vegetation on some routes
- Better screening of residential properties in some areas and more opening up of views along routes to create informal surveillance in others
- Lighting of well used routes, particularly designated Safe Routes to School

The chart below gives the summary audit scores:



Note: the Camp cycleway is also known as the Burnside cyclepath

The average, median and third quartile/fair summary scores are 49%, 42% and 65% respectively.

Quality Standard

The Council should work to drive up the quality of the poorer corridors to similar levels to the three river corridors and adopt a quality standard that all green corridors should have a summary score of at least 65%. Appendix C gives details of the desirable characteristics of green corridors.

The Quantity of Provision

It is not sensible to try to define a quantity standard. The purpose of green corridors is to provide a means of

getting from A to B, or to go for a walk, cycle or horse ride for an acceptable time or distance. Therefore the Council should concentrate on:

- Identifying points of interest that it will be desirable to link by green corridors
- Identifying opportunities to link different green corridors together to create networks of routes that offer people the opportunity to enjoy walks or rides of varying lengths with opportunities to return to their start point without necessarily retracing their route.
- Encourage more sustainable transport between settlements

Trends

National Trends

The promotion of sustainable means of transport that use green corridors is a growing national policy imperative. At the same time, climate change is likely to result in a need for various species to migrate and there is evidence that networks of greenspace facilitate this while isolated “green islands” do not.

Local Trends

The County Council promotes sustainable transport initiatives, in part through the planning system, and there is growing evidence of the use of bicycles, particularly for leisure purposes. The St Albans Green Ring is an important local initiative that the Council is actively supporting.

Implications

The Council should be actively seeking to extend the network of green corridors across the City and District both within and between settlements.

Policy Conclusions

Proposed Local Standard

The only locally determined provision standard relates to quality and appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of green corridors.

Broad Approach to Green Corridor Provision

The Council should:

- Protect all existing green corridors
- Work with the County Council to promote the development of green corridors that will facilitate access to the Watling Chase Community Forest and Heartwood Forest
- Enhance access from within settlements to the urban

fringe

- Identify and deliver opportunities to develop new corridors, separated from vehicular traffic as much as possible, within and between settlements that will make it possible to walk or cycle safely and separated from vehicular traffic to work, leisure and other community facilities; link up with and extend the rights of way network and other path systems; and facilitate access to the urban fringe and wider countryside
- Require developers to “plug in” their developments to the evolving and planned corridors network much as possible
- Promote the enhancement of those green corridors with a summary audit score of less than 65%

Note: these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council’s current wider planning policies.

11 Provision Standards: Children's Play

Introduction

It is obviously desirable that there should be adequate opportunities for children and young people to enjoy playing informally and safely and seeing nature at work in the open air close to home. For planning purposes it is sensible to split them into three broad and overlapping age groups with different requirements:

- **Toddlers:** typically aged from about 2 to 6, young children – or possibly more accurately the parents or carers that normally accompany them to play areas – require simple, inherently safe play facilities such as shoochy chickens and small slides
- **Older children:** typically aged from about 6 to 11-12, older children will often use play areas on their own; they require facilities that present something of a physical challenge for them to use creatively, such as climbing frames and mobiles
- **Teenagers:** typically aged about 12-16, teenagers require somewhere to “hang out” and, ideally, take part in informal sports activities

This chapter reviews the provision of play areas for the first two of these groups in order to derive local accessibility, quality and quantity standards and suggests a new approach to provision for play in the future. Provision for teenagers is considered in the next Chapter.

First, however, it is worth noting the following main points from the Council's *Play and Free-time Strategy 2007-12*, as they set the context for this element of the strategy:

- There is a need to change perceptions away from play as “swings and roundabouts” to accept and encourage all forms of legitimate play and free-time opportunities from playing ball in the street, to hanging out at the bus shelter, and from toddler play facilities in local parks to youth clubs

- Play and free-time opportunities should be more inclusive and accessible
- Play opportunities should match the needs of children and young people
- There is a gap in provision for children and young people over the age of about 9
- The Council and its partners should promote unstructured play, in particular outdoor, natural and wheeled play
- There is a need to improve transport, particularly cycle lanes, between where older children live and play
- There is a need to develop a more strategic approach to play in the City and District
- There is a need to generate a more positive image of young people to improve older people's attitudes and perceptions
- There is a need to improve communication about the value of play in its own right
- There is a need to facilitate ongoing consultation with children, young people and the wider community

Scope of the Audit

The audit covered a total of 87 play areas across the City and District but excluded the Camp play area as it has been closed for some time. In addition; although the audit included the Sutton Road play area it is excluded from the analysis because the Council has since removed it. Of the 87 facilities:

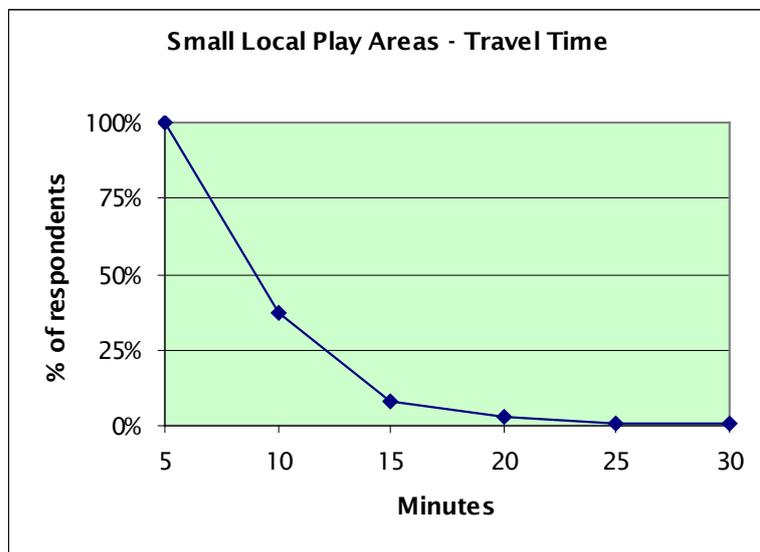
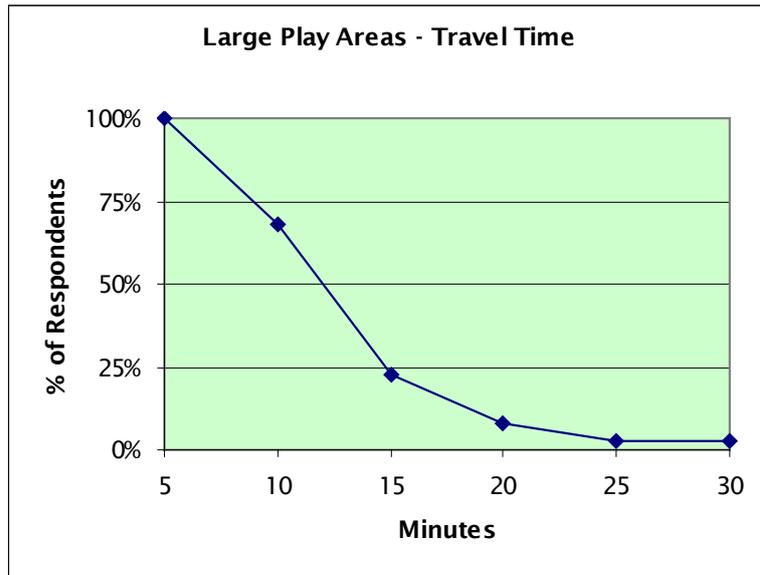
- 72 contain equipment designed for toddlers
- 65 have equipment designed for children aged about 6-11
- Only two have equipment specifically designed for children with disabilities

Accessibility

Accessibility Standard

The charts below, based on the results of the residents' survey, identify the percentage of people willing to walk for various times to use two types of play area:

- Large play areas, defined as offering approximately 4-8 pieces of equipment, generally for children aged up to about 11 years
- Small local play areas, defined as areas for younger children with 0 to 5 items of play equipment



They make clear that a sensible accessibility standard will be around 7-8 minutes for both types of play area as around 75% of respondents indicated that they were willing to walk for this length of time to these facilities, although users of the larger areas were on average willing to walk slightly further than those who used the smaller ones.

Children learn to walk faster as they grow up. However, to avoid having unnecessarily complicated accessibility standards it is sensible to allow an average speed of 50 m per minute for younger children and 75 metres per minute for older ones. An 8-minute walk therefore equates to a total distance of around 400 m for young children and 600 m for older ones. Allowing for the straight line distance being around 75% of the total distance walked gives "as the crow flies" distance

thresholds of 300 and 450 m respectively.

There is no need for cycling or driving thresholds as all play facilities should be accessible on foot.

Play Audit

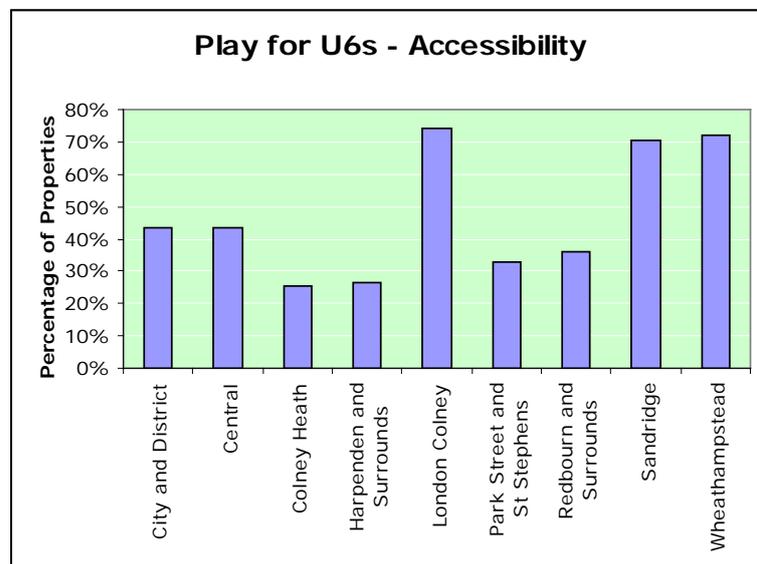
The play audit identified a total of 87 equipped play areas. Of these:

- 22 have equipment designed only for toddlers up to the age of about 5
- 14 have equipment designed only for older children
- 51 have equipment designed for children in both age groups

This means that of the 87 play areas, 73 have equipment for toddlers and 65 have equipment for older children.

District-wide Accessibility Assessment – Toddlers

Across the District, 44% of properties are within 300 m of at least one play area with equipment designed for toddlers, but only 18% within this distance of a play area with a first quartile summary audit score. The proportion of properties within the distance threshold of at least one toddlers’ play area in each of the eight planning areas is:

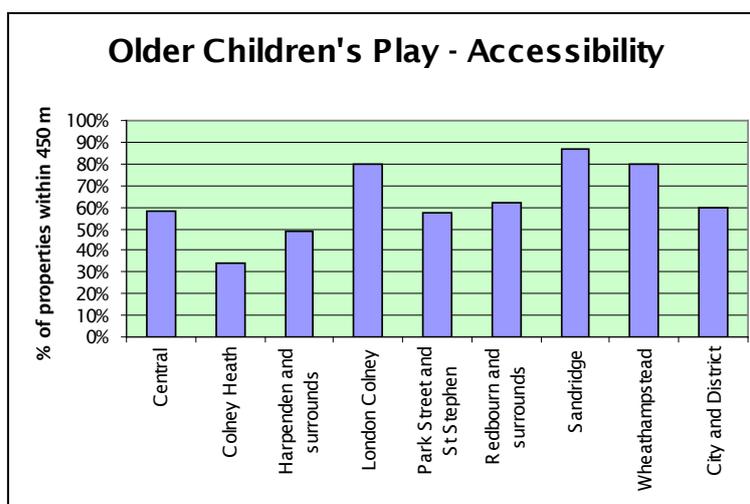


It would be unrealistic to expect that all properties would be within the distance threshold of at least one play area in a district with large rural areas and the levels of accessibility achieved in London Colney and Wheathampstead are probably about the maximum that

can be achieved at sensible cost. However, this analysis still suggests potentially significant accessibility deficiencies in the Central, Colney Heath, Harpenden and Park Street and St Stephen areas.

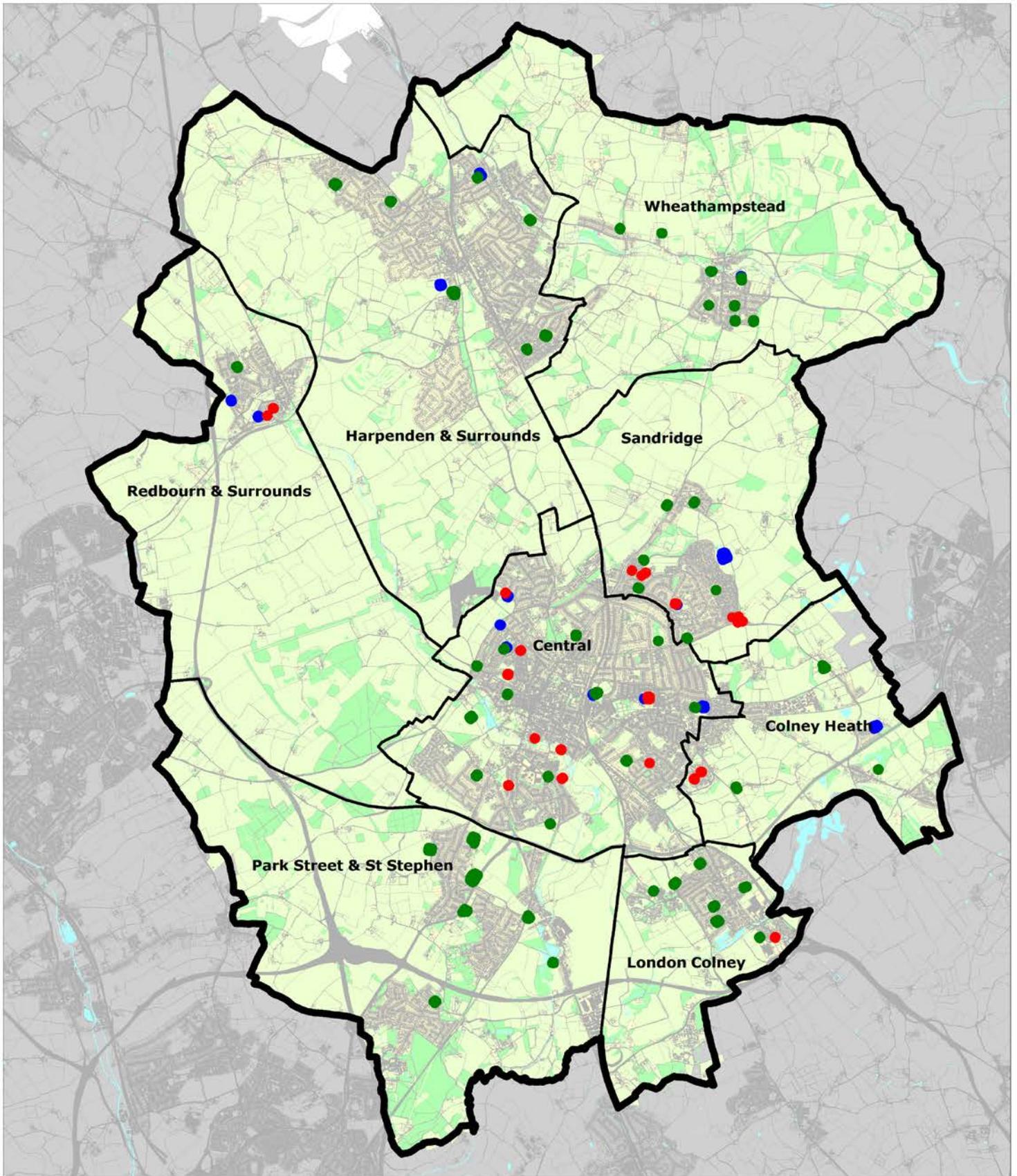
Accessibility Assessment – Older Children

Overall, 59% of properties lie within the 450 m distance threshold of at least one play area with equipment designed for older children, but only 27% within a play area with a fourth quartile summary audit score. The percentage of properties within the distance threshold of at least one site varies across the planning areas as follows:



Accordingly, the accessibility of play facilities for older children is better than for toddlers, largely as a result of the higher distance threshold. In spite of this, there are still likely to be some significant areas in which there is an accessibility deficiency, particularly in Colney Heath (although the population is low), Harpenden and surrounds and Park Street and St Stephen.

Map 11.1, below, shows the location of the various equipped play areas.



- Equipped play area for U6s
- Equipped play area for 6-11 year olds
- Equipped play area for both age groups

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy



Map 11.1
Equipped Play Areas

Quality and Value **Audit Results**

Across the City and District’s 87 equipped play areas:

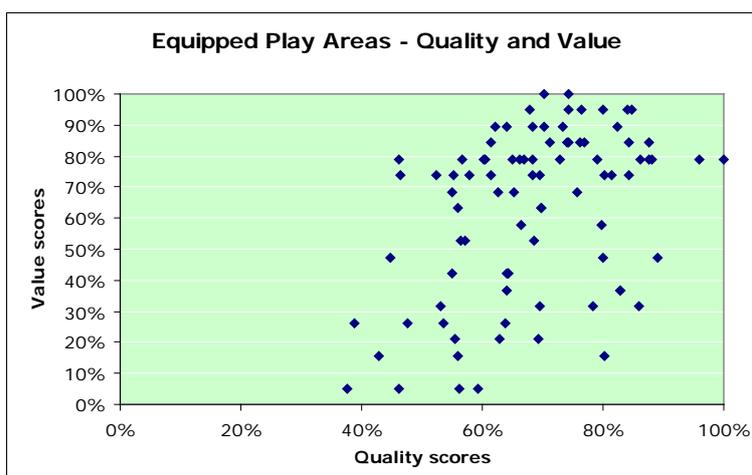
- 35 have 1-4 items of equipment
- 43 have 5-7 items of equipment
- 9 have 8-9 items of equipment

The play areas also range considerably in land area, from a minimum of 26 to a maximum of a little over 11,000 sq m, with an average of 1,031 sq m. Paragraph 10.13 of the District Local Plan Review notes that “The Council ... accepts that playing space should be provided to meet the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) target of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 population”. The NPFA (now renamed Fields in Trust) recommends that equipped play areas should take two forms:

- Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs): minimum size 400 sq m with 5 pieces of equipment
- Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs): minimum size 1,000 sq m/8 pieces of equipment

Across the City and District, 31 of the equipped play areas are smaller 400 sq m; 32 occupy an area of between 400 and 1,000 sq m; and 24 are larger than 1,000 sq m. Therefore slightly over one third of the existing equipped play areas are smaller than the implicit requirements in the Local Plan Review.

Full details of the audit scores for the 87 play areas are given in Appendix L. The average quality and value scores are both 68% - higher than in many other Council areas:



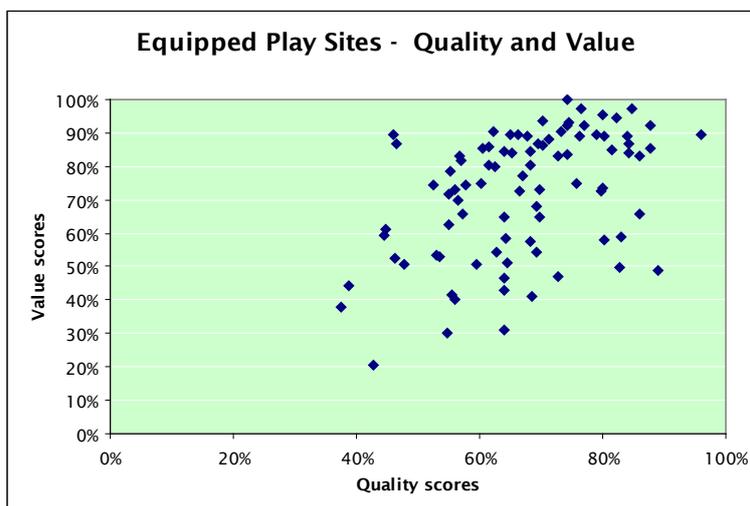
The quality and value scores for the equipped parts of play areas were based on:

- **Quality:** general characteristics (eg the distance to the nearest dwelling window, signage and separation of equipment for children of different ages); pedestrian accessibility (eg for people with disabilities or maintenance equipment); safety and security (eg the type and condition of any safety surface and dog-proof fencing); the condition of play equipment, surfaces and facilities for parents/carers; and management and maintenance
- **Value:** children often have a low attention span and so the wider the range of equipment types on a site the higher the play value

Most play areas do not consist solely of equipment items. Accordingly the audit also assessed the play value of the non-equipped parts of play sites, using the following criteria:

- Visual stimulation/attractiveness
- Opportunities to run around
- Opportunities to see plants, birds, animals and insects
- Opportunities to sit quietly with adults or friends
- Opportunities to hide
- Opportunities to climb

Combining the scores for equipment and the non-equipped areas of sites raised the average value score from 68% to 73%. The detailed scores are shown in the chart below:



While the average scores are good, therefore, they mask considerable variation in the quality and value of sites across the City and District. Ideally, all of the scores should be clustered in the top right hand quadrant of the charts. In the interests of offering provision of

consistent quality and value across the District, it will be desirable to aim to narrow the range of both quality and value scores by upgrading the worst sites, particularly those which are below average quality and value. This will also raise the average quality and value scores. The best sites are:

- In terms of **quality**: Porters Hill and Walsingham Way (both in London Colney); Brooke End and Silkmill (both in Redbourn); and Sherwood Avenue and New England Street (both in St Albans)
- In terms of **play value**: Greenwood Park and North Close (both in Park Street and St Stephen); Fleetville, St Stephen's Hill, Holyrood Crescent and Clarence Road (all in Central); and Westfield Road and Westfield Road in Harpenden.

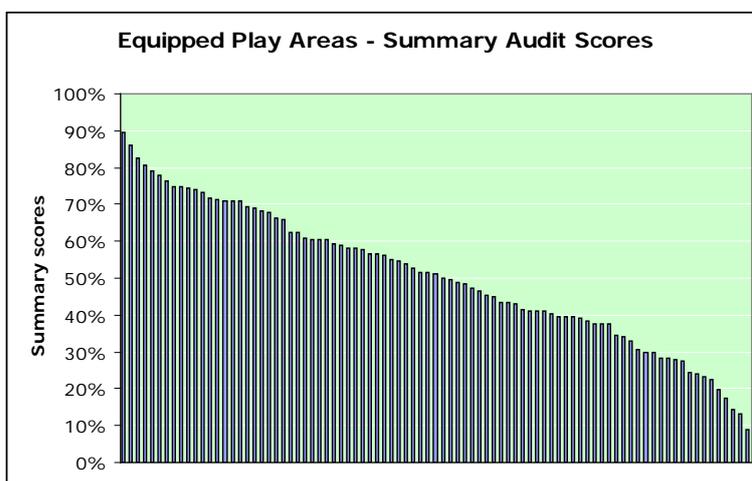
The main improvements needed to play areas across the City and District include:

- **Additional play equipment** or replacement of existing equipment at some sites
- **Enhanced accessibility**, for example through better disabled access or surfaced paths to the entrance to play areas and also within them. It is quite common for users to have to walk across a grassed (and in wet weather often muddy) area in order to get to the entrance gate. This will not bother young children, but will dissuade adults accompanying them who do not want to get their shoes or feet wet. Some play areas also lack a hard surfaced area at the entrance gate, with the result that the entrance can be a sea of mud for at least part of the year. The average accessibility score was 75%.
- **Enhanced safety**: where dogs may be a nuisance and scare young children, equipped play sites should have dog-proof fencing. In addition, the type of safety surfacing beneath equipment items varies considerably with the most common surfaces being a wet pour impact absorbing surface and bark chips. The former has the advantages of staying in place and being easy to clean, but in spite of being point elastic is not actually particularly safe (it is usually laid on top of tarmac, so tends to minimise cuts and grazes but not a lot else). Bark chips, on the other hand, are better to fall on but tend to become displaced (particularly beneath swings), partly negating their safety properties, and are almost impossible to clean, for example if fouled by dogs. The use of the play areas also tends to result in chips being scattered on paths and grassed areas. The average safety and security score was 63%.
- **Better facilities for parents and carers**: while most sites have at least one seat for adults

accompanying young children, a number are in poor condition. Litter bins are also sometimes missing or in poor condition. The average score for facilities was only 41%.

- **Enhanced maintenance:** the average score for management and maintenance is a good 79%, but at a number of sites there is a need for enhanced maintenance
- **Better signage:** every site should have a sign at the entrance giving the age of children for which it is intended, where to get help in case of an accident or other emergency and details of who is responsible for maintenance so that users can draw attention to any need there may be for repairs. The Council has already responded to an early draft of this strategy by upgrading signage at its sites.

The chart below summarises the combined summary scores for the 87 play areas:



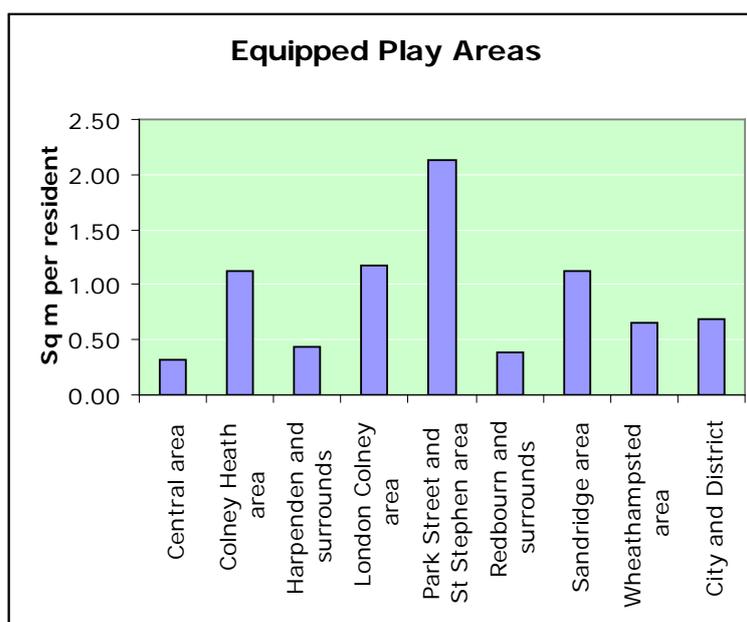
The average and median summary scores are 51% and 50% and the third quartile/fair score 66%. However, the summary scores range from 90% down to only 9%, indicating a huge difference between the best and worst facilities. The Council should therefore work with the Parish and Town Councils to take out or enhance the worst play areas. If removal will leave an accessibility gap in provision it will obviously be desirable to replace the current facility with a better one on a suitable site.

Quality Standard

The Council should adopt a minimum combined third quartile/fair audit score of 62% as its minimum acceptable quality standard. Appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of equipped play areas.

The Quantity of Provision

It is impossible to be definitive about the total area of land used for play because many sites form only a part of larger sites, with the whole of the site available for some form of play as well as other purposes. Nor is it always possible sensibly to differentiate the areas used for toddlers and older children because they often share the same overall play area. However, taking the enclosed areas only, the total area of play provision across the City and District is just below 9 ha. This equates to the following average levels of provision per person in each of the planning areas and the City and District as a whole:



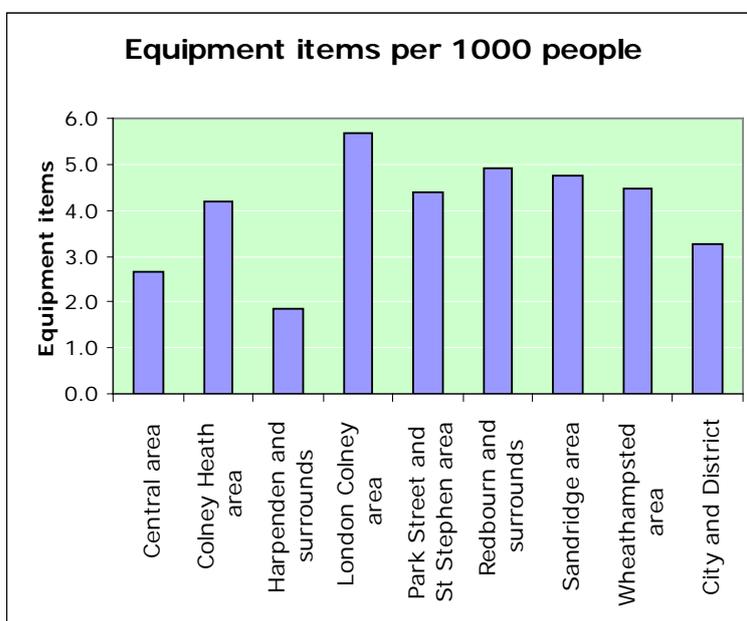
These are higher levels of provision than in many other Council areas, although the Park Street and St Stephen figure, and to some extent the overall average, is skewed by the 11,000 sq m facility in Greenwood Park. If this is excluded the Park Street and St Stephen average falls to a little over 1.2 sq m per person.

The District Local Plan Review gives a target of 0.2-0.3 ha of equipped play areas per 1,000 people, or 2-3 sq m per person. The current amount of equipped play areas in each of the planning areas compared with the minimum Local Plan Review standard of 2 sq m per person is:

	Sq m/person	% of Standard
Central area	0.33 sq m	17%
Colney Heath area	1.12 sq m	56%
Harpenden area	0.44 sq m	22%
London Colney area	0.92 sq m	46%

Park Street & St Stephen	2.14 sq m	107%
Redbourn area	0.39 sq m	20%
Sandridge area	1.12 sq m	56%
Wheathampstead area	0.65 sq m	36%
City and District	0.68 sq m	34%

This clearly calls into question the validity of the Local Plan standard and more generally the Fields in Trust approach to play provision. However, site area on its own is a very poor way of measuring the quantity of play provision. For example, a site with an area of say 400 sq m may have only one item of equipment or anything up to about eight or nine. Accordingly a better measure is the number of equipment items available for children to use. The chart below therefore summaries the number of equipment items per 1000 residents in each of the planning areas:



This reduces the disparity between the various areas of the City and District. The number of items per 1000 residents varies from 1.9 in Harpenden to 5.7 in London Colney with a District-wide average of 3.3.

Local Views

The household survey asked local residents their views on the amount or quantity of different forms of play provision. The percentage of respondents thinking that there is too much, about the right amount or too little equipped play provision in each of the planning areas was:

Large Play Areas

	Too much	About right	Too little
Central	1%	43%	32%
Colney Heath	0%	38%	38%
Harpenden area	1%	46%	34%
London Colney	0%	47%	26%
Park St & St Stephen	1%	58%	24%
Redbourn area	0%	27%	55%
Sandridge	1%	43%	35%
Wheathampstead	3%	56%	24%
City and District	1%	45%	32%

Note: percentages do not sum to 100 because some respondents answered “don’t know” or did not respond at all

Small Play Areas

	Too much	About right	Too little
Central	1%	44%	50%
Colney Heath	0%	46%	49%
Harpenden area	0%	65%	30%
London Colney	0%	50%	37%
Park St & St Stephen	0%	49%	47%
Redbourn area	0%	50%	45%
Sandridge	0%	57%	37%
Wheathampstead	2%	65%	27%
City and District	1%	46%	33%

Accordingly a majority of those who expressed an opinion in all areas except Colney Heath (where opinion was evenly balanced) and Redbourn saw no need for more large play areas and a majority in all areas except Central and Colney Heath saw no need for more small local play areas. However, only in Redbourn was there a significant majority in favour of more provision.

Trends

National Trends

There are no particular trends in the use of or demand for equipped play areas, apart from the fact that they are often colonised by teenagers as places in which to hang about in the evenings, largely because equipment items such as swings offer somewhere to sit. There are, however, two significant wider trends in thinking on play provision:

- Increasing recognition that more or less standard play areas are a very poor way of providing for children and as a result a move away from “play areas” – fenced areas with fixed play equipment and

safety surfacing – to “playable spaces”, or greenspaces designed in such a way as to stimulate children’s imaginations in a natural play environment.

- Significant concern that the design of children’s play is driven too much by fear of litigation in the event of accidents rather than the needs of children – a concern fully endorsed by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

One result of these trends is that interest is growing in “environmental play” or “Child friendly local environments”, an approach which our Companion Guide to PPG17 forecast:

[Using a formulaic approach] tends to result in children’s play being allocated to the more unbuildable parts of housing sites and often ignores the needs of older children, such as teenagers. It can sometimes place the design of play areas in the hands of manufacturers with a vested interest in selling their products. Other European countries have developed approaches which use pieces of timber and different surfaces to create exciting and naturalistic play environments, better integrated with their surroundings than areas of safety surfacing surrounded by dog-proof fences and containing a few pieces of brightly coloured equipment.

More recently, London’s Supplementary Planning Guidance on “Providing for Children and Young People’s Play and Informal Recreation”, states:

Although children and young people use and value many different types of space, planners and others have historically relied on a limited number of models for the kinds of space to be provided for them. Providing for children and young people is almost universally seen as a matter of installing fenced-off play areas with safety surfacing and fixed play equipment (or variations on these for older young people). This approach leads to artificial, inflexible spaces that make a narrow offer to children and hold little attraction to the wider community. It also reinforces the view that children and young people should be corralled into specially designated areas, rather than being allowed to play in the wider public realm. Whilst clearly designated and bounded spaces may be of value, especially to younger children and their carers, the overall objective should be the

provision of well located, well designed and functional spaces that are accessible to children and young people and an integrated part of the wider public realm.

As this quotation makes clear, there is still a place for equipped play areas, especially for young children. However, there should probably be relatively few of them and they should be significantly better than most of those currently available.

Local Trends

The Council's *Play and Free Time Strategy* reflects and fully endorses the national trends, particularly the natural play approach.

Implications

The Council needs to develop a new approach to providing for children that relies less on fixed play equipment within designated play areas.

Quantity Standard

The new approach to play suggested above is based on a mix of fewer but significantly larger and more stimulating equipped play areas, at key locations such as parks, plus local greenspaces designed with rocks, logs, and other features that stimulate children's imagination and promote and facilitate "natural play". This clearly accords with the recommendations in the Council's *Play and Free Time Strategy* to promote more unstructured outdoor play and develop a more strategic approach to play provision.

Against this background, it would be wrong to propose the continued provision of formulaic equipped play areas as the main form of play provision in the City and District, although there may still be a case for some in a few locations. Therefore the Council and its Town and Parish Council partners should do two things:

- Plan and progressively develop a "strategic network" of large and exciting equipped play areas in the main concentrations of population, preferably in high profile, major greenspaces such as parks or park-like spaces.
- Retain the present equipped play areas for the moment but move to a new approach whenever new development, or the need to replace an existing play area, creates the opportunity to do so and the strategic network is in place. This new approach will vary slightly across the City and District:

- In the main settlements, the Council and other play providers should significantly reduce the number of equipped play areas but enhance the quality of existing greenspaces in residential areas in order to make them more appealing and stimulate children to play in imaginative ways within them. This can best be achieved by skilled landscape architects working with local children to add naturalistic, low maintenance features such as rocks. Rocks need a lot less maintenance than swings and climbing frames; indeed, they have already lasted for many millions of years without any maintenance whatsoever.
- In the smaller settlements, they seek to rationalise the number of equipped play areas into a smaller number of larger sites and simultaneously enhance amenity greenspaces in residential areas

As a result, the Council can best help to ensure good provision for children and young people by:

- Requiring developers to provide or contribute to amenity greenspaces, natural greenspaces and parks and gardens in accordance with the proposed quantity and quality standards for them
- Ensuring that all new greenspaces in housing areas are designed to be suitable for children's play in accordance with the proposed quality standards in Appendix C
- Securing developer contributions that the Council and the Town and Parish Councils can use to make existing suitably located greenspaces more stimulating and exciting for children's play

The Strategic Network

People will happily travel further to see the Rolling Stones than a pub band, or the Berliner Philharmonic than their local amateur orchestra. Many will also bypass a poor local facility in order to get to a better one, even if it is some distance away. The same goes for visits to facilities like strategic play areas – provided they are complemented by local provision for everyday use. At the same time, it would be wrong to plan a strategic network of large, high profile play areas that many people will normally visit by car. This suggests a distance threshold of around 15 minutes walk to them, which equates to about 1200 m on the ground or 900 m “as the crow flies”. This distance threshold relates primarily to walking but some older children will access strategic play areas by bicycle and some parents will also drive to them with their children. However, this does not justify setting a wider catchment as the Council

should be encouraging potential users to walk to them.

The number of strategic sites required in each of the main settlements will depend primarily on where it is possible to site them and the extent to which notional catchments are severed by main roads and railway lines. An ideal strategic play area is around 1,500 sq m in size, or roughly a quarter of a football pitch. This is large enough to be high profile and contain a wide range of pieces of equipment for children of a wide range of ages.



An example of a strategic play area set on the edge of a park – full of children and adults

This approach will have three important long term benefits:

- It will result in a slowly but steadily increasing number of more interesting, more attractive and more “playable” greenspaces that should appeal to both children and adults
- It should generate economies of scale in terms of maintenance costs for the Council and the Town and Parish Councils
- It will raise the profile of the City and District’s main parks

Local Play Areas

In many new housing developments it will still be necessary to require developers to provide some small local play areas that will complement the new strategic network and opportunities for natural play. The Council should therefore adopt a quantity standard for these local play areas slightly lower than the current average level of equipped play provision of 0.68 sq m per person, such as 0.5 sq m per person. These small facilities will

not negate the desirability of designing new housing areas with home zones, but complement them.

Strategic Play Provision

In addition, it will be desirable for the Council to promote the development of a limited number of strategic play areas in areas where there is a concentration of children and young people. Assuming an average density of 30 dwellings per hectare in residential areas, a circular area with a radius of 900 m will have an area of approximately 255 ha and contain around 7640 dwellings and 18,500 residents. If this is to be served by a strategic play area of some 1,500 sq m the required quantity standard is 0.08 sq m per person.

Overall Quantity Standard

Combining 0.08 sq m per person for strategic play areas with the 0.5 sq m per person above for local play areas gives a composite quantity standard of approximately 0.6 sq m per person.

Policy Conclusions

Proposed Local Standards

In summary, the proposed locally determined provision standards for equipped play areas are therefore:

Accessibility	Toddlers: 300 m walk Older children: 450 m walk Strategic play areas: 900 m
Quality	Appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of both greenspaces that will be suitable for children's play and equipped play areas
Quantity	0.6 sq m per person, with a notional split into 0.5 sq m per person for equipped play areas and 0.1 sq m per person for strategic play areas

Broad Approach to Play Provision

The Council and other play providers should:

- Protect those play areas with an audit score of at least 66%, unless they are to be converted into a strategic play area or lie within the toddlers distance threshold of one
- Apply the quantity standard in a flexible manner that takes account of the nature of existing play and greenspace provision in the vicinity of a proposed development. In doing so, the distance thresholds will be applicable throughout the City and District, except in relation to scattered dwellings and

settlements in which application of the standards will result in very small play areas that will be of little benefit to children.

- Encourage developers to create high quality on-site greenspaces that will be attractive as playing spaces to children of all ages in preference to on-site equipped play areas. Appendix C provides guidance on how this can be achieved for both the Council and developers.
- Review the need for those play areas with an audit score of less than 66% whenever significant equipment repairs or replacement are required.

Note: these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council's current wider planning policies.



12 Provision Standards: Teenagers

Introduction

Groups of teenagers hanging around are often seen as a potential threat by many older people, although perception and reality can be very different things. However, one of the possible reasons for young people hanging around is that there is little for them to do that is free and does not require organisation. Accordingly this chapter reviews provision for teenagers, defined as aerial runways, ball courts, BMX tracks, shelters, skateboard areas, and similar open access facilities. It does not include multi-courts, also known inelegantly as Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs) because there is a charge for the use of most of those in the City and District. However, the Council recently developed new open access multi-courts in Napsbury, at the Marlborough Pavilion and in the Porters Hill Open Space

Accessibility

Accessibility Standard

The household questionnaire survey did not ask respondents the length of time for which they were willing to travel to use teenage facilities. The nearest equivalent was “neighbourhood play areas”, defined as “offering a good variety of play equipment for children of all ages (including young teenagers) with ball games areas, skateboard areas, teenage shelters etc”. The chart below summarises the length of time that respondents to the questionnaire survey said they were willing to travel to them:



Accordingly the appropriate distance threshold is around 7-8 minutes. Most teenagers are either not old enough to drive or do not have access to a vehicle, so there is no need for a driving threshold, but many have a bicycle and so it is desirable to have a cycling as well as a walking threshold. Rounding the travel time up to 10 minutes results in the following distance thresholds:

- Walking 600 m
- Cycling 1500 m

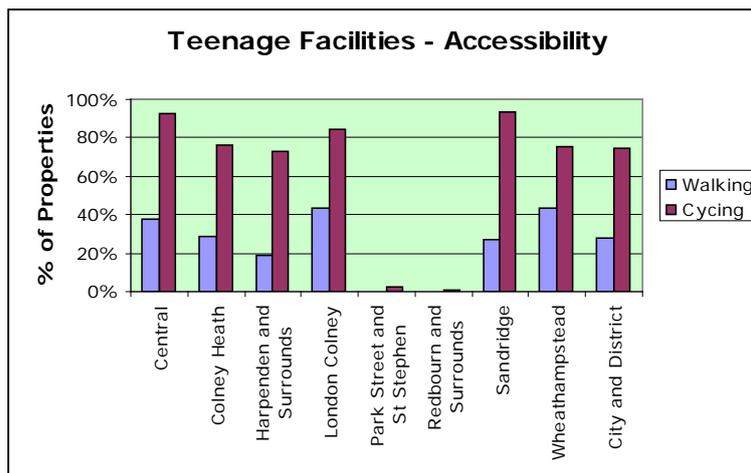
Accessibility Assessment

The audit identified a total of only 11 teenage facilities across the City and District as follows:

Central	5
Colney Heath	0
Harpenden and surrounds	2
London Colney	2
Park Street and St Stephen	0
Redbourn and surrounds	0
Sandridge	1
Wheathampstead	1
Total	11

Note: these figures relate to the dedicated teenage facilities and do not include the various multi-courts in the City and District as some have a charge for their use

Young people in large parts of the City and District therefore lack ready access to teenage facilities. The percentage of dwellings within the distance thresholds of at least one teenage facility are:



Accordingly around three quarters or more of teenagers in all parts of the City and District other than Park Street and St Stephen and Redbourn and surrounds are able to access at least one teenage area within a 10 minute cycle ride. However, this is a long way to go to “hang out” and the walking threshold is more realistic. Overall only 28% of properties lie within a 10-minute walk of at least one teenage facility.

This means that there are widespread accessibility deficiencies across the City and District and a need for a programme of facility development in most areas except parts of the Central and Wheathampstead areas. However, it will also be desirable to expand the range of facilities on most existing sites.

There will be many opportunities for additional teenage provision but the key will be to work with young people to identify good locations. The experience from other areas is that higher levels of use are achieved if young people are actively engaged in helping to identify suitable sites and decide what is provided. The broad criteria the Council should use to select sites include:

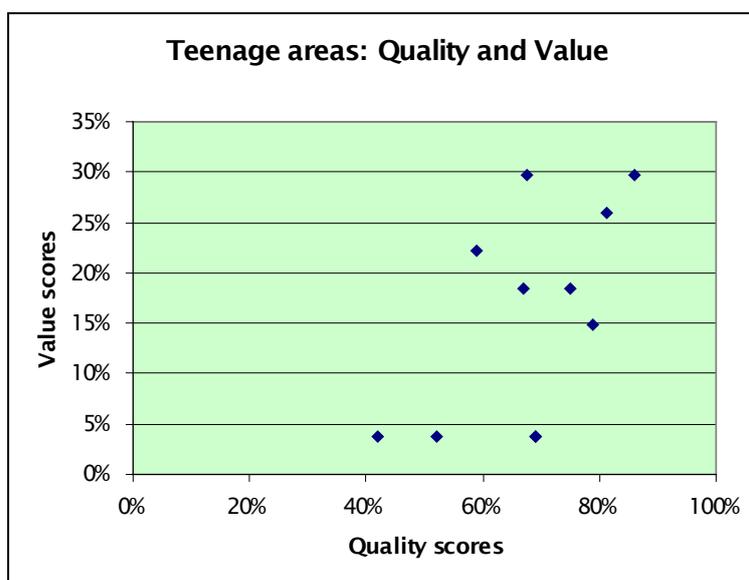
- They should be located close to, but far enough from well used pedestrian routes that they will not be seen as a possible threat by passers-by
- They should be provided with lighting for night time use
- They should not be adjacent to dwellings, schools or shops
- They should take account of any territorial issues there may be amongst teenagers – young people (and the Police) will be able to advise on this

Quality and Value **Audit Results**

The factors included in the audit were

- **Quality:** general characteristics such as the distance to the nearest dwelling window; signage; pedestrian accessibility; inclusiveness; safety and security; the condition of the facilities; and management and maintenance
- **Value:** the range of facilities available and the degree of public access.

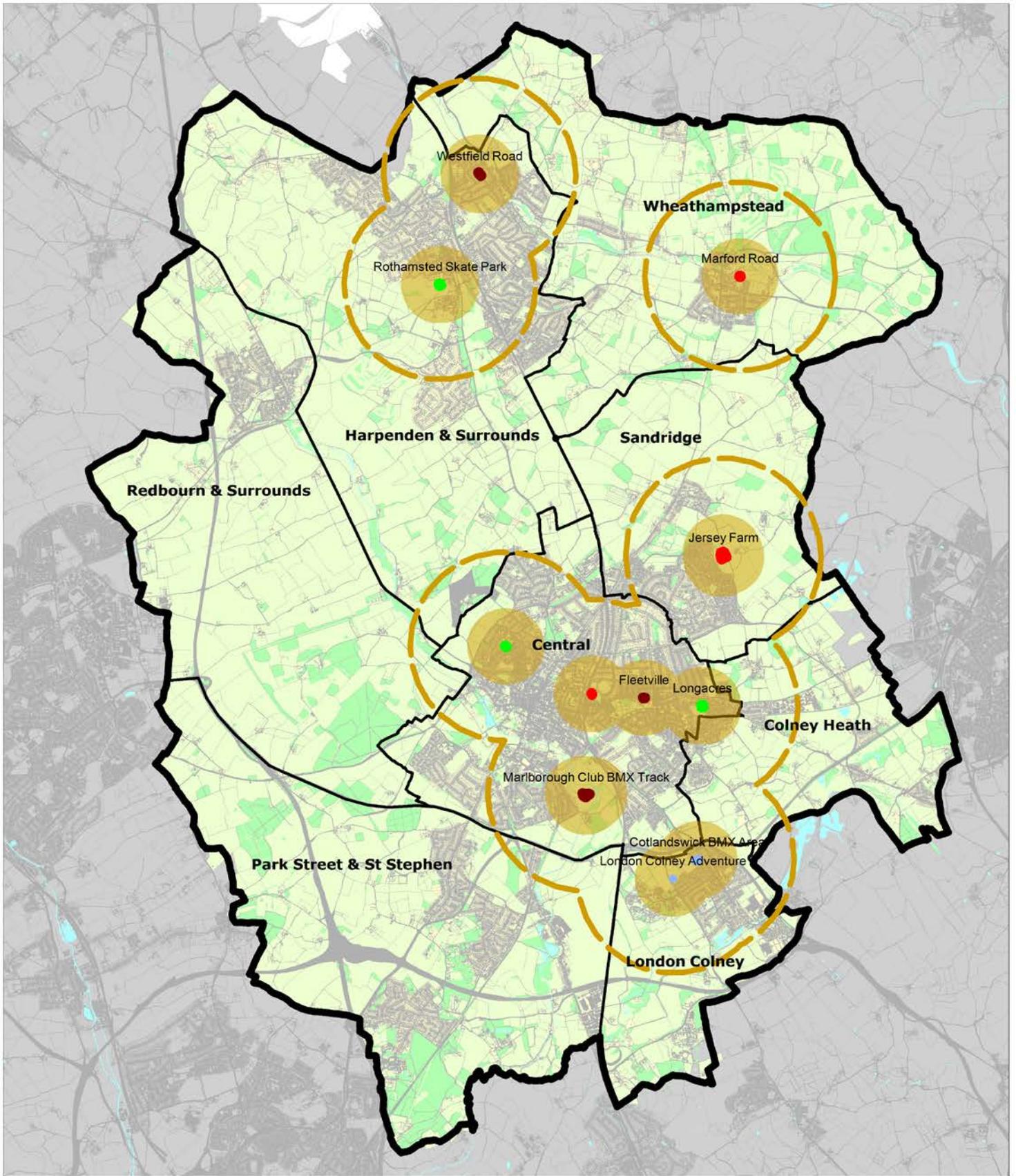
The very limited range of equipment on most sites – of the 11 existing sites, only three (all in the Central area) have more than two different types of equipment – resulted in low value scores as shown in the chart below, with further details in Appendix M:



Note: two sites – Clarence Park and Westfield Road – have identical audit scores so there appear to be only ten points for the eleven sites on the above chart. The scores relate to the dedicated teenage facilities and do not include the various multi-courts in the City and District as some have a charge for their use.

As the chart shows, however, the quality scores were generally fairly good with four sites achieving a score of 75% or more. This indicates a good standard of specification and maintenance. The average quality and value scores were 66% and 20% respectively, indicating a clear need to enhance value, best achieved by providing a wider range of equipment: Map 12.1 highlights their locations. The other main improvements required to sites include:

- Better signage
- Greater inclusiveness
- Better all-weather surfaces
- Lighting to allow evening use



- Sites with fourth quartile audit score
- Sites with third quartile audit score
- Sites with second quartile audit score
- Sites with first quartile audit score

8 minutes/450 m walk distance threshold

St Albans City and District Council
Greenspace Strategy



Map 12.1
Teenage Facilities

In total, the equipment available at the 11 sites consists of:

Aerial runway	2
Ball court, not floodlit	2
Ball court. floodlit	1
Ball walls	0
Basketball goals	3
BMX track	2
Shelters	2
Skateboard areas – large	2
Other	9

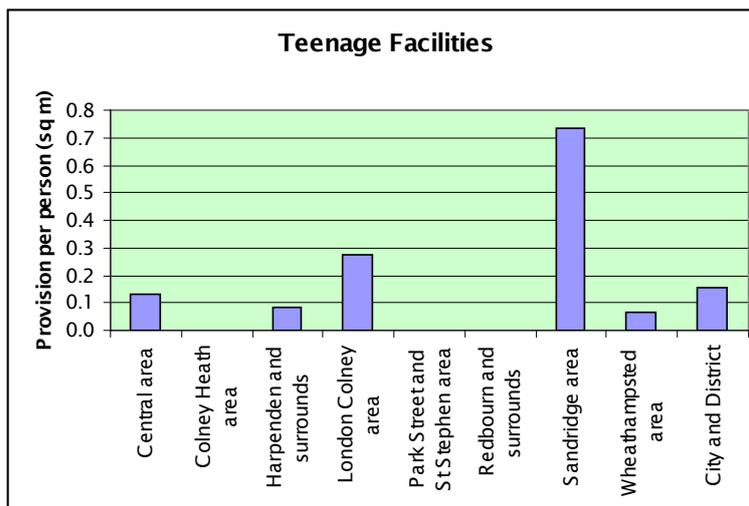
The scores relate to the dedicated teenage facilities and do not include the various multi-courts in the City and District as some have a charge for their use.

Quality Standard

The average, median and third quartile/fair summary audit scores were 11%, 12% and 17% respectively. Accordingly the third quartile/fair summary score will result in only a very low quality standard but for consistency the Council should adopt it in order to identify the sites most in need of enhancement. However, when developers provide or fund additional provision the Council should seek better provision than implied by this standard. Appendix C gives a number of suggestions, but is only a starting point and all teenage facilities should be planned and designed in partnership with teenagers themselves.

The Quantity of Provision

With only eleven sites, the overall quantity of provision is quite low. In all, it aggregates to just over 2 ha, of which about a third is accounted for by the two very low quality and value BMX tracks at Cotlandswick and the Marlborough Pavilion BMX Club in Cottonmill Lane, St Albans. Four of the sites have an area of less than 500 sq m, which is a good indication of their limited value.



On average, there is some 0.16 sq m of teenage provision per person across the City and District, but this ranges from none in Park Street and St Stephen and the Redbourn and surrounds area to 0.74 sq m per person in Sandridge, although this latter figure is high because of the unusually large Jersey Farm area.

Local Views

The percentage of respondents in each of the planning areas in the household survey thinking that the quantity of neighbourhood play provision was “about right” or “too little” were:

	<i>About right</i>	<i>Too little</i>
Central	38%	40%
Colney Heath	43%	30%
Harpenden and Surrounds	44%	35%
London Colney	42%	34%
Park Street and St Stephen	58%	24%
Redbourn and surrounds	39%	39%
Sandridge	36%	39%
Wheathampstead	55%	29%
City and District	42%	36%

Accordingly, a majority of respondents thought that the current amount of provision is about right in all areas of the City and District except for Redbourn and surrounds and Sandridge.

The Council's *Play and Free Time Strategy 2007-2012*, however, found that young people are likely to face barriers that prevent them from participating in free-time activities, with the main ones being:

- Cost
- Lack of places to go
- No one to go with

- Lack of information
- Difficulty of travel

The strategy highlighted two important consequences of young people not being able to access free time opportunities:

- They are likely to miss out on the developmental benefits that participation in quality free-time activities can bring
- Local communities have a concern that when young people don't have appropriate things to do they are more likely to get involved in anti-social behaviour

In terms of physical provision for teenagers across the City and District, the research that underpinned the strategy found:

- A cluster of informal spaces used by teenagers in the Redbourn area
- A concentration of informal spaces used by teenagers in the Park Street and St Stephen area, where there is no specific youth provision
- Limited youth provision in Harpenden South, North and East

Trends

Surveys in other areas have found very strong support for more teenage provision, although usually on the basis of "but not near me, thank you". Therefore the household survey results in St Albans are abnormal, especially when set in the context of the accessibility assessment above.

There are however no specific identifiable trends in provision for teenagers, although when asked roughly equal proportions of teenagers seem generally to want shelters, skateboard areas and floodlit multi-sports courts. Interestingly, and largely because of the former availability of grants from Sport England, the one form of provision that many councils have concentrated on – basketball goals without floodlights – comes near the bottom of many teenagers' "wish lists".

Quantity Standard

The results of the household survey provide no guidance on what local teenagers want, nor is it possible to combine the findings of the household survey with the current average quantity of provision to identify a sensible quantity standard. Accordingly it is necessary to use a different approach based on the Central planning area as the area with the greatest concentration of teenagers.

There is no standard size for a teenage facility, but assuming a desirable teenage area consists of a ball

court plus a shelter and skateboard area, it will have an area of around 800-1000 sq m. Accordingly the Central area will have a total of around 8,800-11,000 sq m (0.9-1.1 ha) of provision for its population of just below 52,000 or some 0.16-0.2 sq m per person. The mid point of this range is 0.18 sq m of provision per person and this will be an appropriate quantity standard.

Policy Conclusions Local Provision Standards

The Council should adopt the following provision standards for teenage provision:

Accessibility	600 m walking 1500 m cycling
Quality	Appendix C sets out the desirable characteristics of teenage facilities
Quantity	0.18 sq m per person

Broad Approach to Teenage Provision

The Council should:

- Protect all existing teenage facilities, unless an opportunity arises to relocate a facility to a more accessible or more suitable location
- Always consult local teenagers before deciding the form that any proposed provision should take. Teenagers can be very fickle and their preferences for facilities intended for their use can change rapidly. However, remember also that they will expect “instant results”.
- Require housing developers to contribute to off-site provision except in major developments of at least 1500 dwellings
- Promote the enhancement of those teenage facilities with an audit score of less than 17%
- When seeking a potential location for a teenage facility, take account of:
 - Possible territorial issues between different areas – the Police will be able to advise on this
 - The desirability of teenage facilities being visible from and reasonably close to but not located immediately adjacent to well used pedestrian routes
 - The likelihood that teenage facilities will generate litter so refuse collection vehicles must be able to stop reasonably close to them
 - The fact that teenage facilities will almost certainly generate noise so they should not be located immediately adjacent to dwellings
- It should be possible to allay some of the concerns that residents’ may have relating to groups of

teenagers through effective community liaison

Note: these recommendations are intended to complement and provide evidence that will assist the Council when drawing up the policies in its forthcoming Local Development Framework and do not over-ride or supersede the Council's current wider planning policies.

Application of Provision Standards to the Planning Areas

