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# Chapter two: Recreation and Open Space Strategy

Technical guidance

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## **Part 2:**

### **➤ Facility Analysis**

## 8. Countryside Recreation Sites

### Introduction

8.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to Countryside Recreation Sites in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Definition and Context
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Definition

8.2 The Countryside Act (1968) placed a duty on the then Countryside Commission to provide and improve facilities for the enjoyment of the countryside, to enhance and conserve the countryside and secure public access to the countryside for recreational purposes. The Act stated that countryside recreation sites and picnic sites were already in existence, but that their numbers were inadequate to meet demand at that time, and made provision to increase the amount of these types of sites.

8.3 The original criteria for country parks set out in the Countryside Act (1968) are that to be recognised by the Countryside Commission a country park must be:

- a) readily accessible for motor vehicles and pedestrians
- b) provided with an adequate range of facilities, including as a minimum, parking, containing facilities, lavatories, either within or adjacent to the park, and a supervisory service.

8.4 The countryside commission considered a country park to be not less than 25 acres in extent.

8.5 This assessment does not focus exclusively on formal country parks, but instead includes large strategic sites that offer countryside recreation.

8.6 For the purposes of this study, countryside recreation sites have been defined as follows:

**“Large countryside-type sites set aside for a variety of recreational activities, offering a range of formal and informal facilities and activities. They may not fit within formal definitions of country parks, but offer residents the opportunity to experience, appreciate and enjoy the countryside. These are destination sites, to which residents expect to travel (usually by car), which provide a range of facilities”**

8.7 The following sites have therefore been included within the countryside recreation sites typology:

- Ampthill Park
- Aspley Woods
- Dunstable Downs
- Rushmere Park
- Sundon Hills Country Park
- Tiddenfoot Waterside Park
- The Lodge RSPB Reserve, Sandy
- Millennium Country Park - Marston Moretaine

## **Context**

8.8 Countryside recreation sites are a key part of the wider network of countryside and open spaces and are managed for countryside recreation.

8.9 As set out in Section 2, open spaces offer a variety of functions and benefits. As well as providing a wide range of opportunities for recreation, countryside recreation sites also have a role to play in enhancing health and supporting education as well as providing a link to the countryside. At the same time, many of the countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire are important places for biodiversity and conservation and as such have a dual purpose. This will be returned to later.

8.10 The provision of countryside recreation sites contributes towards the achievement of many national and local aims and objectives set out in Section 3. Countryside recreation sites are a legacy of the 1968 Countryside Act and there are now more than 400 sites that are classified as country parks across England. Natural England recognises country parks as significant sites in the network of accessible countryside across Britain so when the Rural White Paper (2000) revealed that such sites were in decline, a review was commissioned by Natural England (at the time called the Countryside Agency) termed Towards a Country Park Renaissance. This review considered:

- how country parks developed in the years since their inception
- the size and distribution of existing country parks
- the major issues facing service providers
- the contemporary relevance of country parks and how they relate to current and planned initiatives

8.11 The review included a series of recommendations around the key areas of:

- the inclusion of country parks in local authority parks and greenspace strategies
- the continuity and enhancement of the country park image
- incentives that encourage the participation of all country parks
- the development of a shared vision
- the town and countryside interface
- the development of a set of eight core activities
- development of a set of minimum quality/service standards
- issues concerning 'people' as well as 'place'
- meeting the social agendas of other organisations
- the requirement for additional marketing and promotional support
- the establishment of a delivery group

8.12 The average size of country parks/countryside recreation sites evaluated in this review was circa 130 hectares.

8.13 More locally, countryside recreation sites are considered to be a key component of the accessible greenspace across the region. Many of the sites (and potential country parks) in Central Bedfordshire are owned and managed by Central Bedfordshire Council and their role and priorities associated with these sites is considered in the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (Central Bedfordshire Council 2013).

8.14 The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan defines country parks as strategic sites that are over 60ha or 'Country Park' level or aspiring to be at the country park level. These are usually large sites with a range of facilities and attract people from a wide catchment and often have high visitor figures'. The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan highlights that country parks (and other publicly managed accessible spaces) are just one way in which residents of Central Bedfordshire can enjoy access to the countryside.

8.15 The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan identifies several country parks amongst the most frequently visited sites in Central Bedfordshire and indicates that Dunstable Downs is visited more frequently than any other site in the area. Stockgrove Country Park, Marston Millennium Country Park, Sundon Hills Country Park and Ampthill Park also feature within the top most commonly visited sites. Section 3 summarised the strategic priorities of the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan, all of which relate to country parks as part of the stock of facilities managed by the Central Bedfordshire Council Countryside Access Service. Access to country parks is highlighted as particularly important and these sites are seen to have a vital role as strategic hubs.

8.16 More specifically, the Green Infrastructure plans (both regional documents and local village plans) outlined in Section 3, highlight several strategic priorities relating to country parks. These will be referred to and considered later in this section, but in brief include:

- creation of the forest of Marston Vale and enhancement of the associated Forest Centre and Millennium Country Park
- development of a green wheel around Sandy
- creation of a green wheel around Biggleswade (potentially to include a country park)
- creation of a country park in Flitwick
- enhancement of visitor management at Aspley Woods
- creation of a country park at Clophill Lakes
- development of new areas and improvement of existing resources at Rushmere Country Park

## **Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision**

8.17 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open space types detailed in this study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space.

### **Household Survey Responses**

#### **Usage Profile**

8.18 17% of respondents to the telephone survey visit countryside recreation sites at least once per week and a further 23% use these sites at least once per month. 36% of respondents never visit countryside recreation sites. This indicates that while the proportion of residents who do actually visit countryside recreation sites is higher than all other types of open space (with the exception of large recreational areas), visits are made less frequently than to some more local facilities. Countryside recreation sites may therefore have a different role to play than other types of open space, for many residents they act as a destination facility rather than a site that is visited every day.

8.19 The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (Central Bedfordshire 2013) cites research undertaken in 2003 which indicates that 83% of residents use countryside recreation sites, and that 20% visit at least once per month. A comparison between this research and that undertaken specifically for this strategy suggests that while the frequency of visits for those using countryside recreation sites has increased, a higher proportion of residents now do not visit countryside recreation sites than in 2003.

8.20 Analysing this further, the telephone survey suggests that:

- younger residents are more likely to visit countryside recreation sites than older residents. 79% of those aged 18-34 visit countryside recreation sites at least once per year compared to 62% aged 35 – 54 and 56% for those aged over 55. Those older residents that do use countryside recreation sites are more likely to use them more frequently than younger residents. 7% of residents aged over 55 visit countryside recreation sites daily
- residents with a disability visit countryside recreation sites less frequently – just 6% visit weekly or more (compared to 19% of those without a disability) and 56% never visit a countryside recreation site
- residents with dependent children aged under 8 are the most likely to use a countryside recreation site – just 23% never visit a site compared to 36% of residents overall. Interestingly, 43% of residents with dependents aged 9 – 13 and 55% of those with dependents aged 14 – 18 never visit countryside recreation sites. The frequency of visits is highest between those who do not have dependents and those who have children aged below 9
- 51% of residents of non white British origin do not use countryside recreation sites compared to 34% of white British residents

### **Usage by Placemaking Area**

8.21 The household survey reveals that there are few variations between the usage patterns in different parts of Central Bedfordshire. It is notable that residents in Leighton Buzzard and Rural South visit countryside recreation sites much more frequently than those in other areas (31% at least once per week compared to 8% in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 9% in the east and 25% in West Central Bedfordshire). Only 20% of residents in Leighton Buzzard and Rural South indicate that they have a lack of interest in countryside recreation sites, again a much lower percentage than in other areas.

### **Usage by Settlement Hierarchy**

8.22 The household survey indicates that there is little difference between use of countryside recreation sites by people living in different settlement hierarchies. The proportion of residents

in each of the settlement hierarchies that visit countryside recreation sites is relatively similar, although a higher proportion of residents (50%) in the minor service centres never visit countryside recreation sites. Level of use is highest in the large villages and it is also these residents that use countryside recreation sites most frequently.

### **Reasons for Visiting Countryside recreation sites**

8.23 The household survey reveals that the main reasons for visiting countryside recreation sites are:

- Walk and exercise (54%)
- To relax (42%)
- For children to play (24%)
- Dog walking (18%)
- Peace and tranquility (7%)

8.24 Research undertaken as part of the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan highlights similar reasons for residents using the countryside, with walking being the most popular activity.

### **Reasons for Visiting Countryside recreation sites by Placemaking Area**

8.25 Reasons for use are the same in all geographic areas according to the household survey. The only exception to this is in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, where almost 50% of residents using countryside recreation sites do so for children's play, a much higher proportion than in any other area.

### **Reasons for Visiting Countryside recreation sites by Settlement Hierarchy**

8.26 There are no variations in the reasons for visiting countryside recreation sites at different levels of the settlement hierarchy according to the household survey.

### **Barriers to Use**

8.27 Analysis of the barriers to use of different types of open space indicates that there are higher levels of interest in countryside recreation sites than in most other types of open space. The key barriers to use are lack of time (35%), difficult to get to (17%), lack of interest (15%) and no local facility (10%).

8.28 There are a few small differences in the importance of different barriers to use, specifically:

- Younger residents are more likely to highlight issues with accessing countryside recreation sites than older residents. This is also true of residents who would consider themselves to have a disability
- There is a particularly high lack of interest amongst residents of ethnic origin (38% not interested in countryside recreation sites compared to just 12% of white British residents). Location is also more important to those of non white ethnic origin
- Lack of time is the main reason attributed to lower levels of use by those with dependents aged between 9 and 18

## **Barriers to Use of Countryside recreation sites by Placemaking Area**

8.29 There are no clear differences in barriers to use by placemaking area according to the household survey. The only exception to this is in Leighton Buzzard, where a significantly lower proportion of residents highlight issues accessing countryside recreation sites than in other areas. It is in this area where the highest levels of use are exhibited.

## **Barriers to Use of Countryside recreation sites by Settlement Hierarchy**

8.30 The household survey indicates that the barriers to use are the same in all settlements, although the location and challenges of reaching a countryside recreation site are more of a barrier in the major and Minor Service Centres.

## **Current Provision and Views on Current Provision**

### **Quantity**

8.31 Overall, 680 hectares is dedicated to countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire. The average size of a countryside recreation site is 97 hectares, but sites range from 13 hectares (Tiddenfoot Waterside Park) to 230 hectares (Stockgrove / Rushmere Country Park). The stock of facilities includes the following sites:

- Ampthill Park - is owned by Ampthill Town Council assisted by the Greensand Trust. The area includes a county wildlife site as well as a section of the Greensand Ridge Walk
- Aspley Woods - is one of the largest areas of woodland in Bedfordshire. It is managed by Central Bedfordshire Council and public access is allowed in through an agreement between Central Bedfordshire Council, Milton Keynes Council and the Bedford Estates
- Dunstable Downs - is in partnership with the National Trust and includes a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The site contains The Chilterns Gateway Centre and has several circular walks and a picnic area.
- Rushmere Country Park - Rushmere Country Park is located on the Greensand Ridge and includes woodland, heath and meadow. It is 2 miles from the centre of Leighton Linlade. This site is managed by a partnership of The Greensand Trust and Central Bedfordshire Council. The overall vision for the site is a creation of an attractive and accessible public open space that balances recreational needs and activities with the needs of the sensitive natural and historic environment areas and features
- Sundon Hills Country Park - is managed by Central Bedfordshire Council in partnership with the National Trust. The site is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest and has important biodiversity values. It is located within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and includes a car park and a small picnic area
- Tiddenfoot Waterside Park - is owned by Central Bedfordshire Council and managed in partnership with the Greensand Trust. The space is a former sand quarry that now functions as a recreational space and includes surfaced paths for walking and cycling. The site is also a haven for wildlife and includes areas of woodland with restricted / private access and fishing lakes (managed by Leighton Buzzard Angling Club)

- The Lodge RSPB Reserve, Sandy – is managed by the RSPB and is located on the Greensand Ridge. It is a heathland nature reserve containing managed gardens, 5 miles of walking trails and a hide from which to watch a range of woodland birds. The site also includes a picnic area and shop. The RSPB is a nationally recognised organisation which attracts visitors from across the country as well as from the local area.
- Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park - is owned and managed by the Marston Vale Trust. It is the 'flagship' site in the Marston Vale and serves as an outdoor access / recreation hub for the surrounding area. It comprises woodland, wetlands (including a Wetlands Nature Reserve), grassland, lakes and 12km of paths and cycleways, including a section of NCN Route 51. The park provides the setting for the Forest Centre, a purpose built major visitor centre which serves as the headquarters for the Trust and is operated as a social enterprise. It provides a lakeside café, exhibition, conference facilities, sensory wildlife garden, children's play area and gift shop. The facility has held a green flag award since 2007 and is accredited under the Natural England scheme for Country Parks.

8.32 Table 8.1 summarises the amount of space dedicated to countryside recreation sites across Central Bedfordshire. It indicates that population growth will see the amount of space per 1000 population decrease from 2.67 ha to 2.34 ha.

**Table 8.1 – Countryside recreation sites across Central Bedfordshire**

Facility Type	Number of Sites	Total Provision (ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (future)
Countryside recreation sites	8	680.60	2.67	2.34

8.33 Table 8.2 summarises the distribution of countryside recreation sites by placemaking area. **This table should be treated as indicative only, as sites have been classified in the area in which the centroid of the site falls.** The size of countryside recreation sites means that in reality, several sites are spread across one or more of the placemaking areas. This will be considered later in this section in relation to accessibility.

8.34 Table 8.2 suggests that there are no countryside recreation sites located within the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area (primarily as this is an urban area although it must be noted that geographically, part of Dunstable Downs is actually in the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area although the centroid is not) and that provision is divided between the North and Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South. The geographical scale of the North area means that countryside recreation sites are well spread out, while in contrast, there is a particular cluster of countryside recreation sites around the Leighton Buzzard area. When taking into account the size of the population, provision in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South is almost double that of the North (5.45 hectares per 1000 population compared to 2.59 hectares).

**Table 8.2 – Countryside recreation sites by Placemaking Area**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision	Sites	Hectares per 1000 Population	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	0	0	N/A	0	0
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	4	294.55	Rushmere Country Park, Tiddenfoot Waterside Park, Dunstable Downs, Aspley Woods	5.45	4.73
North	4	386.06	Amphill Park, Sundon Hills Country Park, Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park, The Lodge	2.59	2.27
<b>Central Bedfordshire Totals</b>	8	680.61		2.67	2.34

8.35 The nature of countryside recreation sites means that it is not really appropriate to consider location by settlement hierarchy as by definition, they are located in the countryside and outside of the main urban areas. It should however be noted that most of the sites are located in close proximity to settlements and in many cases, to large settlements, specifically:

- Tiddenfoot Waterside Park - Leighton Buzzard (Major Service Centre)
- Amphill Park - Amphill (Major Service Centre)
- The Lodge - Sandy (Major Service Centre)
- Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park - Marston Moretaine (Minor Service Centre)
- Aspley Woods – Aspley Heath (small village) also partly in Aspley Guise
- Stockgrove Country Park - Heath and Reach (Large Village)
- Sundon Hills Country Park – Harlington (Large Village)but primarily in Sundon
- Dunstable Downs – Totternhoe (Small Village) but also partly in Dunstable

### **Quantity of Provision – Consultation Responses**

8.36 The following summaries the views obtained during the consultation types listed.

### **Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans**

8.37 While consultation reveals overall satisfaction with the amount of countryside recreation sites, as demonstrated earlier, the creation of new countryside recreation sites is an important priority of several of the local Green Infrastructure studies.

8.38 Specifically with regards quantity, the review of Green Infrastructure Assessments, Town and Parish Council responses and available Town and Parish plans highlights the following priorities;

- Extension to Ampthill Country Park (GI study)
- Biggleswade – new country Park (GI / Parish consultation)
- Flitwick – new country park (GI / Parish consultation)
- Arlesey – new country park in Blue Lagoon (GI)
- Marston Moretaine – extension of Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park to include Rookery Pits North (GI). It should be noted that there are several planning policy constraints associated with the use of this site. This will be addressed in appendix G (minerals and waste)

## **Household Survey**

8.39 With regards the quantity of countryside recreation sites, the household survey reveals that:

- overall, there is a strong perception that the amount of countryside recreation sites is sufficient. 71% consider there to be about the right amount of facilities and a further 8% think that there are too many
- just 17% of the population believe there is a need for more countryside recreation sites and a further 4% think there are nearly enough. With regards quantity, this represents the highest levels of satisfaction of all types of open space

8.40 Overall therefore, the headline findings of residents' views indicate that there are enough countryside recreation sites. There are few differences in opinion between different segments of the population, with the only significant difference being that a higher proportion of residents of non-white ethnic origin consider there to be insufficient countryside recreation sites than residents of white background. This is perhaps surprising, as analysis of current usage patterns demonstrates that residents in this group visit countryside recreation sites less frequently. It may however reflect the aspirations of this group to have local access to such sites.

## **Views on Quantity of Countryside recreation sites by Placemaking Area**

8.41 Despite the skew of countryside recreation sites towards the Leighton Buzzard and Rural South area, the household survey demonstrates that there is little variation in perception between the placemaking areas and that overall in each area residents are satisfied with the amount of countryside recreation sites provided.

8.42 It is noticeable however that satisfaction levels are lower in the east (part of the North Placemaking area) than in other parts of Central Bedfordshire. In this area, 24% of residents consider there to be not enough countryside recreation sites and a further 4% think that there are only nearly enough. While overall there is a good distribution of countryside recreation sites in the north, only one of the four sites (The Lodge, Sandy) is located to the east of the northern region and access for these residents is therefore more limited.

## **Views on Quantity of Countryside recreation sites by Settlement Hierarchy**

8.43 Views on the quantity of countryside recreation sites are similar regardless of the settlement hierarchy in which residents live. The only slight pattern evident is that a slightly higher proportion of residents living in the Major Service Centres and in the small villages consider there to be not enough countryside recreation sites than in other areas. This may

reflect challenges in accessing facilities. Similarly, it was revealed earlier in this section that residents in the minor service centres were less likely to visit countryside recreation sites. This may again be associated with the location of these sites, only one of which is in close proximity to a minor service centre.

### **Views on Quantity of Countryside recreation sites - Town and Parish Councils**

8.44 Reflecting the findings of the household survey, 65% of responding Parish and Town Councils believe that there are sufficient countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire. The majority of those that identify there to be a requirement for more cite the distance that their residents have to travel to reach such a facility as being the reason for this. The majority of those believing there to be insufficient provision are Towns / Parishes located around Biggleswade (including Biggleswade Town Council).

### **Current Provision**

#### **Quality**

8.45 The quality of countryside recreation sites was evaluated using an assessment matrix..

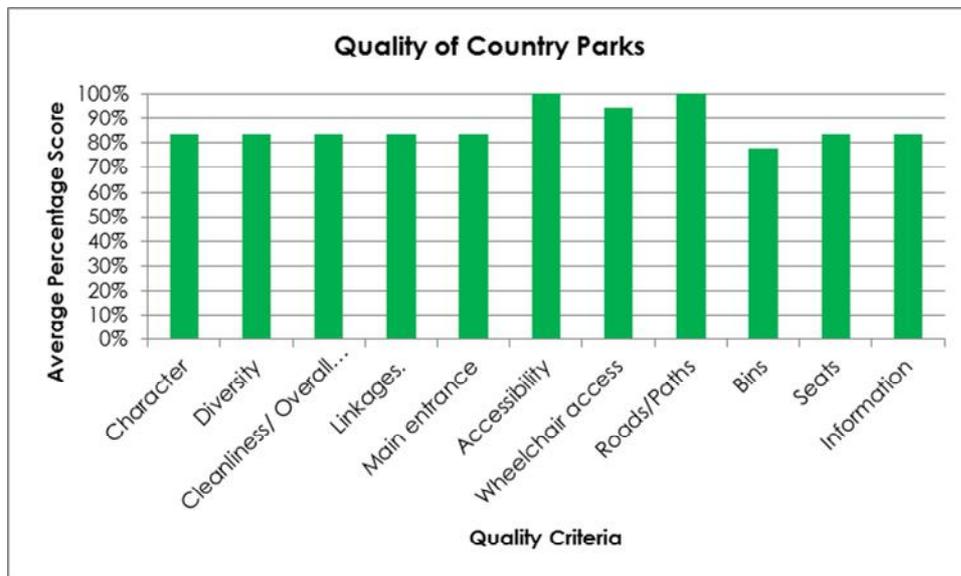
8.46 Site visits reflect these findings, indicating that in general, the countryside recreation sites across Central Bedfordshire are pleasant places to be, are well maintained and offer a variety of facilities including play. Most function as a family destination and include parking and toilet facilities. Facilities include;

- Ampthill Park – includes a café, parking and toilet facilities
- Rushmere Country Park – includes café / picnic area, toilets and parking
- Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park – has visitor centre / café, toilets and parking. Links also being created to nearby rail station
- Dunstable Downs – café / shop / toilets / picnic area / parking
- The Lodge – picnic area / toilets / car parking / shop and refreshments
- Sundon Hills Country Park – picnic areas and parking
- Aspley Woods – car parking

8.47 Very few concerns are raised through site assessments in relation to the quality of countryside recreation sites and indeed site visits confirm that these spaces are overall the highest quality facilities in Central Bedfordshire. Reflecting this, the Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park has achieved the Natural England Country Parks accreditation, a measure of site quality.

8.48 Chart 8.1 illustrates the average quality scores achieved for each factor rated during site assessments. Reflecting the overall positive perception of countryside recreation sites, it indicates that the average scores for most factors are high. The key areas for improvement are linkages, seating and information and the provision of bins was the most poorly rated factor. Dog fouling was also identified as an issue at several sites and there is a need to improve wheelchair access in some areas. Site visits confirm that countryside recreation sites are amongst the highest quality sites in Central Bedfordshire.

**Chart 8.1 - Quality of Countryside recreation sites**



## Quality of Provision – Consultation Responses

### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

8.49 The review of Green Infrastructure assessments, Town and Parish Council responses and available Town and Parish plans reveals relatively few issues relating to the quality of countryside recreation sites. Key improvements identified are:

- improvement to disabled access routes – Ampthill Country Park (GI study)
- Aspley Woods – importance of increased resources (Aspley Guise GI)

8.50 The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan also identifies a series of key actions relating to the quality of countryside access sites, which include countryside recreation sites. These will be updated annually, but include;

- All Level 1 and 2 Countryside sites will have an up to date management and development plan. The local community will be involved in the development of these plans and information will be accessible to them on the plans and their implementation
- All Level 3 and 4 Countryside sites will have an up to date management plan/ statement. The local community will be involved in the development of these plans and information will be accessible to them on the plans and their implementation
- Welcome signage and/or interpretation will familiarise people with the site, its management, who is responsible and will encourage people to explore and discover
- Develop a new initiative to target Dog fouling, dog control and on site litter

- Enhance existing and create new facilities on site, e.g. trails, litter/waste bins, toilets, play facilities, public art, car parking, visitor centres to cater for increased use - in line with Leisure strategy standards and user / nonuser demands

### **The Green Flag Award**

8.51 The Green Flag (managed by the Civic Trust) is recognised as an important national standard for country parks. This award recognises the quality of individual open space sites and is often associated with formal urban parks, although it can relate equally to all types of formal and informal open space. Marston Vale Trust has been achieved this award for the Forest Centre & Millenium Country Park.

8.52 The Green Flag criteria seek to promote best practice management principles, including community involvement, meeting with the localism agenda. The key criteria involved in the attainment of the Green Flag award are:

- A welcoming place – including signage and safe access for all. Site visits highlighted issues with some footpaths and routes through sites, although this feature was more highly rated by current users
- Healthy, safe and secure – providing safe equipment, addressing dog fouling, appropriate provision of toilets etc. The safety of sites in Central Bedfordshire was not highlighted as an issue specific to parks, however the site infrastructure, including toilets, were highlighted as both areas of concern and important in terms of aspirations for future provision. Furthermore, infrastructure was also viewed as an essential component of a successful park
- Clean and well maintained – appropriate attention should be given to litter and vandalism management and the maintenance of the grounds. Cleanliness and maintenance was viewed as one of the areas with potential for improvement during site assessments, but was highlighted as essential throughout consultation relating to all types of open space in Central Bedfordshire
- Sustainability - Methods used in maintaining the park/green space and its facilities should be environmentally sound, relying on best practices. This may include recycling and minimising the use of pesticides. As well as using sustainable management practices, Friends Groups can play an important role in ensuring the long term sustainability of parks by providing invaluable volunteer support and increasing revenue at parks, by holding events at parks, for example.
- Conservation and heritage - Particular attention should be paid to the conservation and appropriate management of Natural features, buildings and structural features. Many consultees highlighted the importance of retaining the individual character of open spaces and building upon the history of the area (Section 3).
- Community involvement - the management of sites should actively involve members of the community, and the site should provide appropriate levels of recreational facilities for all sectors of the community. Again this was highlighted as a key issue by many consultees (Section 3) and it was highlighted that this one of the current successes at many sites across Central Bedfordshire.

- Marketing - A marketing strategy should be in place, which is in practice and regularly reviewed. This should include good provision of information to users and the site should be promoted as a community resource.
- Management - A management plan or strategy should be in place to address all of the above criteria.

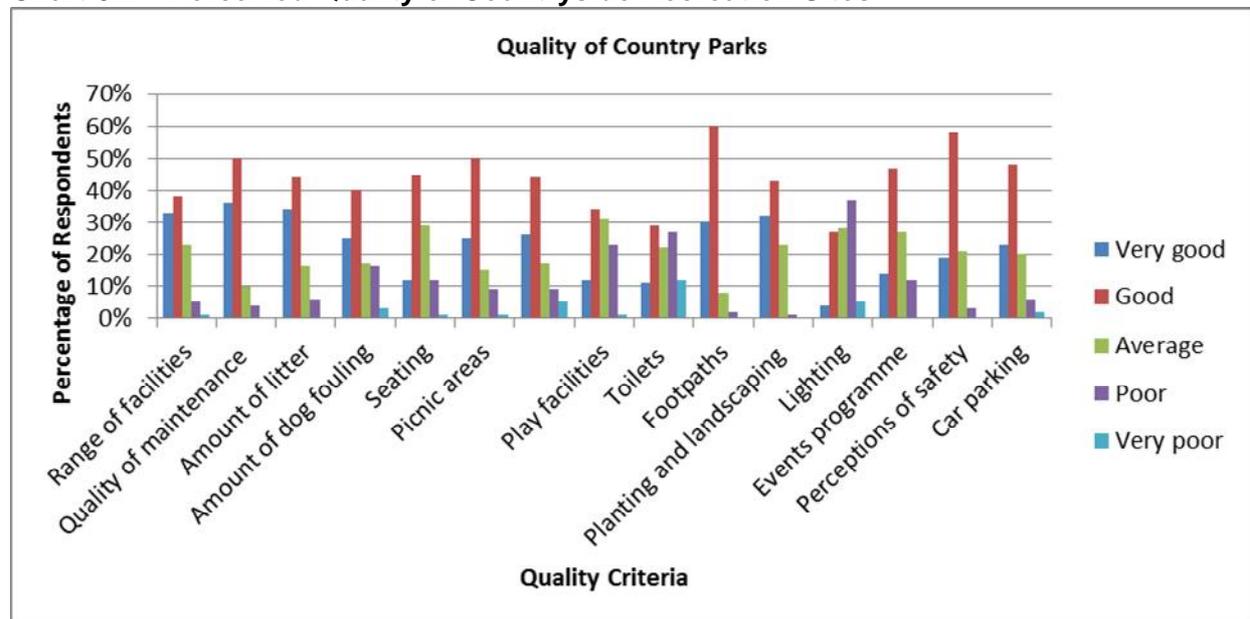
## Household Survey

8.53 The telephone survey indicates that 87% of residents in Central Bedfordshire consider the quality of countryside recreation sites to be good or very good, ranking them the highest quality open spaces in the area. There is very little variation in this perception across all segments of the population.

8.54 Chart 8.2 summarises the views of residents in relation to countryside recreation sites. It clearly reflects the overall positive viewpoint and indicates that for each feature (with the exception of lighting) the most common response is good. In particular, footpaths (90% good or very good) quality of maintenance (86% good or very good) amount of litter (78% good or very good) perception of safety (77% good or very good) planning and landscaping (75% good or very good) and picnic areas (75% good or very good) were all considered positively.

8.55 The key areas for improvement were highlighted as lighting, toilets, play facilities, seating, events programme and the amount of dog fouling.

**Chart 8.2 – Perceived Quality of Countryside Recreation Sites**



8.56 Reflecting many of the above comments made, consultation undertaken as part of the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan indicates that the key areas for improvement are seen as:

- Improved management of dog fouling and control
- Improved information, both generic and audience targeted
- Appropriate signage and way marking

- Public transport provision at an affordable cost
- Signed and secure car parking facilities
- Organised walks/events; picnicking facilities
- Accessibility for buggies and wheelchairs
- Increased volunteering opportunities

### Views on Quality of Countryside Recreation Sites by Placemaking Area

8.57 There are a few noticeable differences in perception of the quality of facilities between residents in different Placemaking Areas. While there are some variations in the proportions of residents rating different factors very good and good, there is a consistent consensus across all different Placemaking Areas. The only clear noticeable difference is that in general, residents in the east rate most factors marginally lower, in particular the range of facilities provided. This is perhaps reflective of the park in this area (The RSPB site, Sandy) which offers more limited facilities in terms of children’s play etc, than other countryside recreation sites and may also be influenced by the negativity surrounding the amount of countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire.

### Views on Quality of Countryside Recreation Sites by Settlement Hierarchy

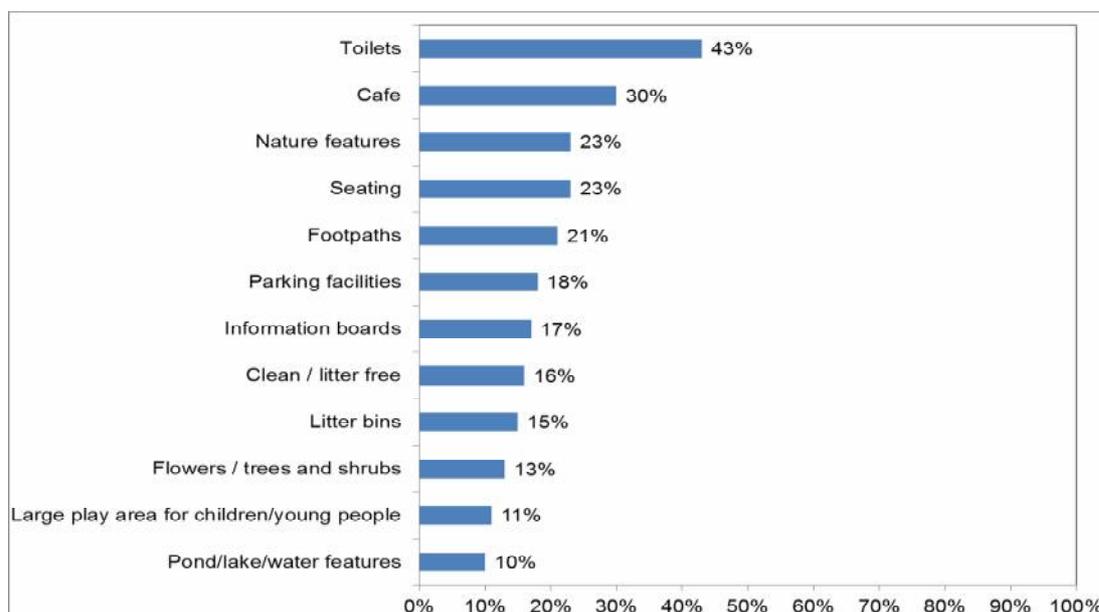
8.58 There are no clear variations between settlement hierarchies.

### Quality of Countryside Recreation Sites – Aspirations

#### Household Survey

8.59 Chart 8.3 illustrates the factors that residents of Central Bedfordshire consider most important in the provision of a countryside recreation site. It is noticeable that particular emphasis is given to the provision of toilets, a café, natural features and seating. Toilets and seating were both highlighted as being amongst the areas that are most in need of improvement.

**Chart 8.3 – Aspirations of Residents (Countryside recreation sites)**



## **Parish and Town Councils**

8.60 Reflecting the findings of the household survey, Town and Parish Councils hold positive views of the quality of countryside recreation sites. All respondents to the survey rated the quality of these facilities as average or above and 93% considered quality to be good. Many refer to the range of facilities that are provided.

## **Role of Countryside Recreation Sites in Meeting Biodiversity and Conservation Priorities**

8.61 While this assessment considers the requirement for open spaces from a recreational perspective, it is important to note that the role of countryside recreation sites from a wildlife and conservation perspective is as important as the role of these sites in meeting recreational need. The increasing population is likely to result in an increase in recreational activities of residents, putting pressure on all sites to sustain higher visitor numbers and this is something that the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan identifies as a key issue.

8.62 Several consultees highlight the importance of balancing recreational need with conservation as well as the importance of taking into account the capacity of a site to meet the needs of visitors. Increasing population numbers within Central Bedfordshire are likely to result in an increase in visitor numbers (assuming that the same proportion of residents use countryside recreation sites) and this will need to be taken into account when considering the adequacy of provision in quantitative terms. There is a relationship between the sensitivity of sites and their capacity to provide recreational benefits.

8.63 The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough has developed a model to predict the sensitivity of sites (A Model to Predict Wildlife Site Sensitivity to Visitor Pressure, February 2011 Bedfordshire and Luton Wildlife Working Group). While it is not possible to apply this model to all sites within Central Bedfordshire, some Countryside recreation sites have already been assessed for their sensitivity. Using this information as a guide, a desk based assessment of the sensitivity of these Countryside recreation sites has been carried out. This is a desk based assessment, drawing on existing information on sites that have been assessed for their sensitivity, professional knowledge of the sites, information about their designations, the area of the site that is designated, and the total site area.

8.64 On this basis, sites have been categorized as high, medium or low sensitivity, depending on whether they are very vulnerable to recreation pressures, moderately vulnerable to recreation pressures, or primarily a recreational asset with limited ecological sensitivity and vulnerability to recreation pressures.

8.65 It is important to note that many of the above sites are zoned – i.e. there are sections that are designed for recreation and other areas that are dedicated for wildlife. This allows a recreational function alongside the wider benefits that the site brings.

## **Sensitivity Weighting**

8.66 In order to ensure that the ecological value of countryside recreation sites is taken into account, further work was therefore undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council at a site specific level to determine the ecological sensitivity of each site. Sites were categorized into one of the following classifications:

- High Sensitivity
- Medium Sensitivity
- Low Sensitivity

8.67 The following ratings were established for countryside recreation sites and these have been taken into account in the application of local standards later in this section:

- Dunstable Downs - high
- Sundon Hills Country Park - high
- Tiddenfoot Waterside Park - high
- Stockgrove Country Park - high
- Ampthill Park - high
- The Lodge - high
- Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park – medium
- Aspley Woods - high

### Accessibility

8.68 For recreational purposes, access to open space is as important as the quality of provision and in particular, for countryside recreation sites, where challenges accessing sites has arisen as one of the key barriers to use.

8.69 Table 8.3 summarises the mode of transport that residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use to reach a countryside recreation site and the type of transport that visitors actually do use.

**Table 8.3 – Mode of Travel**

Expected vs Actual	Walk	Cycle	Public Transport	Car
Expected	25%	8%	1%	66%
Actual	18%	1%	2%	79%

8.70 Table 8.3 demonstrates that on the whole, in contrast with most other types of open space, residents expect to travel by car to reach a countryside recreation site and just 25% would walk to a countryside recreation site. When considering current users, while car is the most common means of reaching the destination, 18% do walk to their nearest countryside recreation site – this indicates that as well as attracting visitors from further afield, countryside recreation sites are also important recreational resources for those living close to them.

8.71 Further analysis of responses from the household survey reveals that:

- there are no clear differences in the views of users and non users

- expectations are broadly similar across all demographic groups. It is however clear that older residents have a greater reliance on the car (75% of residents aged 55 plus would expect to travel by car, compared to 58% aged 18 – 34). Younger residents place a higher emphasis on travelling to a countryside recreation site on foot suggesting that there is more of an expectation that facilities will be local to the home.
- for residents with dependents, the importance of access by bike increases. 20% of those with dependents aged 9 -13 would expect to cycle (and 11% with children aged below 9, 12% aged 14 – 18) compared to 4% of those without children

8.72 Perhaps reflecting the distribution of existing countryside recreation sites, a higher proportion of residents in the Minor Service Centres indicated that they would expect to travel by car, while a larger quantity of residents in the larger villages would travel on foot. Also potentially related to the distribution of countryside recreation sites (there is only one site in the east of Central Bedfordshire) 78% of residents in the East would travel by car, which is almost 20% higher than in any other area. Just 12% of respondents in this area would expect to travel on foot. Views are consistent in the other three areas.

8.73 While consultation demonstrates that residents expect to travel by car to reach a country park, the Central Bedfordshire Transport Plan, as well as many external agencies, seeks to reduce the reliance on the car and promote sustainable transport links. This includes the creation of public transport and cycle links. The expectation that facilities will be accessed by car is perhaps reflective of the current constraints of using more sustainable transport modes to access facilities.

### **Importance of Accessibility to Countryside Recreation Sites in Green Infrastructure Plans**

8.74 In addition to ensuring that residents have access to countryside recreation sites within appropriate distances, many of the GI plans also emphasise the importance of linkages to these sites – by cycleway and the rights of way network. This reflects the goal of ensuring that facilities are accessible by more sustainable modes of transport. Specific priorities referenced are detailed in Appendix A. settlement summaries.

### **Steps 3 and 4 – Setting and Applying Local Standards**

8.75 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

8.76 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space.

8.77 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of countryside recreation sites. Existing provision can then be measured against these standards to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

8.78 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for countryside recreation sites is outlined below.

## Accessibility

### Setting Accessibility Standards

8.79 Accessibility is a key determinant of the success of countryside recreation sites as evidence suggests that location is one of the main barriers to use. Usage is highest in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South which coincides with the highest quantities of local provision. It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to reach each type of open space. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

8.80 The survey data demonstrates that there is a strong expectation that residents will travel by car to reach a countryside recreation site (64%). It is important however to note that a relatively large group of residents travel on foot and that bike is also an important access means.

8.81 Table 8.4 uses raw data collated in the household survey, to evaluate the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach a countryside recreation site.

8.82 To fully understand the spread of responses (and therefore the expectations of all residents), it categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach a countryside recreation site. PPG17 indicates that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 8.4 – Travel Expectations – Countryside recreation sites (calculated from the Household Telephone Survey)**

Mode of Transport	Walk				Car			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	6	10	15	60	15	20	30	70
Major	5	5	12	30	15	20	30	45
Minor	10	15	15	60	15	20	30	70
Large	10	15	30	30	15	30	30	60
Small	5	5	10	15	20	20	30	60

Table 8.4 reveals the following key findings in relation to accessibility expectations

### Walking

8.83 Only a relatively small proportion of the population overall expect to walk to a countryside recreation site. Of those that do, 25% would be willing to walk just 6 minutes or less. The maximum expected travel time is 80 minutes. 25% of residents in the major and minor settlements are willing to walk up to 10 minutes

- The modal response for that wish to walk is 10 minutes

8.84 This suggests that overall, given that most residents expect to walk relatively short distances to a countryside recreation site, only those with a site in particularly close proximity to their home are likely to do so.

### Car

- views on the distance that residents are willing to travel to reach a countryside recreation site are relatively consistent, with the maximum travel time expected being 70 minutes
- 25% of residents (Quartile 1) across Central Bedfordshire would only be willing to drive up to 15 minutes to reach a country park. With the exception of the smaller villages (where residents are willing to travel up to 20 minutes) this is common to all settlement hierarchies. This means that 75% of residents are willing to travel for 15 minutes or more; and
- the modal response (i.e. the most common response given) was that a countryside recreation site should be within 20 minutes drive of the home while the average was 23 minutes. The median response (quartile 2) is also 20 minutes

8.85 This suggests that a 15 – 20 minute drive time is broadly acceptable to 75% of residents.

8.86 It should however be noted that while car is currently the most frequently used mode of transport for accessing country parks (as well as the option that most residents expect to use), the Central Bedfordshire Transport Plan seeks to prioritise access by more sustainable modes of transport. To ensure deliverability in the short term, the strategy uses a drive time standard, however the long term goal is to ensure that all countryside recreation sites are accessible by more sustainable modes of travel.

8.87 The recommended accessibility standard, and justification for this standard, is set out below.

### Accessibility

<b>Country Parks - Accessibility Standard</b>
20 minute drive time (car or public transport) Long term – 20 minute travel time (public transport / cycle)
<b>Justification</b>
<p>The findings of the consultation demonstrate that 64% of residents expect to travel to a countryside recreation site by car. These expectations are common across all settlement hierarchies. It is important to note however that access on foot is also important and that for those with dependents, there is an expectation that facilities will be accessible by bike.</p> <p>In all areas, the average and most common responses are similar (20 and 23 minutes respectively) and statistical analysis demonstrates that 75% of users are willing to travel at least 20 minutes by car.</p> <p>To ensure that the standard is based upon realistic and achievable aspirations, a 20 minutes drive time has therefore been used as a standard. This standard takes into account the</p>

expectations of residents in terms of quality and quantity as well by promoting the provision of easily accessible, high quality space.

While a drive time has been set to ensure deliverability, the focus will remain upon the achievement of the aspirations of the Central Bedfordshire Transport Plan, which seek to ensure that these facilities are accessible by sustainable modes of transport.

### **Application of the Accessibility Standard**

8.88 The application of this standard is illustrated in Appendix B. It indicates that overall, the majority of residents within Central Bedfordshire have access to a countryside recreation site within the target of a 20 minute drivetime.

8.89 Reflecting the findings of consultations and other strategic documents, it is the east of the north Placemaking Area which has more limited access, most notably around the Biggleswade area. The following settlements are currently outside of a 20 minute drive time from a countryside recreation site;

#### **By Placemaking Area:**

- Dunstable and Houghton Regis - none, well served by Dunstable Downs
- Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South - well served by Tiddenfoot Waterside Park and within 20 minutes of Rushmere Country Park
- North - Biggleswade, Pottton, Stotfold, Arlesey, Shefford, Barton Le Clay, Langford, Henlow, Clifton, Stondon, Meppershall, Shillington, Small Villages – Tempsford, Everton, Wrestlingworth, Dunton, Northill, Old Warden, Streatley and South Hill.

#### **By Settlement Hierarchy:**

- Major Service Centres - Biggleswade
- Minor Service Centres – Pottton, Stotfold, Arlesey, Shefford, Barton Le Clay
- Large Villages – Langford, Henlow, Clifton, Stondon, Meppershall, Shillington
- Small Villages – Tempsford, Everton, Wrestlingworth, Dunton, Northill, Old Warden, Streatley and South Hill.

8.90 At least one to two strategically located facilities would be required to provide access to residents in the above settlements to meet both current and future need.

### **Impact of Ecological Sensitivity on Accessibility of Countryside Recreation Sites**

8.91 The deficiencies identified on previous pages do not however take into account the ecological and biodiversity functions of existing open spaces or acknowledge that many of the sites in this typology contain areas dedicated to biodiversity and conservation, including national and local designations such as SSSI and County Wildlife Sites (CWS).

8.92 As outlined earlier in this section, the use of these spaces for recreational purposes can have an adverse impact upon their ecological and biodiversity functions and as such, the capacity of these sites to sustain visitors is more limited.

8.93 To take this into account and to represent the reduced recreational capacity of a site, the catchment area of those sites that are ecologically significant has therefore been amended as follows:

- Sites of high ecological and biodiversity sensitivity – catchment area reduced by 50%
- Sites of medium ecological and biodiversity sensitivity – catchment area reduced by 25%
- Sites of low ecological and biodiversity sensitivity – catchment remains as recommended standard
- For countryside recreation sites, this means that although residents are willing to travel up to 20 minutes to reach a countryside recreation site:
- Sites of high ecological sensitivity are considered only able to serve residents within a 10 minute drive-time
- Sites of medium ecological sensitivity have a catchment area of 15 minutes drive-time
- Sites with low ecological sensitivity have a 20 minute catchment area

8.94 The impact of consideration of the level of ecological sensitivity of each site on the application standard is illustrated in maps in Appendix B. It can be seen that a much higher amount of residents are outside of the catchment area for a countryside recreation site and that to successfully balance the recreational function of countryside recreation sites with biodiversity and ecology, more countryside recreation sites are required. The reduction in catchment areas due to ecological sensitivities mean that there are particular gaps in the north of Central Bedfordshire around the larger towns of Biggleswade and Sandy, Stotfold and Arlesey, Flitwick and Shefford.

8.95 While existing sites are highly ecologically sensitive, it is extremely unlikely that newly created sites will be as sensitive, at least whilst they become established. If new sites are not considered to be ecologically sensitive (and therefore have the full 20 minute catchment area), 2 to 3 additional sites would be required to meet demand. There is also a small area north of Dunstable and Houghton Regis (Barton le Clay) where there is a lack of access to countryside recreation sites.

## **Quantity**

### **Setting Quantity Standards**

8.96 As set out earlier in this section, there are currently 680 hectares of land dedicated to the provision of countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire.

8.97 Consultation demonstrates that overall, there are few concerns with regards the amount of countryside recreation sites provided and indeed public satisfaction is highest of all types of open space. The lowest levels of provision are however found in the east of the north placemaking area and it is in this area where public satisfaction is also low.

8.98 Town and Parish Council consultation also revealed demand for new countryside recreation sites in the North of Central Bedfordshire, particularly in the eastern part of the North placemaking area. These aspirations are also reflected within adopted local strategic documents (Local Green Infrastructure Assessments, Mid Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Assessment) as well as many of the local green infrastructure assessments. There is therefore clear aspiration for additional country parks.

8.99 Application of the accessibility standard supports these concerns, highlighting that residents in the eastern part of Central Bedfordshire are outside of this catchment and it can therefore be concluded that additional sites are required in this area. When taking into account the overlap in function of countryside recreation sites between recreation and conservation (as well as the variation in size of these sites), it is clear that more sites are required if recreational usage is not to have a detrimental impact upon the other functions of existing sites. By way of illustration, The RSPB Lodge, Sandy, which is the main countryside recreation site in the east area (the part of Central Bedfordshire most lacking in countryside recreation sites), has limited visitor capacity due to environmental and conservation sensitivities.

8.100 Application of the reduced accessibility catchments indicate that an additional 2 - 3 countryside recreation sites are required to meet baseline requirements and to ensure that a balance between recreation and biodiversity is achieved.

8.101 Table 8.5 takes this into account and summarises the baseline level of demand for countryside recreation sites across Central Bedfordshire.

8.102 To reflect the fact that new sites are not considered to be ecologically sensitive, (and therefore have double the catchment of an existing site), Table 8.5 assumes that additional countryside recreation sites will be smaller than the average of those currently in existence (90ha). For the purposes of the calculation of the standard, new sites are therefore considered to be equivalent to 45ha (50% of the size of the normal site).

**Table 8.5 – Baseline Quantity Requirements**

Area	Current Provision	Required provision to meet catchment, taking into account ecological sensitivities of countryside recreation sites	Minimum Requirement
Central Bedfordshire	8 sites – 680 ha	Three additional sites to address accessibility issues in and around Biggleswade, Sandy, Flitwick, Arlesey, Stotfold, Barton le Clay.	815 ha (assumes countryside recreation site is 45 ha)

8.103 This requirement for an additional countryside recreation site means that a total of 815 ha would be required to meet current needs. This equates to the need to provide the equivalent of 3.19 ha of countryside recreation sites per 1000 population.

<b>Countryside Recreation Sites - Quantity Standard</b>
3.19ha per 1000 population
<b>Justification</b>
This figure represents the minimum requirement for countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire if all residents were to be located within a 20 minute drivetime of a countryside recreation sites.

### **Application of the Quantity Standard**

8.104 Table 8.6 illustrates the shortfalls and surpluses of the quantity standard. Due to the nature of countryside recreation sites and the wide catchment that they serve, these figures are provided at authority wide level and should be treated as indicative only. The size of countryside recreation sites and the willingness of residents to travel means that it is not appropriate to apply this standard at a settlement level, as countryside recreation sites would not be excepted in every settlement and indeed the characteristics of each countryside recreation site will be different.

8.105 Figures however demonstrate that there is a shortfall in provision to meet demand currently (and even more so when taking into account the impact of recreational usage on biodiversity) and that this shortfall will increase as the population grows and visitor numbers increase.

**Table 8.6 - Shortfalls of Countryside recreation sites**

Current Provision	Required Provision	Current Shortfall / Surplus	Future shortfall / surplus
680ha / 2.67ha per 1000 population	815ha / 3.19 ha per 1000 population	135 ha	246ha

As demonstrated above, population growth will see the requirement for countryside recreation sites increase by 111 hectares.

### **Quality**

#### **Setting Quality Standards**

8.106 Quality is as important as the amount of each type of open space. Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents, as well as aspirations that they have in relation to the type of spaces that they would like to see provided. Supporting this, site visits have provided an overview of the quality of countryside recreation sites and reflected many of the views of local residents. The key issues raised through each of these means highlight similar issues and are also reflected in the priorities of the Outdoor Access and Improvement Plan.

8.107 Following the Government review of country parks, a country parks accreditation scheme was also developed. This scheme focuses on the core functions and services that it is believed a country park should offer, which in brief are:

- Area – site should be at least 10 hectares and should have an identifiable boundary
- Access – site should be readily accessible, free of charge, comply with DDA and other regulations and ideally should contain other facilities to support accessibility
- Character – should be predominantly natural / semi natural and less than 5% of the total area should be buildings
- Facilities – should include paths and toilets. Other opportunities should also be considered including visitor centres, play facilities, catering equipment, cycle and horse tracks and art sculptures
- Links to local communities and neighbourhoods – should be easily accessible for local market
- Links to wider countryside – should have clear links with the Public Right of Way Network
- Management – should include a daily staff presence and a management plan

8.108 Activities – suitable for public and educational user, potentially with a clear programme of events, walks and activities

- Information and interpretation – should include clear signage and information for visitors.

The full criteria can be found at [http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/CH3%20-%20Criteria%20Checklist%20-%2020240409\\_tcm6-11152.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/CH3%20-%20Criteria%20Checklist%20-%2020240409_tcm6-11152.pdf). These criteria can also be used to inform decision making relating to countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire.

8.109 This information can be used to identify the key components of each type of open space in relation to quality and to set a quality standard that should be used as a basis for improving existing spaces as well as the creation of new spaces.

8.110 The quality standard for countryside recreation sites is set out below. Further detail can be found in the Design Guidance.

## Country Parks - Quality Standard

Size and Location	Sufficiently large to meet demand (national standards suggest at least 10ha) Appropriately located for local catchment (within 20m drivetime of target residents) Accessible via safe footpaths and roads Clear boundaries that are locally appropriate and promote security
Character	Predominantly natural space ideally offering a range of habitats and landscapes Less than 5% total building area
Access	Clearly defined pathways and cycleways Public transport provision Links with Public Rights of Way and cycle routes into wider countryside Compliant with DDA – access audit in place Accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs
Facilities	Clearly defined paths and cycle routes Appropriate and regular seating Café and / or visitor centre, including toilets and refreshments Information and signage both to and within the site as well as at the main entrance, including interpretation boards and way marking Play equipment (linking with requirements identified in Section 10 – this may include natural play) Appropriate bins Management of dog fouling Secure parking that is clearly signed Cycle storage
Activities	Clear events programme Volunteer opportunities for the local community (linked with section 4) Visible daily staff presence

8.111 In addition, drawing on the findings of strategic consultations and national best practice it is also desirable for the following to be in place;

- Transport plan or policy for the site
- Management and promotion of the sites conservation interest
- Outreach and marketing programme to engage and involve local residents

### **Application of the Quality Standards**

8.112 The quality of existing countryside recreation sites is high and many of the above criteria are met for each site. It is particularly notable however that Sundon Hills Country Park and Tiddenfoot Waterside Park do not currently meet many of the infrastructure requirements (including toilets and café) that are considered important to residents. Aspley Woods is also highlighted as lacking in infrastructure.

### Usage

8.113 Usage of countryside recreation sites is high and as a consequence they represent a valuable recreational resource – only 36% of the population never visit countryside recreation sites.

8.114 Visits to these sites are however less frequent than to other open space and for many, countryside recreation sites act as a destination facility rather than a site that is visited every day. The function of these sites as destinations means that there are higher expectations with regards the facilities that are provided. Younger residents and those with families are most likely to visit countryside recreation sites. While fewer older residents visit these sites, those that do use them more regularly than other visitors.

8.115 Walking, exercise and play are the most common reasons for visiting a countryside recreation site and issues with accessing sites and proximity to the home are the key barriers to usage. Notably, while there is an acceptance that residents will travel by car to reach a countryside recreation site, many residents harbour aspirations to reach these facilities by bike.

### Quantity and Accessibility

8.116 There are eight countryside recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire all of which are large sites containing a variety of facilities. Consultation reveals few concerns with regards the amount of countryside recreation sites, with the only area where a requirement for new facilities was expressed was to the east of the North Placemaking area (Town and Parish Council Survey / Telephone Survey / Green Infrastructure Studies).

8.117 Reflecting this, countryside recreation sites are largely distributed around the south of Central Bedfordshire, in particular in close proximity to Leighton Buzzard and Rural South (and it is in this area where residents use facilities most frequently). The majority of the remaining sites are situated in the north west of Central Bedfordshire, with only the RSPB Lodge (Sandy) located in the east.

8.118 Analysis of survey responses demonstrates that residents are willing to travel between 15 and 20 minutes to reach a countryside recreation site. Reflecting consultation, application of a standard of a 20 minute drivetime indicates that residents in Biggleswade, Potton, Stotfold, Arlesey, Shefford, Barton Le Clay, Langford, Henlow, Clifton, Stondon, Meppershall, Shillington, Tempsford, Everton, Wrestlingworth, Dunton, Northill, Old Warden, Streatley and South Hill must travel further than this.

8.119 Countryside recreation sites are however highly environmentally sensitive and have a dual biodiversity function. As such, there is a finite impact on the amount of recreational visitors that they are able to sustain without adverse impact. To reflect this, the drivetime of sites with high ecological impact has been reduced (by 50%). This exacerbates the deficiencies in the above settlements, further emphasising the requirement for additional countryside recreation sites.

8.120 Echoing the priorities of several key strategic documents, more countryside recreation sites are therefore required to meet existing and future demand. Baseline calculations suggest

that a minimum of 3.19 ha countryside recreation sites are required per 1000 population and indicate that circa 3 additional parks are required to meet current demand and population growth will further exacerbate this requirement.

## **Quality**

8.121 Both site visits and user perceptions reflect positively upon the quality of countryside recreation sites (rating them most positively of all types of open space) and the facilities provided. The key issues identified include dog fouling, signage, footpath quality, linkages, seating and bins as well as aspirations for visitor facilities (e.g. toilets) at each site. Public consultation also revealed an aspiration to increase the amount and range of activities available.

To meet with key public aspirations, some improvements are also required to existing sites.

8.122 While recreational use of countryside recreation sites is important, it is also necessary to recognise and understand the capacity of sites, particularly given that the primary purpose of Rushmere Country Park and Tiddenfoot Waterside Park is conservation and both Dunstable Downs and Sundon Hills Country Park contain areas of SSSI. Ampthill Park is already considered to be at capacity and the RSPB Lodge, Sandy, also contains sensitive habitats.

## **Step 5 – Developing Priorities**

### **Key Issues to Address**

8.123 The above analysis indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to countryside recreation sites:

- Usage figures demonstrate that existing countryside recreation sites are an important recreational resource – there is therefore a need to retain existing sites
- There are opportunities to increase the usage of existing (and new sites) by addressing identified barriers (access routes) and attracting new user groups (current low usage by residents of non white ethnic origin, disabled users and older residents)
- Analysis suggests that residents expect to be within a 20 minute drivetime of a countryside recreation site –residents of several areas are currently outside of this target catchment. Longer term, linking with the Central Bedfordshire Transport Plan, the goal is to ensure that all countryside recreation sites are accessible by more sustainable modes of travel.
- Recreation is just one element of the function of a countryside recreation site and there is a need to balance biodiversity and conservation with public access. All existing sites have designations which constrain the number of visitors that can be accommodated
- While the quality of existing countryside recreation sites is rated as good, there are high aspirations for the type of facilities provided and the key features of a countryside recreation site. Sites require ongoing maintenance and improvement and some sites need upgrading if they are to meet aspirations

- Population growth is likely to see an increase in demand for countryside recreation sites and a consequent increase in visitor numbers. Some sites are already at visitor capacity and others also have sensitivities that will be approached as visitor numbers increase.

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy - Outcomes and Key Priorities**

8.124 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- Ensure that all residents have appropriate access to countryside recreation sites
- Facilitate access routes to countryside recreation sites
- Attract users from all sectors of the population
- Meet user aspirations relating to quality of provision as well as local priorities and national objectives
- Maintain a balance between the recreational function of these sites and biodiversity and conservation features.

### **Key Priorities**

8.125 It is therefore recommended that key priorities for the delivery of countryside recreation sites across Central Bedfordshire are as follows;

- Given the clearly evidenced value of countryside recreation sites to both residents and wildlife, promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Plan
- Seek to ensure that all residents are within a 20 minute drivetime of countryside recreation sites (although countryside recreation sites with high ecological sensitivity are only able to serve residents within a 10 minute catchment and this should be taken into account).
- Work with communities to ensure that all countryside recreation sites meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section.
- Create a network of green linkages with countryside recreation sites as the hub facilitating access on foot and by cycle as well as by car and public transport
- Ensure that the impact of population growth on countryside recreation sites is recognised through the inclusion of policy requiring developers to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through CIL and / or S106. Where provision is sufficient in quantitative and access terms, contributions should be required towards the management, maintenance and qualitative improvements of existing sites
- Create site specific development plans considering both recreational capacity and conservation targets
- Seek to widen the use of countryside recreation sites through effective marketing and promotion as well as events
- Manage countryside recreation sites as a destination facility

## Site / Area Specific Implications

Table 8.7 below summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 8.7 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites
<b>New provision</b>
Short Term - New sites to meet current deficiencies – suggested locations – Biggleswade /Sandy (linking with Green Wheel proposals), Flitwick, Arlesey / Stotfold, Barton le Clay
Ongoing – supporting the creation of new sites, where feasible, extension of existing sites to meet increasing demand from population growth
<b>Quality Enhancements</b>
Tiddenfoot Waterside Park / Aspley Woods / Sundon Hills Country Park – baseline facilities All sites in line with target quality criteria
Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where residents are likely to use existing facilities.

## 9. Urban Parks

### Introduction

9.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to urban parks in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Definition and Context

9.2 For the purposes of this study, urban parks have been defined as follows:

**“Public parks or gardens in an urban setting that provide a variety of facilities e.g. play area, toilets, tennis courts etc; as well as opportunities for informal recreation”. These spaces provide a wide range and high standard of complimentary facilities of interest to visitors and may include facilities for children and young people and / or outdoor sports facilities as well as often being the venue for community events”**

9.3 Urban parks are considered to be more formal sites than larger recreation areas, and may include cafes / refreshments. They are frequently the central point for events in the town and may draw upon the historical character of the area.

9.4 It must be noted that this type of space overlaps significantly with the categorisation of large recreation areas, particularly where sites perhaps function as an urban park but do not necessarily have the facilities that would be expected of such a park. In this instance, sites have been included within the large recreation areas typology, but their current (and potential) role will also be taken into account in the analysis of urban parks.

9.5 For classification purposes, the different facilities within parks have been separated according to the typology under which they most appropriately fall. Large green areas, footpaths, lakes and less dense woodland will provide the park area (total hectares) and the other facilities will be calculated separately under their own typology classification. This ensures that open space is not counted twice within this study.

9.6 As set out in section 3, the benefits of parks extend far wider than recreation. Parks provide a sense of place for the local community, help to address social inclusion issues within wider society and also provide structural and landscaping benefits. Furthermore, parks are often havens for wildlife and the promotion of biodiversity.

9.7 Specifically with regards parks, Urban Green Nation – Building the evidence base (Cabe Space 2010) concludes that:

- 9 out of 10 people use parks and green spaces and value them

- satisfaction with local parks is linked to satisfaction with the Council
- the provision of parks is worse in the deprived areas in comparison to the affluent areas
- people from ethnic minority groups tend to use less local green space and believe that it is of poorer quality
- the higher quality the space, the more likely it is to be used

## **Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision**

### **Usage Profile**

9.8 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open space types detailed in this study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space.

### **Usage**

9.9 13% of respondents to the telephone survey visit urban parks at least once weekly and just a further 18% use facilities at least once per month. Although this means that urban parks are on the whole visited less frequently than all other types of open space in Central Bedfordshire, the number of people that never visit parks (41% visit less than once per year or never) is lower than for some other types of open space. When evaluating the views of different demographic groups, there are some interesting differences in user patterns, specifically;

- a higher proportion of white British residents use urban parks than non white British residents – (61% of white British residents visit at least once per year compared to 47%). Proportions of residents that visit frequently however are very similar
- residents with dependents are more likely to visit urban parks, unless these dependents are between 14 and 18 (62% in this category never visit an urban park). Just 8% of residents with children under 8 and 32% with children aged between 9 and 13 never visit a park. This compares to 45% without children; and
- use of urban parks also varies by age, with those in the 18 – 34 category most likely to visit a park (just 25% never visit a park). 56% of residents aged over 55 never visit a park. A higher proportion of people aged between 35 and 54 visit parks more frequently than those in other age groups (39% in this age group never visit at all)

### **Usage of Urban Parks by Placemaking Area**

9.10 The variation in use of urban parks is perhaps the most apparent of all types of open space. Frequent usage of such spaces is evident in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard and Rural South (both 15% weekly or more) while few residents in the other areas regularly visit urban parks (1% in East and 3% in West Central Bedfordshire). Despite this, the amount of residents that never visit urban parks is more evenly balanced (56% in the West, 51% Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 49% in the East and 39% in Leighton Buzzard and Rural South). The reasons for using facilities are common across all areas (to a greater or lesser extent).

### **Usage of Urban Parks by Settlement Hierarchy**

9.11 Like in the different geographic areas there is a higher degree of variation in usage patterns according to the size of settlement than in most types of open space. Regular usage is highest in the minor service centres (21% at least weekly, followed by 13% in the large villages and 11% in the major service centres). There is little use of these facilities by residents in small villages and 80% never visit urban parks at all. 43% of residents in the Major Service Centres and 30% of residents in the Minor Service Centres never visit parks. Just 26% of residents in the large villages never visit parks. These patterns do not reflect the distribution of parks and this will be returned to later.

### **Reasons for Visiting Urban Parks**

9.12 Respondents that use urban parks indicate that the main reasons for doing so are:

- Walk and exercise (43%)
- To relax (38%)
- Children play (33%)
- Dog walking (15%)

### **Reasons for Visiting Urban Parks by Placemaking Area**

9.13 There is a much greater emphasis on visiting the urban parks to attend events in Dunstable and Houghton Regis than in other parts of Central Bedfordshire.

### **Reasons for Visiting Urban Parks by Settlement Hierarchy**

9.14 There are few clear variations in the reasons for visiting urban parks between residents in different settlement hierarchies, with the emphasis on walking / exercise and relaxation. It is however apparent that a higher proportion of those in smaller villages visit for events than other areas – this is perhaps reflective of the less frequent usage patterns in this settlement hierarchy.

### **Barriers to Use of Urban Parks**

9.15 A lack of time (25%) and interest (21%) are the main barriers to use across Central Bedfordshire, although 12% indicate that urban parks are difficult to get to while 10% suggest that it is a lack of local facilities that prevents them from using a site. This may be impacted upon by the distribution of urban parks, which will be returned to later in this section.

9.16 Analysis of use across the different segments of population reveals little variation in reasons for visiting, with the only notable differences being:

- 15% of residents of non white ethnic origin cite the quality of urban parks as a reason for not visiting these sites. No white British residents raise this concern. 15% of non white British residents also indicate that they are not aware of the location of facilities (compared to 0% of white British) and 25% suggest that there are no local facilities (10% across Central Bedfordshire as a whole); and
- for those with dependents aged between 14 and 18, the lack of local facility is more commonly raised as a barrier than for those with no children or younger children. There are no other clear differences in opinion.

### **Barriers to Use of Urban Parks by Placemaking Area**

9.17 The barriers to use are largely the same in each area of Central Bedfordshire (lack of time / interest) however it is clear that in Leighton Buzzard and Rural South there is a perception that there are no local urban parks (25% highlight this as a barrier) and that facilities are difficult to access (17%). These barriers are much higher than in other geographic areas.

### **Barriers to Use of Urban Parks by Settlement Hierarchy**

9.18 It is clear that the distribution of urban parks is a much greater barrier to use in the large and small villages than in the bigger settlements, with 25% of residents in the large villages and 10% in the small villages indicating that they have difficulties accessing sites. 25% of residents in the large villages and 40% of those in small villages suggest that they have no local facilities.

### **Current Provision**

#### **Quantity**

9.19 The classification of parks across Central Bedfordshire is the subject of much debate. While some sites are perceived to function as such, it is questionable whether they have any more facilities or have a greater function than other larger recreation areas.

9.20 Only sites within urban areas have been considered to be potential urban parks and only sites which are considered to be a formal focal point of the settlement, or to be considered as a garden have been categorised as such. For the purposes of this assessment, the following sites are considered to be formal urban parks and gardens:

- Houghton Hall Park – Houghton Regis
- Grove House Gardens – Dunstable
- Priory Gardens – Dunstable
- Mentmore Memorial Gardens – Leighton Buzzard

9.21 In reality, only Houghton Hall Park is a formal urban park, with the remaining three sites best described as formal gardens. Within Leighton Buzzard, although the Mentmore Memorial Gardens function as gardens have been included in this site, The Town Council are seeking to install Parson's Close Recreation Ground as the higher order recreation facility.

9.22 The above sites total circa 20 hectares. Of this, Houghton Hall Park makes up 17 hectares. The remaining three sites are much smaller, with Mentmore Memorial Gardens being only 0.25 hectares in size and the other two sites just over 1ha.

9.23 In addition, several sites have been identified by Town / Parish Councils and / or residents (through the household survey) as functioning as urban parks (perhaps because they host local events for example) although they do not have the facilities or status to be formally seen as such. Such sites include;

- Mentmore Recreation Ground (adjacent to Memorial Gardens and classified as a larger recreation area)
- Parsons Close Recreation Ground – Leighton Buzzard
- Franklin Gardens – Biggleswade (classified as a larger recreation area); and
- Ampthill Park – Ampthill (classified as a countryside recreation site)

9.24 While these sites are included in calculations relating to other typologies, it is important to note their function within this urban parks category and their potential to become urban parks longer term.

Table 9.1 summarises the distribution of urban parks by placemaking area.

**Table 9.1 – Distribution of Urban Parks by Placemaking Area**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision	Hectares per 1000 Population	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Perception of Residents
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	3	20.38755	0.39	0.35	35% not enough
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	1	1.93	0.036	0.03	34% not enough
North	0	0	0	0	48% not enough (east) and 35% not enough (west)
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>		20.64	0.08	0.07	39% not enough

Table 9.2 summarises the distribution of urban parks by settlement hierarchy.

**Table 9.2 – Distribution of Urban Parks by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Number of Sites	Total Provision	Hectares per 1000 Population	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Perception of Residents
Major Service Centres	4	20.64	0.15	0.13	40% not enough
Minor Service Centres	0	0	0.00	0.00	49% not enough
Large Villages	0	0	0.00	0.00	29% not enough
Small Villages	0	0	0.00	0.00	37% not enough

### Quantity of Urban Parks – Key Issues

9.25 Tables 9.1 – 9.2 illustrate the following key issues regarding the number, type and size distribution of urban parks:

- all sites classified as urban parks are located in the south of Central Bedfordshire. As set out earlier in this section, in reality, the majority of land classified under this typology is at Houghton Hall Park (Houghton Regis). It indicates that if no additional parks are

provided, the amount of hectares per 1000 population will decline from 0.08 to 0.07 hectares per 1000 population

- all urban parks are located within the Major Service Centres and there is no provision outside of these areas. All of the sites potentially fulfilling a role as an urban park are also located in the Major Service Centres. Provision in the major service centres is currently equivalent to 0.15 ha per 1000 however this will decrease to 0.13 ha per 1000 as a result of population growth

## **Consultation Responses – Quantity of Urban Parks**

### **Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans**

9.26 The review of Green Infrastructure Assessments, Town and Parish Council responses and available Town and Parish plans reveal the creation of more urban parks to be a key priority for many of the larger settlements, with the potential for new parks identified in both Major and Minor Service Centres. Specific areas for further investigation identified in relation to the provision of new parks include:

- creation of linear park east of Biggleswade (GI)
- demand for formal park – Flitwick (Town Plan)
- Arlesey – recreation opportunities at landfill site – potential to include creation of park (GI)
- Marston Moretaine - Shortfall of formal parks (GI)
- Potton – demand for formal community garden (possibly on part of Henry Smith Playing Fields (GI)
- Shefford – need for public parkland, in particular area north of Bedford Road (GI)

9.27 In addition, opportunities to upgrade existing recreation areas to create formal parks are also highlighted, specifically:

- upgrade of Franklin Gardens (Parish Consultation)
- formal planting at Mentmore Gardens and Page Park, Leighton Buzzard (Town Council Consultation). Lighting, seating and security also a priority. Ongoing management and maintenance of Parsons Close Recreation Ground.

### **Household Survey**

9.28 The household survey reveals that despite relatively limited provision, views on the amount of parks are evenly split, with 50% of residents considering provision to be sufficient (8% more than enough and 42% about right) and 50% believing that more are required (11% indicate that there are nearly enough parks while 39% suggest that there are not enough facilities).

9.29 Overall therefore, there is no clear direction on the adequacy of urban parks in terms of quantity. There are however some interesting variations in views between different sectors of the population, which reveal that there is a correlation between levels of use and perception of the adequacy of urban parks. In particular;

- a higher proportion of older residents think that quantity is sufficient. 38% of residents over 55 think more parks are required compared to 52% of residents aged 18 – 34. This links with the identified usage patterns which suggest that older residents use parks less

- there are no clear differences between the views of white and non white British residents, although almost 25% of non white British residents have no opinion. This may link to the lack of awareness of the location of parks which was identified earlier in this section as a key barrier to usage; and
- 70% of residents with children aged below 8 think there are not enough urban parks. This compares with just 39% of residents without dependents. Over 50% of residents with children aged between 9 and 13 also think that more urban parks are required

### **Views on the Quantity of Urban Parks by Placemaking Area**

9.30 Despite the skewed distribution of provision, the household survey demonstrates that on the whole, the divided opinion on the amount of urban parks is evident in all parts of Central Bedfordshire. The proportion of residents in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south that consider there to be enough facilities is however significantly above average (58% enough or more than enough) while there are higher levels of dissatisfaction in East Central Bedfordshire. Interestingly the higher levels of satisfaction in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south correspond with higher proportions of the population visiting urban parks. The eastern area is particularly lacking in formal parks compared to other areas, which correlates with the dissatisfaction in overall quantities of provision.

### **Views on the Quantity of Urban Parks by Settlement Hierarchy**

9.31 Despite the uneven distribution of parks, there are no clear variations in opinion on the quantity between residents at different levels of the settlement hierarchy (although it should be noted that a higher number of residents in the large and small villages have no opinion). Levels of dissatisfaction are highest in the minor service centres, where almost half of those residents with an opinion felt there to be insufficient parks.

9.32 While there are few differences in the overall views on amount of facilities by settlement hierarchy, analysis earlier in this section however reported differences between usage of facilities by settlement. Residents in the small and large villages indicated that they have difficulties accessing these facilities and report visiting them primarily for play and events – this suggests that urban parks are used as a destination for a day out when they are not local to the home.

### **Views on Quantity - Parish and Town Councils**

9.33 Relatively few Parish Councils expect to find urban parks within their settlement. As a result, 60% were happy with the amount of urban parks provided. 40% however indicated that there are not enough urban parks and many of these were larger settlements, including Biggleswade, Houghton Regis, Shefford and Flitwick – all major / minor service centres. Opportunities to upgrade existing sites were identified by many of these towns.

## **Current Provision**

### **Quality**

6.1 The quality and value of urban parks were assessed using a quality assessment matrix and this is provided in Appendix B.

9.34 All of the sites categorised as urban parks were perceived to be important within the urban setting and most exhibited well maintained ornamental flower beds which added to the attractiveness of the sites. Site visits revealed the quality to be high, with the range of scores achieved being between 76% and 89%.

9.35 Notably, the largest site, Houghton Hall Park, achieved the lowest quality scores. While the remaining three sites were considered to be highly maintained, several flower beds, paths and borders in Houghton Hall Park were identified as being in need of repair.

9.36 Table 9.3 illustrates the average quality scores achieved for each factor rated during site assessments. It highlights that almost all of the lower scores achieved relate to maintenance issues, rather than the structure of the site and / or their value to the community. It must be noted however that much of this relates to the issues identified at Houghton Hall Park (as well as concerns with litter at Grove House Gardens).

**Table 9.3 – Quality of Urban Parks**

Criteria	Average Score
Layout	100%
Balance and Setting	96%
Relationship	100%
Integrity	100%
Safety	100%
Linkages	96%
Main Entrance	100%
Wheelchair access	93%
Boundaries (including hedges, gates etc)	87%
Roads and Paths	76%
Planted Areas (trees, shrubs, bedding etc)	84%
Grass Areas	80%
Facilities: Bins	80%
Facilities: Seats – Condition	90%
Facilities: Seats – Adequacy	87%
Facilities: Toilets	100%
Facilities: Parking	87%
Facilities: Lighting	87%
Facilities: Information	90%
Cleanliness	84%

## Consultation Responses – Views on the Quality of Urban Parks

### Household Survey

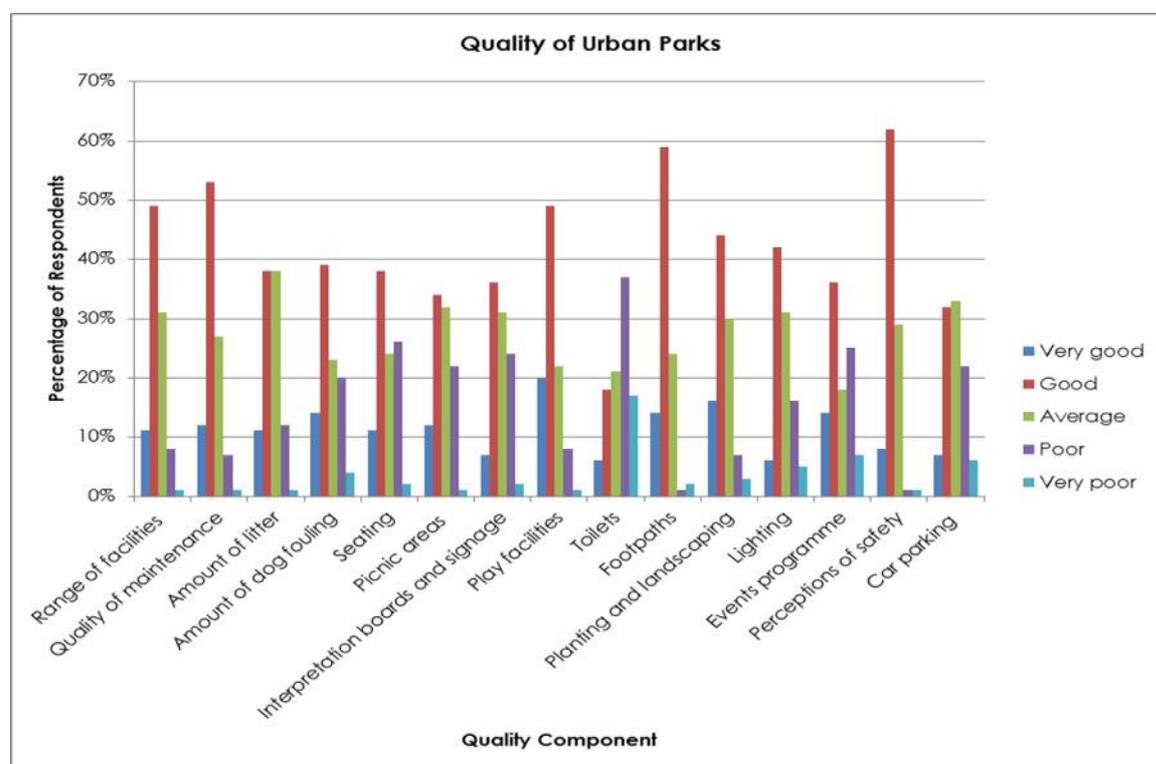
9.37 Reflecting the high quality identified in site visits, the telephone survey indicates that the quality of urban parks is considered favourably. 72% of respondents rate these spaces as good or very good and only 9% consider them poor or very poor. Very few residents highlighted the quality of facilities as a barrier to use, further emphasising this point.

9.38 There are few clear differences in perceived quality between different sectors of the population. Although fewer residents aged over 55 + and non white British residents rate parks as good or better, it must be noted that a higher proportion of these residents have no opinion (probably as they do not use the facilities) and this is therefore balanced out.

9.39 Chart 9.1 (which considers the views just of those that use facilities) outlines the perceived quality of key components of an urban park. It reveals that with the exception of toilets and car parking (which are rated more negatively), the most common response for each component is good. The areas where the highest levels of satisfaction are recorded are as follows;

- Footpaths (73% good or very good)
- Perceptions of safety (70% good or very good)
- Play facilities (69% good or very good)
- Quality of maintenance (65% good or very good)
- Planting and landscaping (60% good or very good)
- Range of facilities (60% good or very good)

**Chart 9.1 – Perceptions of Quality Factors for Urban Parks**



Areas where the highest levels of dissatisfaction are evident are:

- interpretation boards and signage (26% poor or very poor)
- car parking (28% poor or very poor)
- seating (28% poor or very poor)
- events programme (32% poor or very poor); and
- toilets (54% poor or very poor)

9.40 Interestingly, when comparing the expectations of residents with the issues identified during site visits, there are some clear differences. While users are relatively satisfied with maintenance, footpaths etc, these elements achieved lower scores in the site visits (although as already noted this was skewed by Houghton Hall Park). Seating and toilets were however also rated lower, reflecting the perceptions of users of facilities. There is also scope to improve parking.

9.41 It is notable when looking at the specific views of residents in different sectors of the population that:

- residents with dependents are less positive in relation to some of the above factors, in particular picnic tables, interpretation and signage boards and the events programme. 52% of residents with children aged 9 – 13 indicate that the events programme is poor or very poor (19% in total). 21% of residents with children aged 9 – 13 believe that the range of facilities is poor. Residents over the age of 55 are most positive about the events programme
- there are few differences in overall opinion between residents of different ages in relation to the quality components although for each features, older residents are largely more positive; and
- residents of none white British origin are clearly less positive in relation to the range of facilities, site maintenance, seating and toilets than residents of white British origin

### **Views on Quality of Urban Parks by Placemaking Areas**

9.42 Consultation reveals that perceptions of quality are particularly varied in the north placemaking area. Residents in the west (part of the north placemaking area) are most positive about parks despite a lack of provision but those in the east are very negative - 65% of people rating the quality of urban parks as poor or very poor live in the East placemaking area. It is possible that this is attributable to the issue identified earlier in this section – the definition of parks. Several sites in the east, including Franklin Gardens (Biggleswade) and Sunderland Road Recreation Ground (Sandy) are often viewed by residents as parks, but in reality do not provide the same setting as the more formal urban parks identified in this section and do not meet expectations of a facility within this categorization.

9.43 Consultation demonstrates that there are no clear issues in relation to the quality factors in each Placemaking Area. Instead, there is an overall pattern where residents in Leighton Buzzard and Rural South and West Central Bedfordshire are more positive about each factor than in other areas. Residents are particularly negative about litter and seating in the east. As already indicated, this is likely to be impacted upon by the distribution of parks and the perceived function of some larger recreation areas as parks.

### **Views on Quality Urban Parks by Settlement Hierarchy**

9.44 Like the placemaking areas, again the perceived quality of urban parks by settlement hierarchy has little regard to the distribution of these facilities. More residents at all levels of the settlement hierarchy consider the quality of urban parks to be good or very good than any other

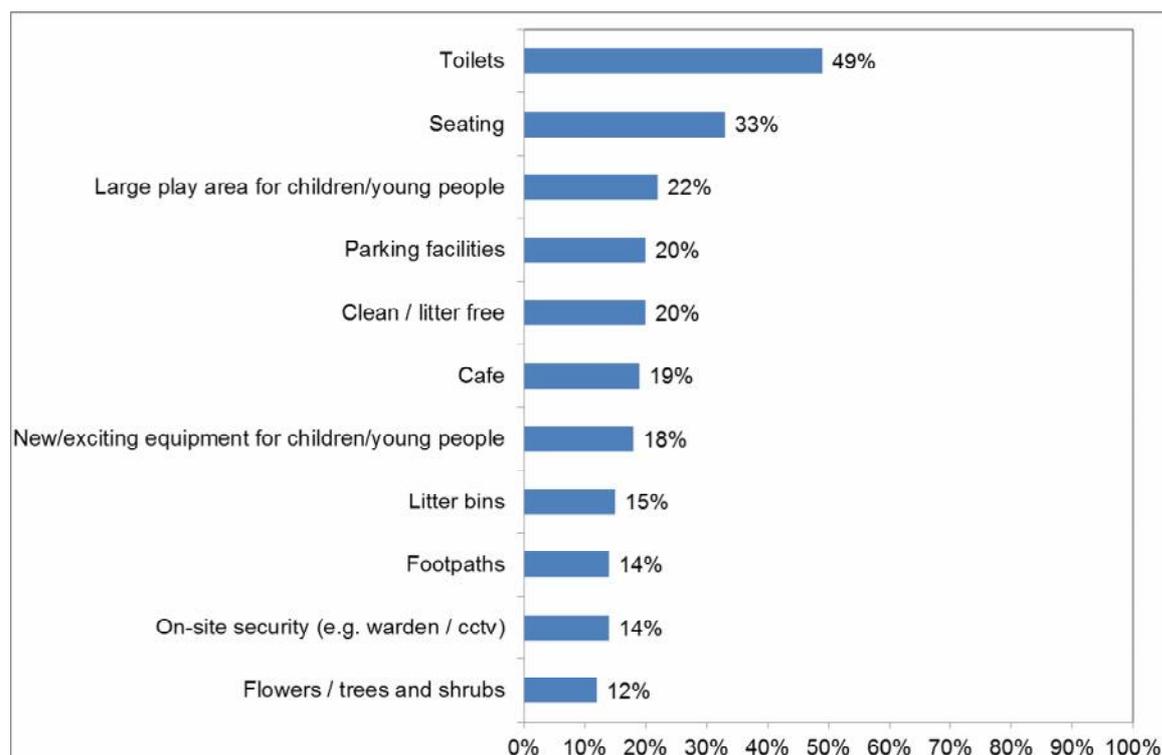
rating. Positivity is lowest in the minor service centres where 54% rate quality good or very good and the highest proportion of residents consider quality to be poor or very poor. Positivity regarding the amount of parks was also lowest in the minor service centres, suggesting that there are greater expectations than are being delivered currently. Again, it is possible that views on larger recreation areas are impacting upon this analysis.

9.45 There are few variations in overall opinion on specific features of urban parks by settlement hierarchy, although for the majority of components, residents in the Minor Service Centres exhibit the highest levels of dissatisfaction.

### Quality of Urban Parks - Aspirations

9.46 Chart 9.2 illustrates the factors that residents of Central Bedfordshire consider most important in the provision of urban parks. It is noticeable that it is considered particularly important that an urban park contains a variety of features. Most of the current sites do not provide this level of facility, and function largely as gardens within the town centre setting. Flowers and ornamental planting, a key component of all of the sites considered as urban parks, feature relatively low on the list of aspirations.

**Chart 9.2 – Aspirations of Local Residents relating to Urban Parks**



### Views on Quality of Urban Parks - Parish and Town Councils

9.47 The majority of Town and Parish Councils had no opinion on the quality of urban parks as none are provided within their locality. For those that do, opinions are evenly split between average and good.

9.48 Biggleswade Town Council were the only respondent to consider urban parks to be poor, however they highlight an opportunity to improve Franklin Gardens to ensure that it

becomes a high quality park. Again, this reflects the overlap in function between parks and larger recreation areas. Similarly, as set out earlier, opportunities to upgrade sites in Leighton Linlade are also identified.

9.49 No issues relating to the quality of existing urban parks are identified within GI plans or Parish Plans. Consultation however reveals the need to improve some elements of facilities at Houghton Hall Park (reflecting the findings of site visits) as well as to address anti-social behavior. Improvements to Houghton Hall Park are also identified as a key action within the Outdoor Access Improvement Strategy (Central Bedfordshire 2013).

### Accessibility

9.50 Using upon data collected through the telephone survey, Table 9.4 summarises the mode of transport that residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use to reach an urban park and the type of transport that users actually do use.

**Table 9.4 – Mode of Travel**

Expected vs Actual	Walk	Cycle	Public Transport	Car
Expected	57%	4%	6%	33%
Actual	48%	1%	3%	48%

9.51 It demonstrates that there is a split in opinion as to the expected mode of travel to reach an urban park. Across Central Bedfordshire as a whole, 57% would expect to travel on foot, while 33% would use their car. This suggests that the majority of residents expect parks to be in relatively close proximity to their home.

### Accessibility of Urban Parks by Placemaking Area

9.52 A higher proportion of residents in East Central Bedfordshire (North Placemaking area) and Dunstable and Houghton Regis expect urban parks to be within walking distance (58% and 62% respectively) than in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south.

### Accessibility of Urban Parks by Settlement Hierarchy

9.53 While 58% of residents in the Major Service Centres and 62% of residents in the Minor Service Centres expect to walk to an urban park, this decreases to just 42% and 22% in the large villages and smaller villages. It is clear therefore that the majority of residents in the large and small settlements do not necessarily expect urban parks to be provided within their village. This is also supported by the Town and Parish Council survey which indicates that the majority of Parish Councils would not expect to find urban parks within their village.

Expectations are broadly similar across all socio – economic and demographic groups.

### Steps 3 and 4 – Setting and Applying Local Standards

9.54 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

9.55 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space.

9.56 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of large recreation areas. Existing provision can then be measured against these benchmarks to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

9.57 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for large recreation areas is outlined below.

## Accessibility

### Setting Accessibility Standards

9.58 As outlined in Section 2, standards are set using an accessibility led approach. It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to get there. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

9.59 Analysis of aspirations set out earlier in this section demonstrates that views are split between the appropriate modes of travel to reach an urban park. The most definitive split is between the opinions of residents living in the major and Minor Service Centres (where a higher proportion would expect to walk) and the larger and smaller villages (where there is an emphasis on other modes of travel).

9.60 Table 9.5 uses the raw data collated in the telephone survey to evaluate the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach an urban park in each of the settlement hierarchies. It categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach an urban park. PPG17 indicates that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 9.5 – Travel Expectations – Urban Parks (Calculated from the Telephone Survey)**

Mode of Transport	Walk				Car			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	10	15	20	60	10	15	20	120
Major	10	10	10	60	10	15	20	45
Minor	10	15	20	35	10	15	16	40
Large	10	15	20	30	15	23	30	120
Small	15	15	15	30	15	20	20	45

Table 9.5 reveals that:

## Walking

- 25% of residents across Central Bedfordshire would only be willing to walk up to 10 minutes to reach an urban park (quartile 1). With the exception of the smaller villages (15 minutes) this is common to all settlement hierarchies. This means that the remaining 75% of residents would be willing to travel further than 10 minutes. The maximum distance residents were willing to travel was 60 minutes
- This suggests that a 15 minute walk time to reach an urban park is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population

## Car

- for those who would travel by car, there is similar evidence - 25% of residents are willing to travel for up to just 10 minutes (quartile 1), (although in the smaller villages and large villages this figure is 15 minutes). The remaining 75% are therefore willing to travel for at least 15 minutes; and
- for residents in the Major and Minor Service Centres, where the majority would expect to walk to an urban park, 25% would only be willing to walk up to 10 – 15 minutes. 75% of residents in the Small Villages and Large Villages (where a higher proportion would drive) will drive more than 15 minutes.

9.61 This suggests that overall, a 15 minute drive time to reach an urban park is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population. Those living in the Small Villages and Large Villages are willing to travel further, up to 20 minutes.

9.62 It is however notable however that there are some variations in expectation according to settlement size:

- residents in larger settlements expect to find urban parks in relatively close proximity to the home
- residents of large villages and smaller villages may be willing to travel further to a urban parks

9.63 It is also important to take into account the views arising from other consultations. It was clear that urban parks are not expected (or sustainable) in every settlement (reflecting the split in expectations between Major and Minor settlements evident in the household survey) although these spaces are still used and valued by residents in settlements of all sizes. It is important that this is taken into account in the planning of new facilities.

9.64 The recommended local accessibility standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

## Accessibility

Urban Parks - Accessibility Standard
15 minute walk time (720m) and 20 minute drive time.
Justification
<p>The findings of the consultation demonstrate that there is a split in expectation according to the size of the settlement. While those in the Major and Minor Service Centres expect to find parks within walking distance, residents in the Large and Small villages expect to travel further afield.</p> <p>In the Major and Minor Service Centres, analysis demonstrates that at least 75% of users are willing to travel at least 10 minutes on foot to an urban park. The same analysis indicates that at least 75% of residents are willing to travel by car for up to 20 minutes in the Smaller and Large Villages.</p>

### Application of the Accessibility Standard

9.65 The application of this standard is illustrated in maps contained in Appendix B.

9.66 It indicates that aspirations to find a local park within a 720m walk of home in Major and Minor Service Centres are met in very few locations. When taking into account only those sites formally classified as urban parks, the distribution of parks means that only residents in some parts of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard and Rural South are able to reach a facility categorised as a park (and in reality, the facilities in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard are just small gardens).

9.67 Residents in the Major Service Centres of Biggleswade, Ampthill, Flitwick, Sandy and Wixams are outside of the catchment of an urban park and to achieve this standard, at least one park would be required centrally in each urban area (either by upgrading an existing site or creating a new park). Residents in all minor service centres are also outside the catchment of a facility.

9.68 Biggleswade, Flitwick Sandy and Ampthill all contain sites classified as larger recreation areas (formal – Biggleswade and Sandy and informal – Flitwick) and countryside recreation sites that to an extent fulfil the role of an urban park.

9.69 Similarly, residents in the Large and Small Villages expect to travel by car for 10 – 20 minutes to reach a park. The location of these sites in the south of Central Bedfordshire means that some residents living in the North must travel further if they wish to access one of the parks within Central Bedfordshire. It must be noted however, that many residents of Central Bedfordshire are able to access parks in neighbouring authorities, specifically Bedford Park (Bedford) and Campbell Park (Milton Keynes).

9.70 Section 10 will consider the role of large recreation areas that are currently functioning as parks and the impact that they have on meeting the needs of residents.

### Setting Quantity Standards

9.71 Consultation reveals that there is a split in opinion with regards the amount of urban parks. It is however clearly demonstrated that residents in the Major Service Centres in

particular expect to find parks in close proximity to their home and that these aspirations are not currently met.

9.72 To inform further analysis, Table 9.6 considers the amount of space that would be required to meet current need, assuming that a minimum of one park is provided in each of the Major Service Centres and that this park is a minimum of 5 hectares.

**Table 9.6 - Baseline Requirement for Urban Parks**

Settlement Hierarchy	Current Provision (number of sites)	Current provision (hectares)	Requirement for additional parks	Total requirement for parks
Major Service Centres	4	20.64	Biggleswade / Ampthill / Flitwick / Sandy / Wixams - 25hectares	40.64
Minor Service Centres	0	0		
Large Villages	0	0	0	
Small Villages	0	0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20.64</b>		<b>45.64</b>

9.73 A total minimum requirement of 45.64 hectares would therefore be needed to provide at least one park in each of the major service centres.

9.74 This equates to a figure of 0.18ha per 1000 population based upon the current population. This takes into account residents living at all levels of the settlement hierarchy, even though it assumes that urban parks would only be located within Major Service Centres. This is because analysis of expectations (and current patterns of use) suggest that residents in Small and Large Villages will travel up to 20 minutes to use parks and that they function as a destination. These facilities are therefore serving all residents.

9.75 Given that both Dunstable and Houghton Regis contain only small gardens, it could be considered that further parks should be required in these settlements. Two further 5ha parks would require provision of 0.22ha per 1000 population.

9.76 A further 45ha would be required if urban parks were also to be provided in Minor Service Centres (0.39) ha per 1000 population.

9.77 While this provides an indication of the land requirements for the provision of parks, the delivery of such a facility in each of the Major Service Centres is likely to be possible by upgrading existing sites, rather than the creation of new facilities. Sites in Sandy, Flitwick and Leighton Buzzard are above the 5ha threshold, while in other areas they would fall below.

9.78 Based upon the above calculations, the quantity standard for urban parks is set out below.

## Quantity

Urban Parks - Quantity Standard
0.22 ha per 1000 population (provision in Major Service Centres only)– 0.39 ha per population (provision in Major and Minor Service Centres).
Justification
This figure represents the minimum requirement for urban parks in Central Bedfordshire. It has been derived through the calculation of the amount of land dedicated to existing urban parks as well as the assumption that a park of at least 5ha would be provided in each of the urban areas (to meet with aspirations identified relating to accessibility and distance thresholds).

## Application of the Quantity Standard

9.79 As this figure assumes that provision is only required in Major Service Centres, it is not appropriate to apply it at all levels of the settlement hierarchy to determine shortfalls and surpluses (although these facilities remain used and valued by residents in all sizes of settlement).

9.80 To provide an indication of the location of surpluses and deficiencies, Table 9.7 outlines the adequacy of provision against the figure of 0.22 ha per 1000 population by Placemaking Area. This should be considered indicative only as the figure is in reality more useful to project the needs of new populations, rather than to identify current shortfalls.

9.81 Table 9.7 overleaf clearly demonstrates however that in addition to the shortfalls in space required to meet current provision, future population growth will generate demand for an additional 7 hectares of parkland. This represents one to two additional parks in total.

**Table 9.7 – Shortfalls and Surpluses by Placemaking Area.**

Area	Current Provision	Amount Required (Current Needs)	Amount Required (Future Needs)	Current Shortfall / Surplus	Future shortfall / surplus
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	20.38755	11.4708	12.8436	8.91675	7.54395
Leighton Linslade and South	1.93	11.8954	13.6994	-9.9654	-11.7694
North	0	32.791	37.3802	-32.791	-37.3802
<b>TOTAL</b>		56.1572	63.9232	-56.1572	-63.9232

9.82 As table 9.7 demonstrates, the largest shortfalls are located within Leighton Linslade and the South and the North areas. The amount of urban parks in Dunstable and Houghton

Regis exceeds the minimum standards due the large size of Houghton Hall Park (Houghton Regis).

### **Application of Quantity Standard by Settlement**

9.83 Unsurprisingly, the settlements with the largest deficiencies are those that do not have any urban parks) or in the case of Leighton Buzzard, only a small park. Many of these areas will also see significant growth in future years and will therefore remain the areas most deficient in parks, specifically:

- Leighton Buzzard (current requirement 14.6 hectares, which will increase to 17.47 hectares)
- Biggleswade (current requirement of 6.4 hectares which will increase to 8.2 hectares)
- Sandy (limited population growth will see demand remain around 4.56 hectares)
- Flitwick (demand equivalent to 5 hectares and population growth will be relatively limited, meaning that it will remain at this level)

### **Quality**

#### **Setting Quality Standards**

9.84 Quality is as important as the amount of each type of open space and in particular for urban parks, consultations suggest that it is the quality of the facility is a key determinant of whether a site is perceived to be an urban park.

9.85 Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents, as well as aspirations that they have in relation to the type of spaces that they would like to see provided. This input can then be used to identify issues that are important to measure both improvements needed to existing parks and to guide the design of new parks.

9.86 Like for countryside recreation sites, The Green Flag (managed by the Civic Trust) is recognised as an important national standard for urban parks. This award recognises the quality of individual open space sites and is often associated with formal urban parks, although it can relate equally to all types of formal and Informal recreation areas.

9.87 Achievement of a Green Flag award can raise the profile of a park and increase the number of visitors to the site. Research undertaken ([www.greenspace.org](http://www.greenspace.org)) indicates that tourists make a special effort to visit award winning parks. The achievement of such an award also demonstrates best value, and can help lever external funding through improvement grants that award winners are eligible to apply for. The Green Flag criteria seek to promote best practice management principles, including community involvement, meeting with the localism agenda.

9.88 The key criteria involved in the attainment of the Green Flag award are:

- a welcoming place – including signage and safe access for all. Site visits highlighted issues with some footpaths and routes through sites, although this feature was more highly rated by current users;
- healthy, safe and secure – providing safe equipment, addressing dog fouling, appropriate provision of toilets etc. The safety of sites in Central Bedfordshire was not highlighted as an issue specific to parks, however the site infrastructure, including

toilets, were highlighted as both areas of concern and important in terms of aspirations for future provision. Furthermore, infrastructure was also viewed as an essential component of a successful park;

- clean and well maintained – appropriate attention should be given to litter and vandalism management and the maintenance of the areas. Cleanliness and maintenance was viewed as one of the areas with potential for improvement during site assessments, but was highlighted as essential throughout consultation relating to all types of open space in Central Bedfordshire;
- sustainability - Methods used in maintaining the park/green space and its facilities should be environmentally sound, relying on best practices. This may include recycling and minimising the use of pesticides. As well as using sustainable management practices, Friends Groups can play an important role in ensuring the long term sustainability of parks by providing invaluable volunteer support and increasing revenue at parks, by holding events at parks, for example;
- conservation and heritage - Particular attention should be paid to the conservation and appropriate management of Natural features, buildings and structural features. Many consultees highlighted the importance of retaining the individual character of open spaces and building upon the history of the area (Section 3);
- community involvement - the management of sites should actively involve members of the community, and the site should provide appropriate levels of recreational facilities for all sectors of the community. Again this was highlighted as a key issue by many consultees (Section 3) and it was highlighted that this one of the current successes at many sites across Central Bedfordshire;
- marketing - a marketing strategy should be in place, which is in practice and regularly reviewed. This should include good provision of information to users and the site should be promoted as a community resource; and
- management - a management plan or strategy should be in place to address all of the above criteria.

9.89 The recommended quality standard is set out overleaf, and draws upon the key findings of consultation and site visits, as well as the principles of best practice guidance outlined above. Further detail can be found in the Design Guidance.

### Urban Parks - Quality Standard

Local consultation, national guidance and best practice indicate that new and existing urban parks should meet with the following criteria;

Size and Location	At least 5ha in size Appropriately located for local catchment (within 480m of target residents) Accessible via safe footpaths and roads Clear boundaries that are locally appropriate and promote security
Character	Less than 5% total building area Clearly defined entrances Well maintained and landscaped Ornamental planting Reflecting the character and history of the local area
Access	Clearly defined pathways and cycleways Compliant with DDA – access audit in place
Facilities	Variety of opportunities within park Clearly defined surfaced paths Appropriate and regular seating Toilets Refreshments Information and signage both to and within the site as well as at the main entrance, including interpretation boards Range of Play equipment (linking with requirements identified in Section 9 and 10) Appropriate bins Management of dog fouling Sufficient parking Lighting
Activities	Clear events programme (with events suitable for young and old) Volunteer opportunities for the local community (linked with section 3) Visible daily staff presence

9.90 In addition, drawing on the findings of consultations and national best practice it is also desirable for the following to be in place;

- transport plan or policy for the site; and
- outreach and marketing programme to engage and involve local residents

#### **Application of Quality Standards**

9.91 The existing urban parks demonstrate a variety of characteristics, but do not meet all of the criteria above. It is however important to take into account the character of the area and the facilities that are therefore required. Three of the four sites fall below the size criteria for urban parks and function more as ornamental gardens, although they are important within the setting of the settlement in which they are based. The full range of facilities at these sites is therefore likely to be unsuitable. Key priorities may include;

- Houghton Hall Park – footpaths / planting / landscaping /toilets / refreshments
- Priory Gardens – Bins, parking, play
- Grove House Gardens – Bins
- Mentmore Memorial Gardens – potential extension to include Mentmore Memorial Park to enable provision of play opportunities. Bins, site infrastructure.

## Summary – Key Issues

### Usage

The category of urban parks overlaps significantly with spaces included within larger recreation areas, particularly where sites perhaps function as an urban park but do not necessarily have the facilities that would be expected. Just Houghton Hall Park (Houghton Regis) can be classified as a formal park in Central Bedfordshire. There are an additional three gardens (one in Leighton Buzzard and two in Dunstable) that also have similar functions.

13% of respondents to the telephone survey visit urban parks at least once weekly and just a further 18% use facilities at least once per month. Although this means that urban parks are on the whole visited less frequently than all other types of open space in Central Bedfordshire (reflecting the limited numbers of sites) the number of people that never visit parks (41% visit less than once per year or never) is lower than for some other types of open space. Analysis of use demonstrates that there are differences between different sectors of the population, with those with dependents, younger residents and white British residents more likely to use a park than other groups.

More so than for other sites, a lack of local facilities and difficulties accessing urban parks are amongst the key barriers to use of these facilities. Particularly for those in small and large villages, the main motivations for visiting include events and play, suggesting that urban parks are viewed as a destination.

### Quality, Quantity and Accessibility

The distribution of parks impacts upon usage patterns – all urban parks are situated within the Major Service Centres. The clear implication of this is that residents in the Minor Service Centres and villages must travel to reach facilities. Despite this, there are no real differences in the views of residents on the amount of parks, with a clear split between those that consider there to be enough and those that do not. Geographically however it is clear that there are perceived to be some gaps in provision, with several Town Councils suggesting that there are not enough parks but highlighting opportunities to upgrade existing facilities to improve access to such sites. There is an expectation that urban parks will be provided in the major service centres and to a lower degree (public expectation) in the minor service centres. Evidence suggests that residents in the major service centres and minor service centres expect to find an urban park within 15 minutes walk of their home, while those in large and small villages are willing to travel up to 20 minutes by car.

Analysis of baseline provision requirements suggest that between 0.22 ha per 1000 population (if parks are only provided in Major Service Centres) and 0.39ha per 1000 population (if parks are also provided in Minor Service Centres) is required. Given that it is likely that much of this requirement can be delivered through the upgrade of existing urban parks, these figures provide a broad indication of need only. Population growth will however generate demand for an additional 6 – 7 hectares of parkland, focused in the Major Service Centres. There are particular deficiencies in provision in Leighton Buzzard (where population growth will see demand increase by almost 3 hectares), Biggleswade, Sandy and Flitwick and it is in these areas where

the largest deficiencies will also remain in future years.

The quality of urban parks is considered favourably. 72% of respondents rate these spaces as good or very good and only 9% indicate that they are poor or very poor. Very few residents highlighted the quality of facilities as a barrier to use, further emphasising this point. Key areas for improvement were however identified, including seating, events programme and toilets. Site visits highlighted that while gardens were in general positively rated, some improvements to Houghton Hall Park were desirable.

## **Step 5 – Identifying Priorities**

### **Key Issues to Address**

9.92 The above analysis therefore indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to urban parks;

- There are opportunities to increase the usage of parks and open spaces through the provision of more formal parks. The telephone survey indicates that these are desirable facilities
- Residents expect to be able to reach an urban park within a 15 minute walk time in the Major and minor service centres and provision is therefore anticipated to be local. New facilities are required in most settlements if this aspiration is to be achieved
- Several Town and Parish Councils highlight opportunities to upgrade existing recreation areas to create formal parks
- Population growth is likely to see a further increase in demand
- Quality improvements are required to existing facilities if high aspirations for the type of facility met.

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

9.93 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- ensure that residents have local access to urban parks within major service centres
- maximise access to residents outside of major service centres to formal parks
- attract users from all sectors of the population; and
- meet user aspirations relating to quality of provision as well as local priorities and national objectives

### **Key Priorities**

9.94 It is therefore recommended that key priorities for the delivery of urban parks across Central Bedfordshire are as follows:

- Given the clearly evidenced strategic role of these sites, promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Plan
- Seek to ensure that at least one urban park is provided in each Major Service Centre. Location should be tailored to ensure that the majority of residents in these settlements are within a 15 minute walk time of parks. This will involve the provision of several additional parks (or the upgrade of existing large recreation areas)

- Work with communities to ensure that all parks meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section
- Create a network of green linkages to each urban park facilitating access on foot and by cycle (for local residents) as well as by car and public transport for those coming from further afield)
- Ensure that the impact of population growth on urban parks is recognised through the inclusion of policy requiring developers to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through CIL and developer contributions. Where quantity and access to parks are already sufficient, contributions should be required towards the improvements of the quality of existing parks.

### Site / Area Specific Implications

9.95 Table 9.8 below summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 9.8 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites
<b>New provision</b>
Short Term – Major and Minor Service Centres – key priorities Leighton Buzzard (new site) Biggleswade (potential to upgrade Franklin Recreation Ground and / or create new linear park), Flitwick (potential to upgrade existing site and or create new site), Sandy (potential to upgrade existing site and / or create new site). New provision should take into account current and projected requirements based upon population growth.
Longer term - potential to provide additional sites in minor service centres.
<b>Quality Enhancements</b>
Houghton Hall Park Existing and new sites in line with target quality criteria Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where residents are likely to use existing facilities.

## 10. Large Formal Recreation Areas

### Introduction

10.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to large formal recreation areas in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Context and Definition

10.2 Large recreation areas are designed primarily for the purposes of recreation. Sites may also however provide a sense of place for the local community, help to address social inclusion issues within wider society and also provide structural and landscaping benefits. Some sites may also have wider ecological and environmental functions.

10.3 For the purposes of this study, large recreation areas have been defined as follows:

**“large green sites which are easily accessible containing opportunities for casual and / or formal recreation for example dog walking, children’s play, casual or formal outdoor sports. (most sites are circa 1ha or above). “**

10.4 Responses to the household survey and wider consultation did, however, identify different expectations of usage and provision between Formal and Informal Recreation Areas. To accurately capture the different primary functions of large recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire, and to identify those sites whose primary function is ecological rather than recreational, this category has been subdivided into:

#### **Type 1: Large Formal Recreation Areas**

- Large sites that contain formal recreation opportunities, for example sports pitches and play facilities. These sites will be maintained and managed primarily for formal recreation.

#### **Type 2: Informal Recreation Areas**

- Sites are primarily used for informal recreation opportunities. They are likely to be more natural in character and contain fewer formal facilities. This categorisation includes woodlands and commons. These spaces could also provide some complimentary facilities such as children and young people’s facilities and/or outdoor sports facilities.

10.5 It should be noted that the availability of one type of recreation space does not necessarily negate demand for others.

**This section considers the adequacy of Large Formal Recreation Areas only. Informal Recreation Areas are considered in Section 11.**

10.6 Facilities within Large Formal Recreation Areas have been categorised under the most appropriate typology. Large green areas and footpaths will provide the total size of the recreation area (hectares) and the other facilities (including play areas) will be calculated separately under their own typology. This ensures that open space is not counted twice within this study. The site will however be considered as a whole entity and the resources that it offers holistically will be taken into account during analysis.

10.7 It should also be noted that there is an interrelationship between urban parks and large formal recreation areas, with both types of space fulfilling some similar functions. As an urban park is a higher order facility (i.e. contains more facilities) than a formal recreation area, in areas where residents are within appropriate distances of an urban park, additional formal recreation areas will not be required. This will be returned to later in this section.

10.8 The remainder of this section presents the findings of the local needs assessment and the audit of provision and presents a summary of the usage, quality, quantity and accessibility of facilities for large formal recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire.

10.9 The key issues arising from the evaluation of local needs and audit of existing provision, as well as the creation and application of local standards are summarised at the end of this section.

## **Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision**

### **Usage Profile**

10.10 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open space types detailed in this study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space. *Consultation did not differentiate between the subdivided Large Recreation Area typology and therefore relates to both formal and informal large recreation areas.*

### **Household Survey Responses**

#### **Usage**

10.11 26% of respondents to the survey visit large recreation areas at least once weekly and a further 22% use these spaces at least once per month. This makes this type of open space one of the most frequently visited across Central Bedfordshire. 35% of residents never visit a large recreation area meaning that these spaces serve the highest proportion of residents of all types of open space in the area.

10.12 Use of large recreation areas varies more between different demographic groups than most other types of open space, in particular:

- more than half of residents aged over 55 (56%) never visit large recreation areas, whereas just 10% of those aged 18 and 34 never visit. Those aged 35 to 54 visit most frequently with 37% visiting once per week or more. This compares to 18% of residents aged 18 – 34 and 20% of those aged over 55

- unlike other types of open space, male residents visit large recreation areas much more frequently than females. 46% of females never visit a large recreation area (23% of males) while 35% of males visit weekly or more regularly (19% of females)
- residents with a disability are less likely to visit a large recreation area. Just 10% visit weekly (compared to 29%) and 45% never use these sites
- like all other types of open space (except allotments), residents with dependents below aged 14 are more likely to use large recreation areas than those without. Unlike other types of open space, residents with children aged between 9 and 13 are more likely to visit (38% weekly) than those with children under 8 (20% weekly).
- there is little difference in use between white British residents and non white British residents. A slightly higher proportion of residents of non white British origin never use large recreation areas.

### **Usage of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

10.13 The survey indicates similarities in the use of large recreation areas in the different Placemaking Areas of Central Bedfordshire. The proportion of residents that never use such spaces is slightly higher in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and the West (part of the North placemaking area). These spaces are used most frequently in the West (31% weekly or more often); 20% of residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 24% in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South, and 29% of residents in the East use these spaces weekly.

### **Usage Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

10.14 There are few differences between the usage of large recreation areas at different levels of the settlement hierarchy. 71% of residents in large villages use large recreation areas at least once per year compared to 58% in the small villages, 64% in major settlements and 65% in minor settlements. This demonstrates that these spaces are important resources in settlements of all sizes.

### **Reasons for visiting Large Formal Recreation Areas**

10.15 Reasons for visiting large recreation areas are perhaps more varied than some other types of open space. Respondents indicate that the main reasons for visiting are:

- To relax (33%)
- Walk and exercise (32%)
- Children play (28%)
- Dog walking (14%)
- Sports (13%)
- Events (8%)

10.16 Like most other types of open space, a lack of time (30%) and interest (20%) are the main barriers to use. The next most common reasons are difficulties in accessing sites (11%), a lack of local spaces (4%) and a lack of facilities (3%). 1% indicate that disabled access is a concern to them.

10.17 Analysis of use across the different segments of population reveals little variation in reasons for visiting large recreation areas despite the differences in user patterns. Analysis concludes that:

- men are more likely to use these spaces to play sport and relax whilst women use them for play (perhaps with children) and to relax
- the proportion of residents using large recreation areas for walking and exercise increases with age. More residents in younger age groups use these spaces to relax

10.18 As the population of Central Bedfordshire ages, these types of space may therefore become more important.

### **Reasons for Visiting Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

10.19 Reasons for visiting spaces are the same in all areas, although use in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South is often for events, whereas in Dunstable and Houghton Regis they are more often used for exercise. Few residents in Leighton Buzzard expect to use large recreation areas for sport.

### **Reasons for Visiting Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

10.20 The reasons for use in each of the three settlement hierarchies are the same, although these spaces are used particularly for play in the Minor Service Centres and for sports in the Major Service Centres.

### **Barriers to Use**

10.21 Lack of interest and a lack of time are the main barriers to use of large recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire. The most commonly referenced other barrier is a perceived lack of local spaces.

### **Barriers to Use of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

10.22 The barriers to use remain consistent across all placemaking areas. There is however a greater degree of concern around the provision of local spaces and difficulties in accessing sites in the Leighton Buzzard and Rural South than in all other parts.

### **Barriers to Use of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

10.23 Barriers to use are also the same in each settlement hierarchy. The most notable exception to this is that 19% of residents in Large Villages highlight the lack of a local facility as a barrier to use, and 25% indicate that these spaces are difficult to get to. Almost all residents highlighting this as an issue are based within the Large Villages.

## **Current Provision and Views on Current Provision**

### **Quantity**

10.24 The audit reveals that 238 hectares is dedicated to Large Formal Recreation Areas in Central Bedfordshire.

10.25 Table 10.1 summarises the number, size distribution and total land dedicated to these spaces and sets out the current and future provision in terms of 'hectares per 1000 population'.

The calculation excludes land that is covered in other typologies (for example play areas or sports facilities).

**Table 10.1 Size Distribution of Large Formal Recreation Areas**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (2022)	Average Site Size (Ha)
Formal Recreation Areas	106	239.3	0.94	0.82	2.3

Table 10.2 summarises the amount of large formal recreation areas by Placemaking Area and indicates that the total provision is relatively consistent.

**Table 10.2 Size Distribution of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Area**

Place-making Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision	Hectares per 1000 Population	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Perception of Residents
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	19.0	50.2	0.96	0.86	31% not enough
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	19.0	47.2	0.87	0.76	24% not enough
North	68.0	141.9	0.95	0.84	26% not enough (east) and 20% not enough (West)

7.1 In order to evaluate whether there are any differences in the distribution of large formal recreation areas according to the size of the settlement, Table 10.3 summarises the distribution of these facilities by settlement hierarchy.

**Table 10.3 Size Distribution of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

Hierarchy Type	Site Type	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (future – 2022)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Perception of Residents
Major Service Centres	Formal	43	104.3	0.75	0.65	2.4	23% not enough
Minor Service Centres	Formal	17	42.3	0.85	0.75	2.5	38% not enough
Large Villages	Formal	27	59.1057	1.44	1.34	2.2	13% not enough
Small Villages	Formal	18	32.1	1.23	1.18	1.8	35% not enough

### Quantity of Provision - Key Issues

10.26 Tables 10.1 -10.3 illustrate the following key issues regarding the number, type and size distribution of large formal recreation areas:

- the size distribution of Formal Recreation Areas ranges from 0.87ha – 0.96ha per 1000 population meaning that provision is geographically relatively even
- provision is highest in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and lowest in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South placemaking areas
- the amount of formal recreation space varies by settlement hierarchy, but there are no clear patterns in the distribution of such spaces, with provision in the major service centres, minor service centres and small villages all relatively consistent (in terms of hectares per 1000 population), but the amount of land dedicated to large formal areas in the large villages being significantly higher. The average size of these spaces is consistent across the three largest tiers of the settlement hierarchy, but sites are generally smaller in the villages
- the future population growth sees provision per 1000 population decrease significantly. This is particularly apparent in the major and minor settlements, where the highest levels of growth will occur.

### Quantity of Provision – Consultation Responses

#### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

10.27 A review of the priorities of Green Infrastructure studies and Parish Plans reveals that in the majority of areas, improvements to existing large formal recreation areas are prioritised over new facilities. Reflecting the satisfaction with existing levels of provision, relatively few plans identify a requirement for new provision.

10.28 The key priorities included in current documents in relation to the amount of informal recreation areas are set out below. This list includes views provided as part of Town and Parish Council consultation, as well as those set out in adopted policy documents;

- Biggleswade - Requirement to increase publically accessible open space to west and south of Biggleswade (GI) – Biggleswade Green Wheel
- Sandy – new landscaped green space for recreation (GI)
- Extension of Recreation Ground at Arlesey (including provision of additional facilities and gardens) GI
- Potton – increase community parkland (GI) and provide more recreational amenities
- Haynes – new facilities required (Parish)
- Henlow – new community park – GI
- Langford – extension of existing playing fields (GI)
- Lower Stondon – creation of new spaces (parish Plan)
- Westoning – lack of recreation space (Parish Plan)
- Chalton – extension of larger recreation ground (GI)
- Kensworth – expansion of recreation ground (GI)
- Streatley – expansion of recreation ground (GI)
- Wrestlingworth – Parish Plan highlighted a need. Parish seeking to lease land Informal Recreation Areas.

### **Household Survey Responses**

10.29 The household survey demonstrates an overall view that there are enough large recreation areas (64%) and 5% believe there are too many. 25% consider there to be not enough, while a further 6% feel there are only nearly enough. Satisfaction with provision is therefore higher than most types of open space in Central Bedfordshire and there are no clear differences in views between residents of different sectors of the population.

### **Views on Quantity of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

10.30 The household survey indicates that views on the amount of provision are also relatively evenly matched although residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and the East are slightly less satisfied with the amount of spaces. When taking into account both formal and informal recreation spaces it is in this area where levels of provision are lowest.

10.31 Interestingly, despite higher levels of dissatisfaction with quantity in the East (part of the north placemaking area), 63% of sites in the North placemaking area are located in the East and almost the same proportion of hectares of large formal recreation areas. This may suggest that there are other issues affecting the views of residents in this area. As noted previously, the household survey grouped together views on formal and informal recreation areas.

### **Views on Quantity of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

10.32 Despite the variations in the amount of provision, analysis of the household survey demonstrates that there are no clear variations in opinion on the quantity of large recreation areas between residents at different levels of the settlement hierarchy. Residents in the minor service centres and small villages are slightly more dissatisfied with a higher proportion of residents indicating that there are not enough or only nearly enough. It is in these settlements where analysis of barriers to use demonstrated that there is perception that there is a lack of local open spaces and that these sites are difficult to access.

10.33 Notably however, the proportion of residents believing provision to be about right is highest in the large villages, where combined provision is also highest.

### **Views on Quantity - Town and Parish Councils**

10.34 Town and Parish Councils demonstrate positive perceptions in relation to the amount of large recreation areas than respondents to the household survey and 75% consider there to be enough of these areas.

10.35 The majority of Towns / Parishes operate an area fitting within the description of a formal recreation area. Interestingly, many of those who indicate that provision is insufficient qualify this by stating that the quality of existing facilities are poor – this suggests that qualitative improvements are perhaps of greater significance in most areas than the provision of additional space. The impact of population growth on existing sites was however raised and it was indicated that new space may be required to serve the needs of residents moving into the area when large quantities of development was taking place. Just five responding Town and Parish Councils indicated that they would prioritise the provision of additional recreation space over the improvement of existing sites. The importance of these sites is however clear, with 16% of respondents identifying large recreation areas as their top priority for improvement.

### **Current Provision**

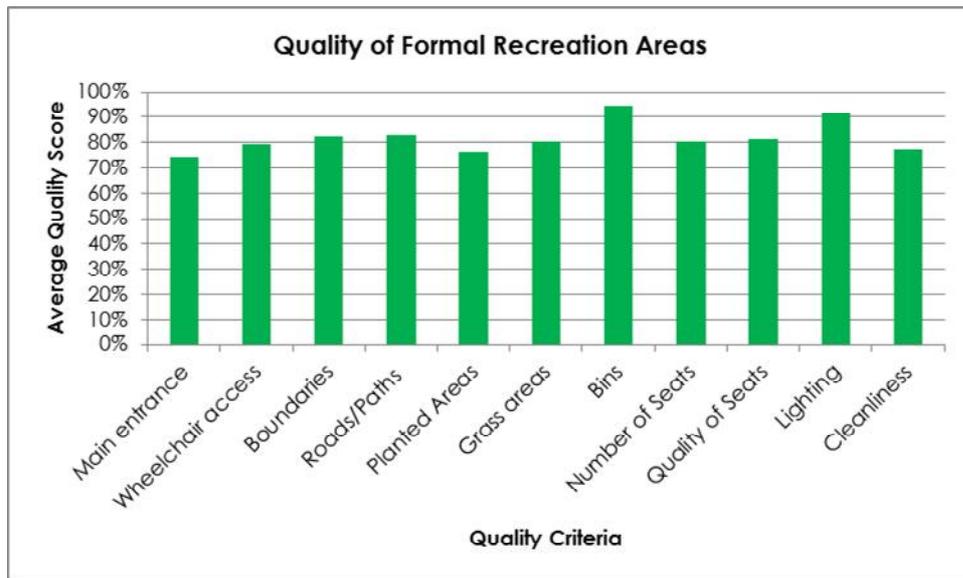
#### **Quality**

10.36 The quality of large formal recreation areas was evaluated using an assessment matrix. This is provided in Appendix D.

10.37 Assessments of formal recreation areas are particularly difficult as the components of these recreation areas (i.e. pitches, sports facilities, play equipment and facilities for teenagers) are evaluated in different sections of this report. The site assessments undertaken for formal recreation areas consider the function of the site as a whole.

10.38 Site visits reveal that the quality of facilities is varying, with an average score of 60%. Overall scores range from 16% to 95% indicating that there are some very poor sites as well as examples of very good facilities. The average quality scores achieved for each of the quality criteria are summarised in Chart 10.1. It indicates that like some other types of open space, cleanliness is the most poorly scoring feature. There is also scope to improve the main entrance and planting. In contrast, the amount of bins is high and many sites are also well lit.

### **Chart 10.1 – Quality of Large Formal Recreation Areas**



10.39 Further review of the facilities provided at large formal recreation areas demonstrates that sites in the smaller settlements generally offer fewer facilities. Those in the Major Service Centres are more likely to contain a full variety of facilities including sports provision and facilities for children and teenagers.

### Placemaking Areas and Settlement Hierarchy

10.40 Site visits do not reveal any clear differences in quality between facilities in different areas of Central Bedfordshire or settlements of different sizes.

### Quality of Provision – Consultation Responses

#### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

10.41 While consultations provide an overview of the quality issues experienced, as well as components that are important in the provision of recreation areas, reviews of the existing Green Infrastructure Studies, Parish Plans and detailed consultation provide a more in depth understanding of site specific priorities related to both formal and informal recreation areas. Sites specifically referenced as requiring improvement are set out below. As identified earlier in this section, the majority of qualitative improvements relate to formal recreation areas, while the creation of new informal recreation spaces takes higher priority than improvement of these sites.

10.42 The key priorities included in current documents in relation to the quality of larger recreation areas are set out below. This list includes views provided as part of Town and Parish Council consultation, as well as those set out in adopted policy documents;

- Improvement of sites through provision of new facilities (in particular Fairfield Road) – Biggleswade (Parish Consultation)
- Restoration of Lakes Recreation Ground, Biggleswade (GI study)
- Improvement of facilities at recreation grounds in Arlesey (GI)
- Potton – more recreational amenities on sites (GI)
- Blunham – require floodlighting and upgrade of riverside area (Parish Council)
- Clophill – improved security and amenities at recreation ground (Parish Plan)

- Haynes – require improvements to paths (Parish)
- Heath and Reach – upgrade Thrift Recreation Ground (Parish)
- Houghton Conquest – sports facilities poor (Parish)
- Lower Stondon – improvement of existing spaces (Parish Plan)
- Silsoe – improved recreation area needed (Parish Plan and GI)
- Totternhoe – recreation ground requires improvement to ensure it can also fulfil village green function (GI)

## Household Survey Responses

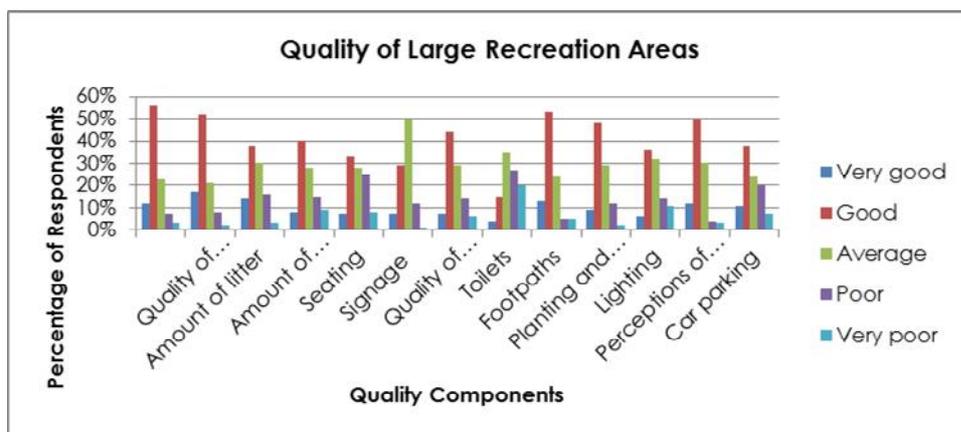
10.43 The household survey indicates that the quality of large recreation areas is viewed positively. 64% of respondents rate these spaces as good or very good and only 5% indicate that they are poor or very poor. Very few residents highlighted the quality of facilities as a barrier to use, further emphasising this point. As already emphasised, views on formal and Informal recreation areas were combined during the household survey.

10.44 There are few clear differences in perceived quality between different sectors of the population. It must be noted however, that the majority of residents who consider spaces to be poor are in the older age groups.

10.45 Chart 10.3 which considers the only the views of those who use large recreation areas, evaluates the perceived quality of key components of a large recreation area. It reveals that with the exception of toilets and signage (which are rated more negatively), the most common response for each component is good. The areas where the highest levels of satisfaction are recorded are as follows;

- Quality of maintenance (69% good or very good)
- Footpaths (66% good or very good)
- Perceptions of safety (62% good or very good)
- Landscaping and planting (57% good or very good)

**Chart 10.3 – Survey results for Quality Factors for Larger Recreation Areas**



Areas where the highest levels of dissatisfaction are evident are:

- toilets(47% poor or very poor)
- seating (33% poor or very poor)

- car parking (27% poor or very poor)
- lighting (25% poor or very poor)
- dog fouling (24% poor or very poor)

10.46 It must be noted that there are higher levels of dissatisfaction exhibited in relation to many of these components than for many of the other types of open space. In addition:

- for all aspects of large recreation areas, residents aged between 34 and 54 are significantly more negative than those in other age groups (for all components except the amount of dog fouling)
- residents of white British origin are far more positive than those of non white ethnic origin for almost all components of a large recreation area with much higher proportions of the population rating different components as average or poor. The only real exception is footpaths; and
- there are no clear differences between those that would consider themselves to have a disability and those that do not
- residents with dependents do not rate the quality of facilities as highly as those without. Those with children aged between 9 – 13 (the age group that use facilities most frequently) are most negative. The range of facilities provided emerges as a particular issue for those with dependents aged 14 – 18

### **Views on Quality of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

10.47 The survey demonstrates that the overall perceptions are similar across all parts of Central Bedfordshire. While residents in the west of Central Bedfordshire are generally more positive about the quality of their open spaces, all residents considering large recreation areas to be poor are also situated within this area. Leighton Buzzard and Rural South is however the area where the highest proportion of residents gave negative responses.

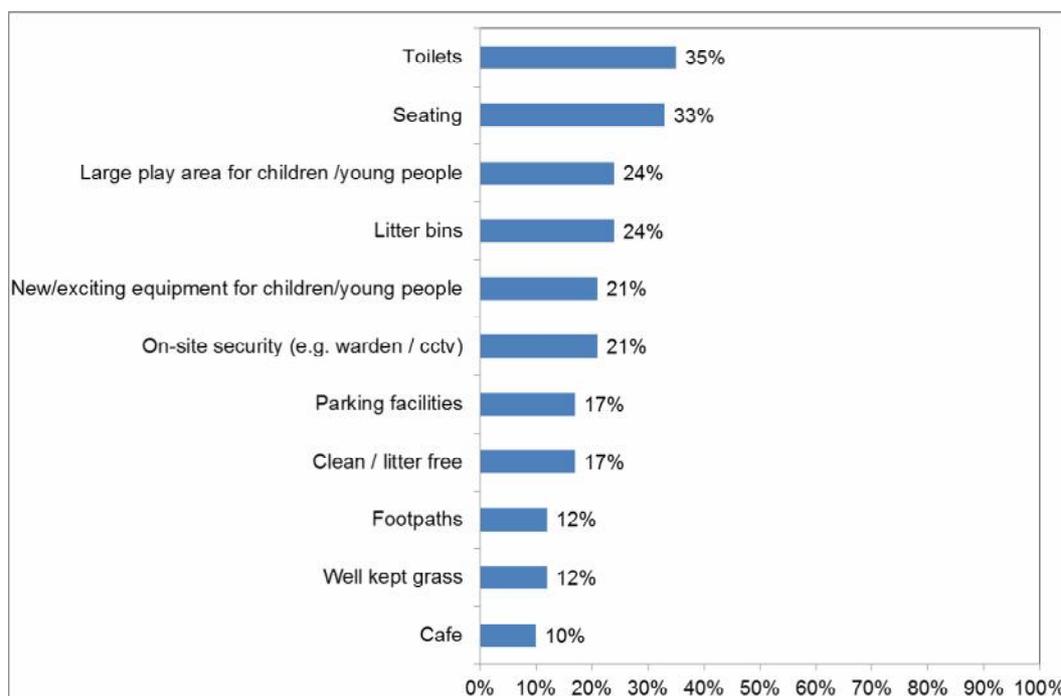
### **Views on Quality of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

10.48 There are few variations in overall opinions of quality by settlement hierarchy. Fewer residents in the small villages and large villages consider the quality of provision to be good, and most of those indicating that these spaces are of poor quality are based in the small villages or large villages. The majority of comments made to support the views provided suggest that this can largely be attributed to the quality of formal recreation areas rather than more informal sites.

### **Quality of Large Formal Recreation Areas– Aspirations**

10.49 Chart 10.4 illustrates the survey results identifying the factors that residents consider most important in the provision of high quality large recreation areas. Seating and the inclusion of basic facilities are the factors that are considered to be most important. It should be noted that aspirations for large recreation areas consider both formal and informal recreation spaces.

### **Chart 10.4 Residents' views on quality**



## Town and Parish Councils

10.50 The quality of larger recreation areas was one of the most widely referenced issues in the Town and Parish Council survey. On the whole, existing provision was viewed positively, with 30% considering facilities to be average and 60% good. The remainder were rated as poor. The key areas of concern or for improvement highlighted were:

- maintenance issues
- dog fouling and litter
- the need to provide a wider variety of facilities and / or equipment at the site (this links to analysis in other typologies)

10.51 Interestingly, just five Towns/Parish Councils prioritised additional provision over the improvement of existing sites. Those indicating that the need for additional larger recreation areas was greater than improvement of current facilities were Leighton Linlade Town Council, Houghton Regis Town Council, Heath and Reach Parish Council, Flitton and Greenfield Parish Council and Wrestlingworth and Cockayne Hatley Parish Council.

10.52 Larger recreation areas are evidently important to the communities of Central Bedfordshire. Six Towns / Parishes identified investment into larger recreation areas as their highest open space related priority (Flitwick Town Council, Houghton Conquest Parish Council, Eggington Parish Council, Leighton Linlade Town Council, Houghton Regis Town Council and Eversholt Parish Council) and a further five Towns / Parishes identified this type of open space as being within their top three priorities.

## Accessibility

10.53 Appropriate access to open space and recreation facilities is as important as the quality of those facilities. Table 10.4 summarises the mode of transport that residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use, and actually use, to reach a large recreation area.

**Table 10.4 – Mode of Travel**

Expected vs Actual	Walk	Cycle	Public Transport	Car
Expected	73%	2%	4%	21%
Actual	69%	1%	3%	27%

10.54 Table 10.4 highlights an expectation that residents will have a large recreation area within walking distance from their home. Analysis of actual usage patterns (through the household survey) indicates that this is delivered in most areas.

10.55 Further analysis suggests that this varies slightly by placemaking area and settlement hierarchy specifically:

#### **Accessibility of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Area**

- there are different expectations in each of the placemaking areas. Spaces are expected within walking distance in Dunstable and Houghton Regis (78%) and East Central Bedfordshire (77%) (part of the North placemaking area). In the west (again part of the north placemaking area) 65% would expect to travel on foot, while this drops to 53% in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South; and

#### **Accessibility of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

- there is much more limited variation across the different tiers of the settlement hierarchy, with the overarching expectation at all levels except small villages being that large recreation areas are within walking distance. A higher proportion of those living in small villages would expect to travel by car

#### **Steps 3 and 4 - Setting and Applying Local Standards**

10.56 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

10.57 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space.

10.58 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of large formal recreation areas. Existing provision can then be measured against these benchmark standards to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

10.59 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for large formal recreation areas is outlined below.

## Accessibility

### Setting Accessibility Standards

10.60 As outlined in Section 2, standards are set using an accessibility led approach. It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to reach each type of open space there. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

10.61 The survey data demonstrates that there is a strong consensus that large recreation areas should be within walking distance of the home, although for residents in the smaller settlements, a high proportion of the population are willing to travel by car.

10.62 To consider how large formal recreation areas fit into aspirations for the open space network in Central Bedfordshire, Table 10.5 uses the raw data collated in the household survey to evaluate the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach a large recreation area in each of the settlement hierarchies.

10.63 To fully understand the spread of responses (and therefore the expectations of all residents), it categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach a recreation area. PPG17 indicates that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 10.5 – Travel Expectations - Large Recreation Areas (From telephone survey)**

Mode of Transport	Walk				Car			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	9	10	15	70	10	15	20	90
Major	5	10	15	30	10	12.5	15	30
Minor	10	10	15	70	10	10	30	90
Large	10	10	15	60	10	15	20	60
Small	5	10	10	30	10	15	20	45

Table 10.5 reveals the following key findings of residents' accessibility expectations:

#### Walking:

- 25% of residents across Central Bedfordshire would only be willing to walk up to 9 minutes to reach a large recreation area (quartile 1)
- 25% of residents in the major service centres and small villages are only willing to walk up to 5 minutes (quartile 1). Across Central Bedfordshire as a whole, the remaining 75% are willing to travel for more than 9 minutes and the maximum value is 70 minutes
- the average expected walking time is 14 minutes while the modal response (most common response) is 10 minutes

10.64 This suggests that a 10 minute walk time to reach a large recreation area is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population.

**Car:**

- for those that would expect to drive, 25% would only be willing to drive up to 10 minutes (quartile 1) while the remaining 75% would travel for at least 10 minutes
- the average expected drive time is 16 minutes, while the mode (most common response) is 10 minutes

10.65 This suggests that a 10 minute drive time to reach a large formal recreation area is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population.

10.66 It is notable however, that there are some variations in expectation according to settlement size:

- residents in larger settlements expect to find large recreation areas in relatively close proximity to the home
- residents of large villages and smaller villages may be willing to travel further to a large recreation space

10.67 It is also important to take into account the views arising from other consultations. While overall residents in small and larger villages are willing to travel further, a lack of local facilities was highlighted as a particular barrier to use in the large villages in the household survey, and Town and Parish Councils also emphasise the importance of local provision of large recreation areas.

10.68 Statistical data therefore suggests that 75% of residents will travel up to 10 minutes to reach a large formal recreation area and other consultation confirms that this is an appropriate distance for the local standard to be set at.

10.69 The recommended local accessibility standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

**Accessibility**

Large Recreation Areas - Accessibility Standard
10 minute walk time (480m) in Major and Minor settlements as well as in Large Villages and 10 minute drive time in Small Villages
Justification
The findings of the consultation demonstrate that there is a split in expectation according to the size of the settlement. While those in the Major and Minor Service Centres expect to find large recreation areas within walking distance, some residents in the Large and Small Villages are willing to travel further afield.
In the Major and Minor Service Centres, analysis demonstrates that at least 75% of users are willing to travel at least 10 minutes on foot to a large recreation area. For residents in the Large and Small Villages, a drive of 10 – 15 minutes is acceptable.

It must be noted however, that a key barrier to use in the large villages is lack of local facilities. The amount of people willing to travel by car is also lower than the amount that would expect to walk. To take this into account, the walk time standard also best reflects the needs and aspirations of those living in large villages.

For smaller villages, while a high proportion of residents still expect to walk to a large recreation area and it is acknowledged that this is the case, to maintain quality (which was highlighted as being a particular issue by residents in these areas) a drivetime standard is acceptable, although access is on foot (and therefore localised provision is desirable).

### **Application of the Accessibility Standard**

10.70 The application of this benchmark is illustrated in maps contained in Appendix B. It is clear from these maps that most large formal recreation grounds are centrally located.

10.71 As outlined earlier, urban parks have similar functions to large formal recreation areas. As higher order facilities (i.e. larger sites providing a greater range of opportunities), these sites negate the need for large formal recreation areas for residents who are within a 10 minute walk time (the local standard for large formal recreation areas) of one of these sites i.e. additional recreation areas will not be required to serve residents living within 10 minutes walk of an urban park.

10.72 Table 10.6 summarises the distribution of formal recreation areas and highlights where residents are outside of the catchment for these spaces. It also provides detail of where needs relating to the improvement of existing spaces and / or the creation of new spaces have been expressed (building upon data set out earlier in this section). While many areas seeking to improve the amount of space currently have limited access to such sites, some projects identified are in areas where access is already relatively high.

**Table 10.6 – Access to Large Formal Recreation Areas**

Settlement Hierarchy	Settlement Name	Current position		Issues Raised Through Consultation	
		Access to Large Formal Recreation Areas	Comments	Quality Issues Raised	Aspiration for Additional Large Formal Recreation Areas
Major	Biggleswade	Yes	Good access to large formal recreation areas for the majority of residents	Yes (formal and Informal)	Yes
Small	Brogborough	No	No large formal recreation areas		
Small	Chalton	No	No access to large formal recreation areas		yes
Large	Clifton	Yes	Most residents able to access large formal recreation areas although there is a small gap to the west.		
Large	Clophill	Yes	Clophill Playing Field. More limited provision to the east of the settlement	Yes	
Minor	Cranfield	Some deficiencies	High Street Recreation Area located centrally - residents both east and west outside of catchment to large formal recreation area.		
Major	Flitwick	Yes	Even distribution of large formal recreation areas with no clear deficiencies, although perhaps lower levels of provision in north west and north east.		
Large	Harlington	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation areas	Yes	
Large	Henlow	Yes	Good local large formal recreation areas. Lack of access in area south of RAF Henlow		
Large	Houghton Conquest	Yes	Large Formal Recreation area centrally located	Yes	

Settlement Hierarchy	Settlement Name	Current position		Issues Raised Through Consultation	
		Access to Large Formal Recreation Areas	Comments	Quality Issues Raised	Aspiration for Additional Large Formal Recreation Areas
Small	Kensworth	Yes	Most residents able to access large formal recreation areas		Yes
Minor	Langford	Some deficiencies	Good large formal recreation areas but located largely to the north of the settlement.		Yes
Large	Meppershall	Yes	Most residents within catchment. Small gap in accessibility to the south		
Minor	Potton	Some deficiencies	Some residents outside of catchment for large formal recreation areas.	Yes	Yes
Large	Silsoe	No	No large formal recreation areas	Yes (and quantity)	Yes
Small	Stanbridge	No	No large formal recreation areas provided		
Small	Streatley	Yes	Large formal recreation area located centrally - all residents within catchment		yes
Large	Blunham	Yes	Good access to existing provision	Yes (and quantity)	
Major	Ampthill	More limited	Most areas lacking in large formal recreation areas. Ampthill Park provides resources for residents in this area but does not function as formal park		
Minor	Arlesey	No	Lack of large formal recreation areas overall, some small shortfalls in south	Yes	Yes
Large	Aspley Guise	No	No access to large formal recreation areas in catchment		
Small	Aspley Heath	No	No access to large formal recreation areas in catchment		

Settlement Hierarchy	Settlement Name	Current position		Issues Raised Through Consultation	
		Access to Large Formal Recreation Areas	Comments	Quality Issues Raised	Aspiration for Additional Large Formal Recreation Areas
Minor	Barton Le Clay	Some deficiencies	Gaps in provision of large formal recreation areas to north and south.		
Minor	Caddington	No	All residents outside of catchment to large formal open space.		
Small	Campton and Chicksands	No	No large formal recreation areas		
Major	Dunstable	Some deficiencies	Lack of access to large formal recreation areas in Watling ward.		
Small	Dunton	Yes	Large Formal Recreation area located to the north of the settlement - some residents to the south outside of catchment.		
Large	Eaton Bray	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation areas.		
Small	Eversholt	Yes	Large formal recreation area in north of settlement,		
Small	Everton	Yes	Good access - Everton Recreation Ground.		
Minor	Fairfield	Yes	Centrally located large formal recreation area		
Small	Flitton	Yes	Provision located between Flitton and Greenfield - access for some residents is further than the target catchment		
Small	Gravenhurst	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation area.		
Small	Greenfield	Yes	Provision located between Flitton and Greenfield - access for some residents is further than the target catchment		

Settlement Hierarchy	Settlement Name	Current position		Issues Raised Through Consultation	
		Access to Large Formal Recreation Areas	Comments	Quality Issues Raised	Aspiration for Additional Large Formal Recreation Areas
Small	Haynes	Yes	Site located on the eastern side of the settlement although within the recommended catchment of almost all residents.	Yes	Yes
Large	Heath and Reach	Yes	Thrift Road Recreation Ground means that there is good access for the majority of residents. The location of this site to the west of the village however means that access is more difficult in the north and east.	Yes	
Large	Hockliffe	Yes	Hockliffe Recreation Ground serves all residents.		
Major	Houghton Regis	Yes	Lack of access in Houghton Hall ward although largely negated by location of Houghton Hall Park.		
Small	Husborne Crawley	No	No large formal recreation areas provided		
Major	Leighton Buzzard	Some deficiencies	Some deficiencies in south Leighton Buzzard and South Linslade.		
Small	Lidlington	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation areas.		
Minor	Marston Moretaine	Some deficiencies	Main recreation area located to far east of settlement - gap in access to west.		
Large	Maulden	Yes	Some large formal recreation areas		
Small	Millbrook	Yes	Large formal Recreation area located centrally - most residents are able to access facilities. Access to east of settlement		
Small	Moggerhanger	Yes	Large formal recreation area located to north of settlement, but most residents within distance,		

Settlement Hierarchy	Settlement Name	Current position		Issues Raised Through Consultation	
		Access to Large Formal Recreation Areas	Comments	Quality Issues Raised	Aspiration for Additional Large Formal Recreation Areas
			although A603 bisects village.		
Small	Northill	No	No large formal recreation area		
Small	Old Warden	No	No large formal recreation spaces		
Small	Pulloxhill	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation areas		
Small	Ridgmont	No	No large formal recreation area		
Small	Salford	No	No large formal recreation area		
Major	Sandy	Yes	Good level of access to facilities, some small gaps in provision to the south.		
Minor	Shefford	Limited	Access to large formal recreation areas limited in West Shefford		
Large	Shillington	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation areas, only those at the extremes of the settlement are not.		
Large	Slip End	Yes	Site located to north of settlement but most residents within recommended distance threshold.		
Small	Southill	Yes	All residents in catchment of large formal recreation areas		
Small	Stondon	Yes	Most residents within catchment area of large formal recreation area, although some gaps in accessibility towards extremes of settlement.	Yes	Yes

Settlement Hierarchy	Settlement Name	Current position		Issues Raised Through Consultation	
		Access to Large Formal Recreation Areas	Comments	Quality Issues Raised	Aspiration for Additional Large Formal Recreation Areas
Minor	Stotfold	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation areas.		
Small	Studham	No	No large formal recreation areas		
Small	Sundon	Yes	Most residents within catchment of large formal recreation area.		
Small	Sutton	Yes	Recreation area on High Street is accessible to most residents.		
Small	Tempsford	No	No provision - all residents outside catchment		
Small	Tilsworth	Yes	Good access to Tilsworth Recreation Ground, although site is not located centrally within settlement		
Minor	Toddington	Yes	Good network of large formal recreation areas		
Small	Totternoe	Yes	Site located to east and at the end of the settlement. Due to the linear nature of Totternhoe, some residents outside the catchment.	Yes	
Small	Upper Caldecote	Yes	Good access to large formal recreation area		
Large	Westoning	Yes	Large Formal Recreation area located to the east of the settlement - small deficiencies in the west.		yes
Large	Woburn	Yes	Good distribution, all residents within catchment of large formal recreation areas.		
Small	Wrestlingworth	No	No provision - all residents outside catchment		

## Quantity

### Setting Quantity Standards

10.73 Overall, consultation demonstrates satisfaction with the amount of sites provided and for formal recreation areas, the majority of emphasis is placed on improvements to the quality of sites rather than the provision of additional facilities. There is, however, evidence of unmet demand for large formal recreation areas in a small number of settlements.

10.74 Reflecting this, application of the accessibility standard indicates that there are some areas where residents are outside of the catchment area for facilities.

10.75 It is clear that there is a widespread distribution of these sites. Table 10.6 reveals that circa 26 additional sites are required to meet target accessibility standard (including small villages). Based upon an average site size of 2.3 ha, the provision of these additional sites would require an additional 59.8 hectares of large formal recreation space across Central Bedfordshire.

**This equates to a total requirement of 298.7 ha to meet current demand (equivalent to 1.17ha per 1000 population).**

10.76 The recommended local quantity standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

## Quantity

Large Recreation Areas - Quantity Standard
Formal Recreation Spaces – 1.17ha per 1000 population
Justification
This figure represents the minimum requirement for recreation areas in Central Bedfordshire if all residents were to be located within a 10 minute walk time of a large formal recreation area.

### Application of the Quantity Standard

10.77 Table 10.7 illustrates the application of this standard in the placemaking areas outlining both current and projected future deficiencies while Table 10.8 summarises the application of the standard in each of the settlement hierarchies. It must be noted that these provide a broad indication only as quantity standards should really be considered at a local level in conjunction with accessibility.

**Table 10.7 – Indicative shortfalls and surpluses of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Area**

Area	Required (Current)	Required (Future)	Shortfall / Surplus (Current)	Shortfall / Surplus (Future)
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	61.0038	68.3046	-10.8	-18.1
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	63.2619	72.8559	-16.1	-25.7
North	174.3885	198.7947	-32.5	-56.9
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	298.6542	339.9552	-59.4	-100.7

**Table 10.8 - Indicative shortfalls and surpluses of Large Formal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Required (Current)	Required (Future)	Shortfall / Surplus (Current)	Shortfall / Surplus (Future)
Major Settlements	163.7	187.7	-59.4	-83.4
Minor Settlements	58.0	66.2	-15.7	-23.9
Large Villages	48.1	51.5	9.1	5.7
Small Villages	30.5	31.7	1.6	0.4

10.78 As Table 10.8 indicates there are significant implications arising from the projected population growth, with an additional 37 hectares of formal recreation space being required to meet future needs, based upon population projections. The majority of this additional requirement is found in the major settlements, with shortfalls currently equating to 50 hectares but increasing by almost 24 hectares as a result of population growth. The implications of growth are much more limited in the large villages (3.4ha) and small villages (1.2ha).

10.79 Application of the indicative quantity standard of 1.17ha per 1000 population at settlement level indicates that shortfalls are currently highest in the following settlements:

- Leighton Buzzard
- Dunstable
- Flitwick

- Ampthill
- Biggleswade
- Cranfield
- Sandy
- Caddington
- Shefford
- Arlesey
- Aspley Guise
- Barton-le-Clay
- Silsoe

10.80 The highest impact of population growth will be experienced in the following settlements (all have existing deficiencies):

- Leighton Buzzard (additional 8 hectares required)
- Houghton Regis (additional 6 hectares required)
- Biggleswade (additional 4.5 hectares required)
- Marston Moretaine (additional 2.5 hectares required)
- Ampthill (additional 2 hectares required)

10.81 By 2022, the following additional settlements will have deficiencies of greater than 1ha:

- Leighton Buzzard
- Biggleswade
- Dunstable
- Flitwick
- Ampthill
- Houghton Regis
- Cranfield
- Caddington
- Arlesey
- Sandy
- Marston Moretaine
- Shefford
- Silsoe
- Aspley Heath
- Barton-le-Clay
- Clophill
- Campton & Chicksands
- Chalton
- Streatley
- Clifton

10.82 Notably, while there is currently sufficient provision to meet the local standard in Potton, Houghton Conquest and Streatley, population growth will cause a small shortfall in each of these areas in future years. All areas with existing deficiencies will continue to have deficiencies by 2022.

10.83 Full detail of all settlements with deficiencies is provided in Appendix A. The application of quantity standards should be considered in conjunction with accessibility standards to determine where new provision is required.

## **Quality**

### **Setting Quality Standards**

10.84 Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents, as well as their aspirations in relation to the type of spaces that they would like to see provided. Supporting this, site visits have provided an overview of the quality of recreation areas.

10.85 For formal recreation spaces, on the whole, improvements to the quality of provision were seen as a greater priority by consultees than the creation of additional recreation spaces (although new provision is required in some areas). Sections 5 & 10 also highlights the opportunity to upgrade several existing large formal recreation spaces with a view to creating formal urban parks.

10.86 This information can be used to identify the key components of each type of open space in relation to quality and to set a quality standard that should be used as a basis for improving existing spaces as well as the creation of new spaces.

10.87 The quality standard for formal recreation spaces is set out overleaf. Further detail can be found in the Design Guidance.

## Quality

### Quality Standard – Large Formal Recreation Areas

Local consultation, national guidance and best practice indicate that new and existing large formal recreation areas should meet with the following criteria;

Quality Requirements – Large Formal Recreation Areas	
Size and Location	Sufficiently large to meet demand (at least 1ha) Appropriately located for local catchment (within 10 minute walk time of target residents) Accessible via safe footpaths Clear boundaries that are locally appropriate and promote security
Character	Formal recreation area containing a variety of facilities Appropriate for residents of different ages
Access	Clearly defined pathways and cycleways and cycle storage Compliant with DDA
Facilities	Clearly defined paths Appropriate and regular seating Information and signage at main entrance and at areas requiring safety information Play equipment (linking with requirements identified in Section 9 – this may include natural play) Sports facilities (requirements outlined further within Playing Pitch Assessment – under separate cover) Appropriate bins Management of dog fouling Sufficient parking
Activities	Clear events programme Volunteer opportunities for the local community

### Application of Quality Standard

10.88 Several large formal recreation areas fall below the level where all factors are considered to be acceptable or above on the site visits matrix (66%). Quality improvements required are included within Appendix A.

### Summary – Issues Identified

#### Usage

26% of respondents to the telephone survey visit large recreation areas at least once per week and a further 22% use these spaces at least once per month. This makes this type of open space one of the most frequently visited across Central Bedfordshire. Just 35% of residents never visit a large recreation area meaning that these spaces serve the highest proportion of residents of all types of open space in the area.

Use of large recreation areas varies more between different demographic groups than most

other types of open space. In particular, usage by residents over the age of 55 is relatively low and residents with a disability are also less likely to use a large recreation area. Residents with dependents are far more likely to visit such a site than others. While relaxation, walking and exercise, play, sports and events are the main reasons for visiting large recreation areas, other than time and interest, the most common barriers to use are lack of local spaces and difficulties accessing sites. Residents in Leighton Buzzard and the rural South and those in large villages highlight greater concerns about accessing these spaces than in other areas. Removal of barriers to access is likely to increase the overall usage of these spaces.

### **Quantity, Quality and Accessibility**

There are 239 hectares of land dedicated to large formal recreation areas. There are no clear patterns in the distribution of these spaces between different geographical areas of different settlement hierarchies.

The household survey demonstrates an overall view that there are enough large recreation areas (64%) meaning that satisfaction is higher than most types of open space in Central Bedfordshire and there are no clear differences in views between residents of different sectors of the population. Reflecting this satisfaction, few issues are raised with regards the quantity of large formal recreation areas in Green Infrastructure documents and Parish Plans, or through other modes of consultation.

Like the quantity of provision, overall, the quality of formal recreation areas is viewed positively although opportunities for improvement are identified, including cleanliness and maintenance, improvement to the type and range of facilities provided and seating, dog fouling is also identified as a key issue at these sites. There are no clear variations in views or actual quality by area or settlement hierarchy. Consultation with Town and Parish Councils, as well as a review of green infrastructure studies highlights a clear emphasis on improvements to the quality of spaces rather than the amount of provision – only five responding Town and Parish Councils indicate that they would prioritise new facilities over improvements to existing sites. These documents also highlight the importance of respecting the balance between recreation and conservation.

Like many other types of open space, residents of Central Bedfordshire expect to find large recreation areas in close proximity to the home. With the exception of small villages, residents in all tiers of the settlement hierarchy would expect to find a large recreation area within walking distance of the home (circa 10 minutes). A local standard has therefore been set at a 10 minute catchment area.

Application of this accessibility standard demonstrates that formal recreation spaces tend to be located within settlements. Circa 26 additional spaces are required to meet the accessibility standard of a 10 minute walk time. Based upon this, the total requirement for provision (quantity standard) of large formal recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire is therefore 1.17ha per 1000 population.

Application of this standard demonstrates that while many areas meet this standard currently, population growth will have a significant impact on the demand for large recreation spaces, with 20 settlements having deficiencies of over 1ha by 2022. Notably, while there is currently sufficient provision to meet the local standard in Potton, Houghton Conquest and Streatley, population growth will cause a small shortfall in each of these areas in future years. All areas with existing deficiencies will continue to have deficiencies by 2021.

The use of the quality standard to guide improvements to existing sites is also of central importance for large recreation areas, given the priority placed in consultations on improving these sites.

## **Step 5 – Identifying Priorities**

### **Key Issues to Address**

10.89 The above analysis therefore indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to large formal recreation areas:

- Usage figures demonstrate that large recreation areas are used by a higher proportion of the population than any other type of open space and they therefore represent a valuable resource
- The location of sites is one of the key determinants of use and consultation suggests that residents expect to be within a 10 minute walk time of a large recreation area – the local standard has therefore been set at a 10 minute walk time
- For formal recreation areas, in most settlements improvements to the quality of existing sites are considered to be as if not more important than the creation of additional sites. In some areas however, residents are outside of the catchment for sites and there is a need for new areas. Residents and providers place a particular value on quality of facilities and it is important that this is taken into account
- While the quality of existing sites is largely good, there are high aspirations for the type and quality of facilities provided at large formal recreation spaces and a need for a particular focus on improving the quality of facilities in many areas
- Population growth is likely to see an increase in demand for this type of facility and a consequent increase in visitor numbers

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

10.90 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- ensure that all residents have appropriate access to large recreation spaces
- attract users from all sectors of the population;
- meet user aspirations relating to quality of provision as well as local priorities and national objectives and promote the provision of a strategic network of high quality large recreation areas; and
- maintain a balance between the recreational function of these sites and biodiversity and conservation features.

### **Key Priorities**

10.91 It is therefore recommended that key priorities for the delivery of large formal recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire are as follows:

- promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Strategy
- seek to ensure that all residents are within a 10 minute walktime of a formal recreation area. Where residents are within a 10 minute walk time of an urban park, as higher order facilities, this negates the requirement for additional large recreation areas
- ensure that the impact of population growth on recreation areas is recognised through the inclusion of policy requiring development to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through on-site provision of facilities, CIL and planning contributions. Where quantity and accessibility standards are already met, contributions should be made towards the management, maintenance and improvement of existing facilities
- work with communities and partners to ensure that all sites meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section. Prioritise qualitative improvements over additional spaces where residents are already within the appropriate catchment of a space
- facilitate access routes from nearby settlements to these sites, including safe footpaths and cycling opportunities

### Site / Area Specific Implications

10.92 Table 10.9 summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 10.9 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites
<b>New provision</b>
Areas without access or with limited access to formal recreation areas. These include;
Cranfield
Langford
Potton
Silsoe
Stanbridge
Amphill
Barton – le – Clay
Dunstable
Marston Moretaine
Shefford
Note: all of the above highlight need within strategic documents and / or Parish plans. In addition, areas where large deficiencies have been identified, including Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable, Flitwick, Amphill, Biggleswade, ,Cranfield, Sandy, Caddington and Shefford.

Areas of new development where incoming residents will create quantitative deficiency and / or are outside of catchment for existing open spaces.

### **Quality Enhancements**

In the majority of areas, qualitative improvements should be the key priority. Evidence suggests that high quality sites are highly valued.

Priority for improvement should be given to high value sites – sites serving unique catchment areas but are of poor quality

Areas which contain clusters of poor quality provision should also be prioritised

Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where additional residents will place additional pressure on existing facilities.

# 11. Informal Recreation Areas

## Introduction

11.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to informal recreation areas in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations.

## Context and Definition

11.2 As set out in Section 10, large recreation areas are sites primarily designed for the purposes of recreation. Sites may also however provide a sense of place for the local community, help to address social inclusion issues within wider society and also provide structural and landscaping benefits. Some sites may also have wider ecological and environmental functions.

11.3 Responses to the household survey and wider consultation identified different expectations of usage and provision between Formal and Informal Recreation Areas. To accurately capture the different primary functions of large recreation sites in Central Bedfordshire, and to identify those sites whose primary function is ecological rather than recreational, this category has been subdivided into:

### Type 1: Large Formal Recreation Areas

- **Large sites that contain formal recreation opportunities, for example sports pitches and play facilities. These sites will be maintained and managed primarily for formal recreation.**

### Type 2: Informal recreation areas

- **Sites that provide informal recreation opportunities. They are likely to be more natural in character and contain fewer formal facilities. This categorisation includes woodlands and commons. These spaces may include some complimentary facilities such as children and young people's facilities but allow people to experience the natural environment.**

11.4 It should be noted that the availability of one type of recreation space does not necessarily negate demand for others.

11.5 For the purposes of this study, informal recreation areas have therefore been defined as follows:

**“Large green spaces that are natural in character. These sites generally offer informal recreational opportunities such as walking and relaxation and allow visitors to experience the natural environment. As well as offering recreational opportunities, many sites in this category are also important for biodiversity and ecology. “**

11.6 The sites included within this category are perhaps more varied than those in any other. The similarities between them lie in their informal nature and their natural properties. They may however present a mix of different opportunities and include sites of many different characters including woodland, common land and heathland. While many are similar to countryside sites, they are generally smaller in scale and more likely to serve local populations only. They are however particularly important in offering more informal and natural recreational opportunities.

11.7 Where sites contain a variety of facilities, these have been categorised under the most appropriate typology. Large green areas and footpaths will provide the total size of the recreation area (hectares) and any other facilities (including play space) will be calculated separately under their own typology. This ensures that open space is not counted twice within this study. The site will however be considered as a whole entity and the resources that it offers holistically will be taken into account during analysis.

11.8 This section considers the adequacy of informal recreation areas only. The adequacy of large formal recreation areas is considered in Section 10.

11.9 It should be noted that while this section evaluates only the recreational opportunities that these sites provide, as well as providing opportunities for recreation, many informal recreation areas have much wider ecological and biodiversity functions and many have been awarded national and local designations (SSSI, CSW) etc. Their importance in terms of wider biodiversity and conservation should not be underestimated and the findings of this assessment should be considered in conjunction with other studies evaluating these properties.

11.10 The remainder of this section presents the findings of the local needs assessment and the audit of provision and presents a summary of the usage, quality, quantity and accessibility of facilities for informal recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire.

11.11 The key issues arising from the evaluation of local needs and audit of existing provision, as well as the creation and application of local standards are summarised at the end of this section.

## **Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision**

### **Usage Profile**

11.12 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open space types detailed in this study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space. ***Consultation did not differentiate between the subdivided Large Recreation Area typology and therefore relates to both formal and informal large recreation areas.***

### **Household Survey Responses**

## Usage

11.13 26% of respondents to the survey visit large recreation areas at least once weekly and a further 22% use these spaces at least once per month. This makes this type of open space one of the most frequently visited across Central Bedfordshire. Just 35% of residents never visit a large recreation area meaning that these spaces serve the highest proportion of residents of all types of open space in the area.

11.14 Use of large recreation areas varies more between different demographic groups than most other types of open space, in particular:

- more than half of residents aged over 55 (56%) never visit large recreation areas, whereas just 10% of those aged 18 and 34 never visit. Those aged 35 to 54 visit most frequently with 37% visiting once per week or more. This compares to 18% of residents aged 18 – 34 and 20% of those aged over 55
- unlike other types of open space, male residents visit large recreation areas much more frequently than females. 46% of females never visit a large recreation area (23% of males) while 35% of males visit weekly or more regularly (19% of females)
- residents with a disability are less likely to visit a large recreation area. Just 10% visit weekly (compared to 29%) and 45% never use these sites
- like all other types of open space (except allotments), residents with dependents below aged 14 are more likely to use large recreation areas than those without. Unlike other types of open space, residents with children aged between 9 and 13 are more likely to visit (38% weekly) than those with children under 8 (20% weekly).
- there is little difference in use between white British residents and non white British residents. A slightly higher proportion of residents of non white British origin never use large recreation areas.

## Use of Informal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas

11.15 The survey indicates similarities in the use of large recreation areas in the different Placemaking Areas of Central Bedfordshire. The proportion of residents that never use such spaces is slightly higher in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and the West (part of the North placemaking area). These spaces are used most frequently in the West (31% weekly or more often); 20% of residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 24% in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South, and 29% of residents in the East use these spaces weekly.

## Use of Informal Recreation Areas Settlement Hierarchy

11.16 There are few differences between the usage of large recreation areas at different levels of the settlement hierarchy. 71% of residents in large villages use large recreation areas at least once per year compared to 58% in the small villages, 64% in major settlements and 65% in minor settlements. This demonstrates that these spaces are important resources in settlements of all sizes.

## Reasons for visiting Informal Recreation Areas

11.17 Reasons for visiting large recreation areas are perhaps more varied than some other types of open space. Respondents indicate that the main reasons for visiting are:

- To relax (33%)
- Walk and exercise (32%)
- Children play (28%)
- Dog walking (14%)
- Sports (13%)
- Events (8%)

11.18 Like most other types of open space, a lack of time (30%) and interest (20%) are the main barriers to use. The next most common reasons are difficulties in accessing sites (11%), a lack of local spaces (4%) and a lack of facilities (3%). 1% indicate that disabled access is a concern to them.

11.19 Analysis of use across the different segments of population reveals little variation in reasons for visiting large recreation areas despite the differences in user patterns. Analysis concludes that:

- men are more likely to use these spaces to play sport and relax whilst women use them for play (perhaps with children) and to relax
- the proportion of residents using large recreation areas for walking and exercise increases with age. More residents in younger age groups use these spaces to relax

11.20 As the population of Central Bedfordshire ages, these types of space may therefore become more important. It should be noted that as already referenced, formal and informal recreation areas were grouped together for the purposes of consultation and reasons for use may be influenced by this.

### **Reasons for Visiting Informal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

11.21 Reasons for visiting spaces are the same in all areas, although use in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South is often for events, whereas in Dunstable and Houghton Regis they are more often used for exercise. Few residents in Leighton Buzzard expect to use large recreation areas for sport.

### **Reasons for Visiting Informal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

11.22 The reasons for use in each of the three settlement hierarchies are the same, although these spaces are used particularly for play in the Minor Service Centres and for sports in the Major Service Centres.

### **Barriers to use**

11.23 Lack of interest and a lack of time are the main barriers to use of large recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire. The most commonly referenced other barrier is a perceived lack of local spaces.

### **Barriers to Use of Informal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

11.24 The barriers to use remain consistent across all placemaking areas. There is however a greater degree of concern around the provision of local spaces and difficulties in accessing sites in the Leighton Buzzard and Rural South than in all other parts.

### Barriers to Use of Informal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy

11.25 Barriers to use are also the same in each settlement hierarchy. The most notable exception to this is that 19% of residents in Large Villages highlight the lack of a local facility as a barrier to use, and 25% indicate that these spaces are difficult to get to. Almost all residents highlighting this as an issue are based within the Large Villages.

### Current Provision and Views on Current Provision

#### Quantity

11.26 The audit reveals that 1801 hectares is dedicated to informal recreation areas in Central Bedfordshire.

11.27 Table 11.1 summarises the number, size distribution and total land dedicated to these spaces and sets out the current and future provision in terms of ‘hectares per 1000 population’. The calculation excludes land that is covered in other typologies (for example play areas)

**Table 11.1 Size Distribution of Informal Recreation Areas**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Total Provision (Ha) Excluding Sites over 20ha	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)
Informal Recreation Areas	119	1801.8	7.1	6.2	15.1	455.4	1.8	1.6

11.28 Table 11.2 summarises the amount of informal recreation areas by Placemaking Area and indicates that the total provision is inconsistent, with much larger quantities of informal recreation areas in the north of Central Bedfordshire.

**Table 11.2 Size Distribution by Placemaking Area**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Total Provision (Ha) Excluding Sites over 20ha	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)
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Dunstable and Houghton Regis	4	11.9	0.2	0.2	3.0	11.9	0.2	0.2
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	15	282.8	5.2	4.5	18.9	82.1	1.5	1.3
North	100	1507.1	10.1	8.9	15.1	375.0	2.5	2.2
Central Bedfordshire	119	1801.8	7.1	6.2	15.1	469.1	1.8	1.6

11.29 In order to evaluate whether there are any differences in the distribution of informal recreation areas according to the size of the settlement, Table 11.3 summarises the distribution of these sites by settlement hierarchy.

**Table 11.3 Size Distribution by Settlement Hierarchy**

Area		Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Perception of Residents
Major Settlements	Informal	36	346.16	2.47	2.16	9.5	23% not enough
Minor Settlements	Informal	27	354.11265	7.14	6.26	11.1	38% not enough
Large Villages	Informal	29	501.4	12.21	11.39	13.7	13% not enough
Small Villages	Informal	25	586.787	22.53	21.66	19.4	35% not enough

### Quantity of Provision - Key Issues

11.30 Tables 11.1 -11.3 illustrate the following key issues regarding the number, type and size distribution of informal recreation areas:

- there are 119 informal recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire meaning that 1801 hectares of land is dedicated to informal recreation opportunities. This is a much higher amount of land than is allocated to formal large recreation areas
- there are several sites that are over 20ha in size. Excluding these sites, provision decreases from 5.6ha per 1000 population to 1.8 ha per 1000 population
- provision is highest in the North placemaking area and lowest in Dunstable and Houghton Regis

- when reviewing the distribution of informal recreation areas by settlement size, a clear pattern emerges. The amount of informal recreation areas per 1000 population increases as the size of settlement becomes smaller, so perhaps reflecting the characteristics of the settlements, the Major and Minor Service Centres have lower provision of informal recreation areas. This pattern remains even when excluding sites exceeding 20ha in size
- the projected population increases will see the provision per 1000 population decrease significantly, particularly in the Major and Minor Service Centres

## Quantity of Provision – Consultation Responses

### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

11.31 A review of the priorities of Green Infrastructure studies and Parish Plans reveals that in the majority of areas, improvements to existing large formal recreation areas are prioritised over new facilities. Reflecting the satisfaction with existing levels of provision, relatively few plans identify a requirement for new provision.

11.32 The key priorities included in current documents in relation to the amount of larger recreation areas are set out below. This list includes views provided as part of Town and Parish Council consultation, as well as those set out in adopted policy documents;

- Biggleswade - Requirement to increase publically accessible open space to west and south of Biggleswade (GI) – Biggleswade Green Wheel
- Flitwick – aspirations for recreational open space (GI) through protection of existing woodland and enhancement of new – creation of green wheel
- Cranfield – new community woodland (Rectory Wood) to link Cranwell to Marston Thrift (GI)
- Potton – aspiration to create community woodland beside Potton Brook (GI)
- Stotfold – Mill Green Nature Reserve is well used. GI plan prioritises extension of this site and creation of further community woodland (GI)
- Clifton – new accessible woodland (west of Stockbridge Farm) – GI
- Harlington – new accessible woodland (GI)
- Langford - Creation of new woodlands (east of railway and wetlands) GI
- Meppershall – creation of additional Informal recreation areas / wildlife resources (GI)
- Silsoe – creation of new community woodland (GI) and acquisition of land for wildlife meadow (GI)
- Brogborough – potential new woodland on former landfill site(GI)
- Chalton – additional woodland and extension of Fancott Wood and Meadow
- Kensworth – creation of informal meadows and community woodland (GI)
- Streatley – expansion of woodland sites.

11.33 In addition to the above identified opportunities for new sites, several GI plans also highlight sites that currently have limited public access but where there may be opportunities to explore greater recreational use of the area. Identified sites include;

- Improve access to Stratton Moat, Biggleswade (GI)
- Provide public access to Cox Hill (Sandy GI)
- Improve access to Etonbury Wood (Arlesey GI)
- Retain access to Arlesey Common (Arlesey GI)

- Improve access to Chicksands Wood and Sandy Hills Nature Reserve (Clophill GI)
- Henlow – secure access to Poppy Lakes and extend Millennium Meadow (GI)
- Houghton Conquest – create public access to existing woodlands (GI)
- Stanbridge – Negotiation of access to Stanbridge Woods (GI)
- Streatley – promotion of public access to Holt Wood and Fernhill Wood (GI).

11.34 In addition to the local green infrastructure plans, there are several landscape – scale initiatives operating within Central Bedfordshire, specifically;

- The creation of the Forest of Marston Vale
- The Chilterns AONB
- The Greensand Ridge Nature Improvement Area.

11.35 These initiatives will encompass the provision and enhancement of green space and the creation of broader green infrastructure, including recreational opportunities.

### **Household Survey Responses**

11.36 The household survey demonstrates an overall view that there are enough large recreation areas (64%) and 5% believe there are too many. 25% consider there to be not enough, while a further 6% feel there are only nearly enough. Satisfaction with provision is therefore higher than most types of open space in Central Bedfordshire and there are no clear differences in views between residents of different sectors of the population. As noted previously, the household survey grouped together views on formal and informal recreation areas.

### **Views on Quantity of Informal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

11.37 The household survey indicates that views on the amount of provision are also relatively evenly matched although residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and the East are slightly less satisfied with the amount of spaces. When taking into account both formal and informal recreation areas it is in this area where levels of provision are lowest.

11.38 Interestingly, despite higher levels of dissatisfaction with quantity in the East (part of the north placemaking area), 63% of sites in the North placemaking area are located in the East and almost the same proportion of hectares of large formal recreation areas. This may suggest that there are other issues affecting the views of residents in this area.

### **Views on Quantity of Informal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

11.39 Despite the variations in the amount of provision, analysis of the household survey demonstrates that there are no clear variations in opinion on the quantity of large recreation areas between residents at different levels of the settlement hierarchy. Residents in the minor service centres and small villages are slightly more dissatisfied with a higher proportion of residents indicating that there are not enough or only nearly enough. It is in these settlements where analysis of barriers to use demonstrated that there is perception that there is a lack of local open spaces and that these sites are difficult to access.

11.40 Notably however, the proportion of residents believing provision to be about right is highest in the large villages, where combined provision is also highest.

## **Views on Quantity of Informal Recreation Areas - Town and Parish Councils**

11.41 Town and Parish Councils demonstrate positive perceptions in relation to the amount of large recreation areas than respondents to the household survey and 75% consider there to be enough of these areas.

11.42 The majority of Towns and Parishes operate an area fitting within the description of a formal recreation area and most commented upon the adequacy of formal recreation space rather than informal spaces.

11.43 The impact of population growth on existing sites was however raised and it was indicated that new space may be required to serve the needs of new residents resulting of development. Just five responding Town and Parish Councils indicated that they would prioritise the provision of additional recreation space over the improvement of existing sites. The importance of these sites is however clear, with 16% of respondents identifying large recreation areas as their top priority for improvement.

### **Current Provision**

#### **Quality**

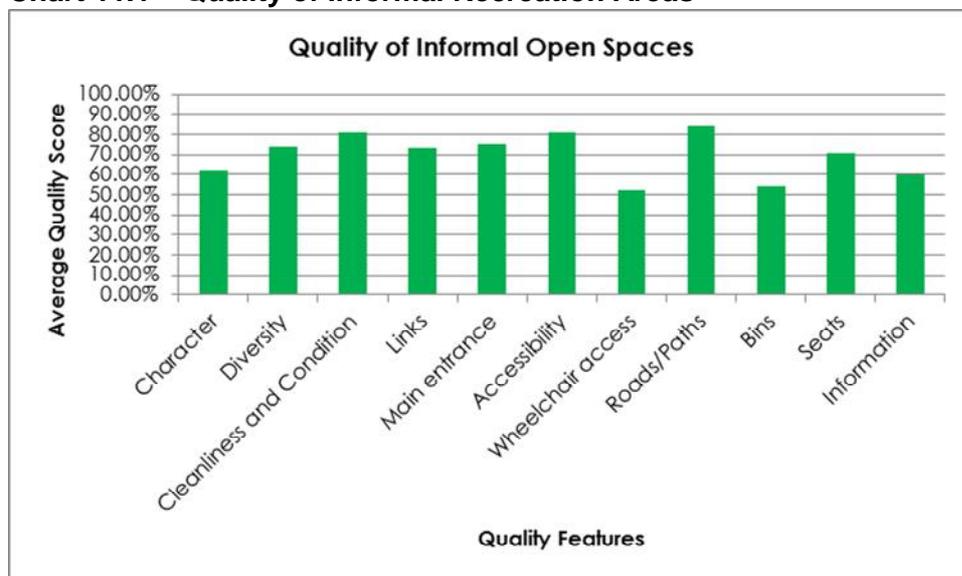
#### **Existing Provision**

11.44 The quality of informal recreation areas was evaluated using an assessment matrix.

11.45 The average score achieved for informal recreation areas was 61%. Chart 11.1 summarises the average score for each of the key features measured and indicates that many of the areas against which sites score more poorly are those generally associated with more formal recreation spaces. Many sites are natural with few specific facilities and indeed in some instances, the provision of recreational facilities may conflict with other functions of the site. Site assessments for these types of open space should therefore be treated as indicative only.

11.46 Wheelchair access is also poor, which is likely to be reflective of the characteristics of this type of open space, which by very definition is natural.

**Chart 11.1 – Quality of Informal Recreation Areas**



11.47 Site specific comments made during visits provide a more detailed understanding of the quality of informal recreation areas, indicating that:

- most of the larger sites achieve high site visit scores and have basic facilities facilitating recreation, including parking, signage and clearly defined footpaths
- in contrast, some smaller sites are described as less well maintained (in many instances reflecting an emphasis on the promotion of biodiversity and conservation) and perhaps lacking in formal recreational function
- although not featured in the site assessment matrix, it is clear that dog fouling is a particular issue at more informal sites, with several incidences identified and the need to include bins suggested; and
- some opportunities to provide seating were also identified.

11.48 It should be noted that in addition to evaluating the recreational function of informal spaces, the wider value of these sites was also measured, taking into account features such as the character of the site, the sustainability, health benefits and value for nature. The average score achieved for value was 75%, highlighting the important role that such sites play both in recreation, but also their wider benefits, particularly those linked with biodiversity and conservation.

### **Placemaking Areas and Settlement Hierarchy**

8.1 Site visits do not reveal any clear differences in quality between facilities in different areas of Central Bedfordshire or settlements of different sizes.

### **Quality of Provision – Consultation Responses**

#### **Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans**

11.49 While consultations provide an overview of the quality issues experienced, as well as components that are important in the provision of recreation areas, reviews of the existing Green Infrastructure Studies, Parish Plans and detailed consultation provide a more in depth understanding of site specific priorities related to both formal and informal recreation areas. Sites specifically referenced as requiring improvement are set out below. As identified earlier in this section, the majority of qualitative improvements relate to formal recreation areas, while the creation of new informal recreation areas takes higher priority than improvement of these sites.

11.50 The key priorities included in current documents in relation to the quality of larger recreation areas are set out below. This list includes views provided as part of Town and Parish Council consultation, as well as those set out in adopted policy documents:

- Improvement to Biggleswade Common (GI)
- Clophill – requirement for increase in facilities at Lakes area (Parish Plan)
- Harlington – improve existing woodland (GI)
- Totternhoe – site specific priorities, for example handrails (GI)

### **Household Survey Responses**

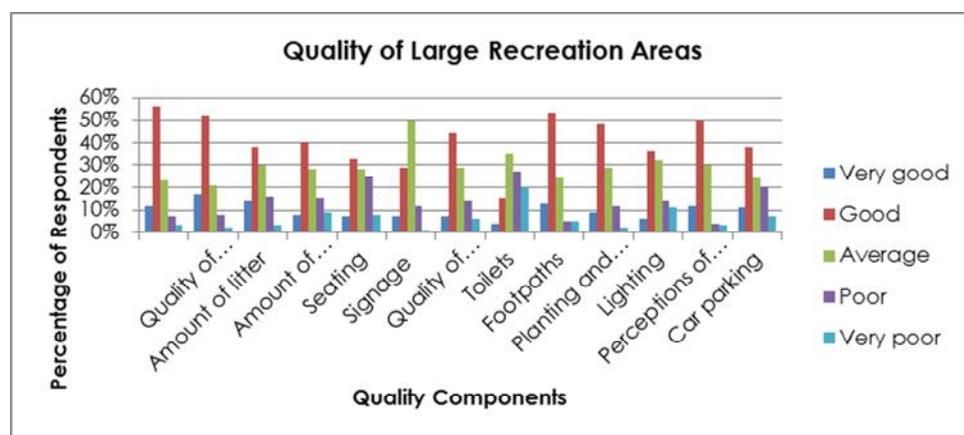
11.51 The household survey indicates that the quality of large recreation areas is viewed positively. 64% of respondents rate these spaces as good or very good and only 5% indicate that they are poor or very poor. Very few residents highlighted the quality of facilities as a barrier to use, further emphasising this point. As already emphasised, views on formal and Informal recreation areas were combined during the household survey.

11.52 There are few clear differences in perceived quality between different sectors of the population. It must be noted however, that the majority of residents who consider spaces to be poor are in the older age groups.

11.53 Chart 11.2 which considers the only the views of those who use large recreation areas, evaluates the perceived quality of key components of a large recreation area. It reveals that with the exception of toilets and signage (which are rated more negatively), the most common response for each component is good. The areas where the highest levels of satisfaction are recorded are as follows:

- Quality of maintenance (69% good or very good)
- Footpaths (66% good or very good)
- Perceptions of safety (62% good or very good)
- Landscaping and planting (57% good or very good)

**Chart 11.2 – Survey results for Quality Factors for Large Recreation Areas**



Areas where the highest levels of dissatisfaction are evident are:

- toilets(47% poor or very poor)
- seating (33% poor or very poor)
- car parking (27% poor or very poor)
- lighting (25% poor or very poor); and
- dog fouling (24% poor or very poor)

11.54 It must be noted that there are higher levels of dissatisfaction exhibited in relation to many of these components than for many of the other types of open space. In addition:

- for all aspects of large recreation areas, residents aged between 34 and 54 are significantly more negative than those in other age groups (for all components except the amount of dog fouling)
- residents of white British origin are far more positive than those of non white ethnic origin for almost all components of a large recreation area with much higher proportions of the population rating different components as average or poor. The only real exception is footpaths; and
- there are no clear differences between those that would consider themselves to have a disability and those that do not
- residents with dependents do not rate the quality of facilities as highly as those without. Those with children aged between 9 – 13 (the age group that use facilities most frequently) are most negative. The range of facilities provided emerges as a particular issue for those with dependents aged 14 – 18

### **Views on Quality of Informal Recreation Areas by Placemaking Areas**

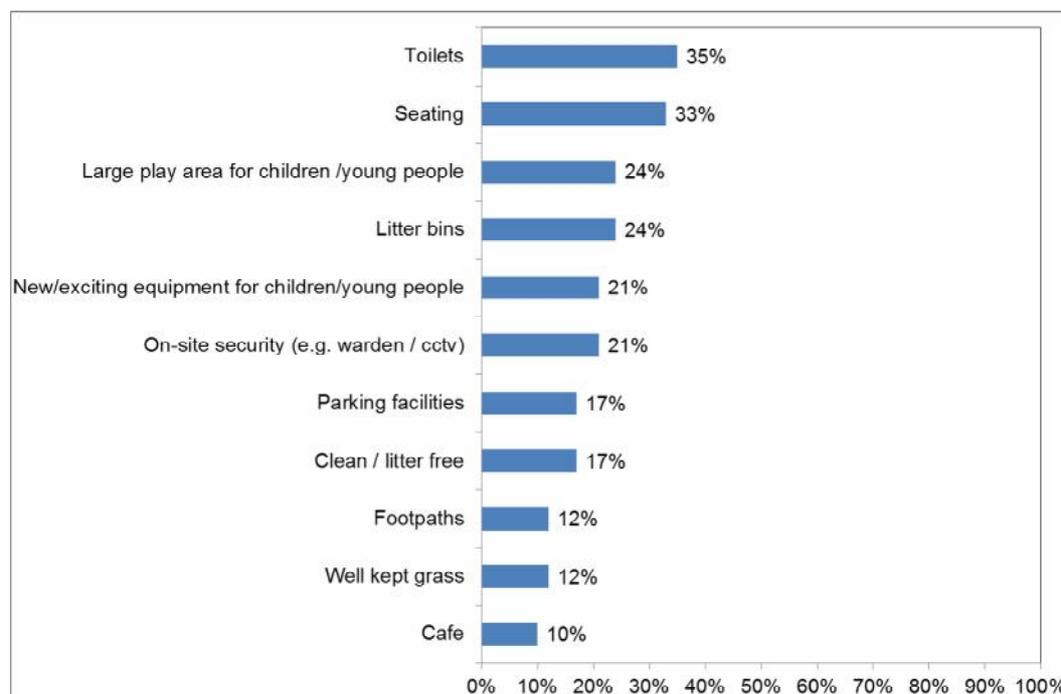
11.55 The survey demonstrates that the overall perceptions are similar across all parts of Central Bedfordshire. While residents in the west of Central Bedfordshire are generally more positive about the quality of their open spaces, all residents considering large recreation areas to be poor are also situated within this area. Leighton Buzzard and Rural South is however the area where the highest proportion of residents gave negative responses.

## Views on Quality of Informal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy

11.56 There are few variations in overall opinions of quality by settlement hierarchy. Fewer residents in the small villages and large villages consider the quality of provision to be good, and most of those indicating that these spaces are of poor quality are based in the small villages or large villages. The majority of comments made to support the views provided suggest that this can largely be attributed to the quality of formal recreation areas rather than more informal sites.

### Quality of Provision – Aspirations

11.57 Chart 11.3 illustrates the survey results identifying the factors that residents consider most important in the provision of high quality large recreation areas. Seating and the inclusion of basic facilities are the factors that are considered to be most important. It should be noted that aspirations for large recreation areas consider both formal and informal recreation areas.



## Views on Quality of Informal Recreation Areas by - Town and Parish Councils

11.58 The quality of larger recreation areas was one of the most widely referenced issues in the Town and Parish Council survey. On the whole, existing provision was viewed positively, with 30% considering facilities to be average and 60% good. The remainder were rated as poor. The key areas of concern or for improvement highlighted were:

- maintenance issues
- dog fouling and litter
- the need to provide a wider variety of facilities and / or equipment at the site (this links to analysis in other typologies)

11.59 Interestingly, just five Towns / Parishes prioritised the need for additional provision over the improvement of existing sites. Those indicating that the need for additional larger recreation areas was greater than improvement of current facilities were Leighton Linlade Town Council, Houghton Regis Town Council, Heath and Reach Parish Council, Flitton and Greenfield Parish Council and Wrestlingworth and Cockayne Hatley Parish Council.

11.60 Larger recreation areas are evidently important to the communities of Central Bedfordshire. Six Towns / Parishes identified investment into larger recreation areas as their highest open space related priority (Flitwick Town Council, Houghton Conquest Parish Council, Eggington Parish Council, Leighton Linlade Town Council, Houghton Regis Town Council and Eversholt Parish Council) and a further five Towns / Parishes identified this type of open space as being within their top three priorities.

### **Balance between Recreation Use and Biodiversity and Conservation Priorities**

11.61 While this assessment considers the requirement for open spaces from a recreational perspective, it is important to note that like countryside recreation sites, many of the informal recreational open spaces are as important from a wildlife and conservation perspective as they are in meeting recreational need. The range of sites included within this typology is diverse and most are multifunctional. As a result, and perhaps more so than for many other types of open space, consultees highlight the importance of balancing recreational need with conservation as well as the need to take into account the capacity of a site to accommodate visitors.

11.62 The increasing population is likely to result in growth in the recreational activities of residents, putting pressure on all sites. This is perhaps of greater significance for sites that have dual function in terms of both recreational value and conservation.

11.63 There is a need to ensure that sites of high biodiversity value are protected from the increasing recreational pressure they will experience in the coming years. The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough has developed a model to predict the sensitivity of sites (A Model to Predict Wildlife Site Sensitivity to Visitor Pressure, February 2011 Bedfordshire and Luton Wildlife Working Group). While it is not possible to apply this model to all sites within Central Bedfordshire, some Countryside recreation sites have already been assessed for their sensitivity. Using this information as a guide, a desk based assessment of the sensitivity of these Countryside recreation sites has been carried out. This is a desk based assessment, drawing on existing information on sites that have been assessed for their sensitivity, professional knowledge of the sites, information about their designations, the area of the site that is designated, and the total site area.

11.64 On this basis, sites have been categorized as high, medium or low sensitivity, depending on whether they are very vulnerable to recreation pressures, moderately vulnerable to recreation pressures, or primarily a recreational asset with limited ecological sensitivity and vulnerability to recreation pressures.

11.65 Table 11.4 summarises the sites that are considered to be of high or medium ecological sensitivity. Reflecting their status of providing habitats of national and local importance, many sites also have national and local designations. These are also detailed in Table 11.4.

**Table 11.4 – Sites of Ecological Sensitivity**

Name	Parish	Site Status/ Classification	Classification
Lancot Meadow	Dunstable	WTNR CWS	high
Blow's Downs	Caddington	WTNR, CWS, SSSI	high
Cottage Bottom Field	Caddington	LNR, CWS	high
Sewell Cutting	Houghton Regis	WTNR, CWS	high
Totternhoe Knolls	Totternhoe	WTNR, LNR, SSSI, CWS	high
Smithcombe Hill	Streatley	NT C.PARK, LGS, CWS, SSSI	high
Stanbridge Meadows	Leighton Linlade	LNR, CWS	high
Mill Nature Reserve	Stotfold	LNR, CWS	high
Biggleswade Common	Biggleswade	CWS, LGS	high
Rowney Warren	Southill	CWS	high
Potton Wood	Potton	SSSI, CWS	high
Glebe Meadows WT Reserve	Arlesey	WTNR	high
Arlesey Old Moat WT Reserve	Arlesey	WTNR	high
Knocking Hoe	Shillington	NNR, SSSI, CWS	high
Pegsdon Hills	Shillington	WTNR, SSSI, CWS	high
Rushymeade	Pulloxhill	CWS	high
Westminster Pond Field	Amphill	none	high
Cooper's Hill Nature Reserve	Amphill	WTNR, LNR, SSSI, CWS	high
Flitwick Moor NR	Flitwick	WTNR, SSSI, CWS	high
Amenity Area / Studham Common	Studham	CWS	high
Maulden Church Meadow	Maulden	SSSI, LNR, CWS	high
Maulden Wood	Maulden	SSSI, CWS	high
Deadman's Hill	Maulden	None GST office?	high
The Riddy	Sandy	LNR	high
Warren Villas WT Nature Reserve	Northill	WTNR, CWS	high
King's Wood and Glebe Meadows	Houghton Conquest	SSSI, LNR, CWS	high
Avery's Garage	Leighton Linlade	None	medium
Heath Wood and Meadow	Leighton Linlade	CWS	medium
Linslade Wood	Leighton Linlade	CWS	medium
Harlington Parish Spinney	Harlington	none	medium
Fairfield Community orchard	Fairfield	CWS	medium
Mallards Walk	Biggleswade	none	medium
Stratton Moat View Point / Stratton Moat	Biggleswade	none	medium
South of Dunton Lane	Biggleswade	CWS	medium
Ickwell Green	Northill	None / village	medium
Stanford Wood	Southill	CWS	medium

Name	Parish	Site Status/ Classification	Classification
Floodplain & Millennium Green	Stotfold	? none	medium
The Hermitage	Arlesey	? none	medium
Polehanger Farm Woodlands	Meppershall	? none	medium
Campton Plantation	Campton & Chicksands	CWS	medium
Rectory Wood	Cranfield	None	medium
Woodland in Moggerhanger Park	Moggerhanger	CWS	medium
Blunham Railway Track	Moggerhanger	CWS	medium
Cut throat Meadow	Amphill/Maulden	CWS	medium
Henlow Common & Langford Meadow LNR	Langford	LNR, CWS	medium
Langford Riverside	Langford	CWS	medium
Holcot Woods	Hulcote & Salford	WTR, CWS	medium
Flitwick Manor Park	Flitwick	CWS	medium
Flitwick Wood	Flitwick	LNR, CWS	medium
Unnamed	Flitton & Greenfield	?	medium
Flitton Moor	Flitton & Greenfield	LNR, CWS	medium
Whipsnade Heath	Whipsnade	CWS	medium
Duck End Nature Reserve	Maulden	LNR, CWS	medium
The Pinnacle	Sandy	LGS, CWS	medium
Mill Meadows	Sandy	None	medium
Sundon Landfill Site	Sundon	None?	medium
Barton Gravel Pit	Barton	None?	medium
Adjacent to Henlow Common & Langford Meadow LNR	Langford	LNR, CWS	medium
Langford Meadow	Langford	CWS	medium
Bury Orchard	Harlington	none	medium

## Accessibility

11.66 Appropriate access to open space and recreation facilities is as important as the quality of those facilities. Table 11.5 summarises the mode of transport that residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use, and actually use, to reach a large recreation area.

**Table 11.5 – Mode of Travel**

Expected vs Actual	Walk	Cycle	Public Transport	Car
Expected	73%	2%	4%	21%
Actual	69%	1%	3%	27%

11.67 Table 11.5 highlights an expectation that residents will have a large recreation area within walking distance from their home. Analysis of actual usage patterns (through the household survey) indicates that this is delivered in most areas.

11.68 Further analysis suggests that this varies slightly by placemaking area and settlement hierarchy specifically:

### **Accessibility by Placemaking Area**

- there are different expectations in each of the placemaking areas. Spaces are expected within walking distance in Dunstable and Houghton Regis (78%) and East Central Bedfordshire (77%) (part of the North placemaking area). In the west (again part of the north placemaking area) 65% would expect to travel on foot, while this drops to 53% in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South

### **Accessibility by Settlement Hierarchy**

- there is much more limited variation across the different tiers of the settlement hierarchy, with the overarching expectation at all levels except small villages being that large recreation areas are within walking distance. A higher proportion of those living in small villages would expect to travel by car.

## **Steps 3 and 4 - Setting and Applying Local Standards**

11.69 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

11.70 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space. Access is particularly important for Informal recreation areas, as many of these sites are located on the edge of settlement boundaries rather than centrally.

11.71 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of informal recreation areas. Existing provision can then be measured against these benchmark standards to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

11.72 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for informal recreation areas is outlined below.

### **Accessibility**

#### **Setting Accessibility Standards**

11.73 As outlined in Section 2, standards are set using an accessibility led approach. It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to reach each type of open space there. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

11.74 The survey data demonstrates that there is a strong consensus that large recreation areas should be within walking distance of the home, although for residents in the smaller settlements, a high proportion of the population are willing to travel by car.

11.75 To consider how informal recreation areas fit into aspirations for the open space network in Central Bedfordshire, Table 11.6 uses the raw data collated in the household survey to evaluate the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach a large recreation area in each of the settlement hierarchies.

11.76 To fully understand the spread of responses (and therefore the expectations of all residents), it categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach a recreation area. PPG17 indicates that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 11.6 – Travel Expectations - Large Recreation Areas (from household telephone survey)**

Mode of Transport	Walk				Car			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	9	10	15	70	10	15	20	90
Major	5	10	15	30	10	12.5	15	30
Minor	10	10	15	70	10	10	30	90
Large	10	10	15	60	10	15	20	60
Small	5	10	10	30	10	15	20	45

Table 11.6 reveals the following key findings of residents' accessibility expectations:

**Walking:**

- 25% of residents across Central Bedfordshire would only be willing to walk up to 9 minutes to reach a large recreation area (quartile 1)
- 25% of residents in the major service centres and small villages are only willing to walk up to 5 minutes (quartile 1). Across Central Bedfordshire as a whole, the remaining 75% are willing to travel for more than 9 minutes and the maximum value is 70 minutes
- the average expected walking time is 14 minutes while the modal response (most common response) is 10 minutes
- This suggests that a 10 minute walk time to reach a large recreation area is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population.

**Car:**

- for those that would expect to drive, 25% would only be willing to drive up to 10 minutes (quartile 1) while the remaining 75% would travel for at least 10 minutes

- the average expected drive time is 16 minutes, while the mode (most common response) is 10 minutes

11.77 This suggests that a 10 minute drive time to reach a large recreation area is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population.

11.78 It is notable however, that there are some variations in expectation according to settlement size:

- residents in larger settlements expect to find large recreation areas in relatively close proximity to the home
- residents of large villages and smaller villages may be willing to travel further to a large recreation space.

11.79 It is also important to take into account the views arising from other consultations. While overall residents in small and larger villages are willing to travel further, a lack of local facilities was highlighted as a particular barrier to use in the Large Villages in the household survey, and Town and Parish Councils also emphasise the importance of local provision of large recreation areas.

11.80 Statistical data therefore suggests that 75% of residents will travel up to 10 minutes to reach a large recreation area and other consultation confirms that this is an appropriate distance for the local standard to be set at. Informal recreation areas emerged as particularly important to local communities through the review of local Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans.

11.81 Building upon the localised data collated, the Woodland Trust and Natural England also set accessibility targets which are relevant to the informal recreation area category. These are summarised below.

### **Woodland Trust**

11.82 The Woodland Trust argues that it is important that there are sufficient woods close to where people live. In a survey undertaken as part of the 'Space for People' project, 85 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that 'more woods in urban areas would help them to stay in touch with nature'.

To this end the Trust has developed the 'Woodland Access Standard', which aspires:

- that no person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2 hectares in size; and
- that there should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20 hectares within 4 kilometres (8 kilometres round-trip) of people's homes.
- Natural England

11.83 Natural England promotes the use of the Access to Natural Green Space (Angst) standard, which recommends the provision of;

- at least 2 hectares of accessible natural greenspace per 1,000 people based on no-one living more than:
- 300m from nearest natural greenspace

- 2km from a site of 20 ha or above
- 5km from a site of 100 ha
- And 10km from a site of 500 ha.

11.84 Analysis undertaken by Natural England for Bedfordshire indicates that access to natural greenspace across Bedfordshire as a whole against the standards is comparatively high with 93.7% of the population within 2km of a site 20ha or more and 31.7% within 300m of a site of 2ha in size. Access in Central Bedfordshire is slightly lower, particularly to more local open space, where only 26.5% have access to a space within the target of 300m.

11.85 The typologies used in this analysis do not directly correlate with the classifications used in the Natural England categorization and it is recognised that based upon the above, sites can be considered to have different catchment areas according to their size. Similarly, the categories used in this assessment do not separate woodland, meaning that it is not possible to apply these standards specifically.

11.86 As highlighted, levels of expectation expressed locally are slightly lower than the standards set by Natural England, which seek to ensure that residents are within 300m (5 minutes walk) of their nearest natural greenspace. These standards should however continue to serve as important targets for the development of natural open spaces across Central Bedfordshire. Recognising the importance of the creation of new open informal open spaces, the local standard will however be applied to new development to ensure deliverability.

11.87 The recommended local accessibility standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

## Accessibility

Informal Recreation Areas - Accessibility Standard
10 minute walk time (480m)
Justification
<p>The findings of the consultation demonstrate that there is a split in expectation according to the size of the settlement. While those in the Major and Minor Service Centres expect to find large recreation areas within walking distance, some residents in the Large and Small Villages are willing to travel further afield, although in reality, for informal space, it is in these areas where informal recreation spaces are more likely to be found. A 10 minute walk time distance is reflective of the overall views of residents of Central Bedfordshire based upon the findings of the household survey.</p> <p>Supporting this, local green infrastructure studies highlight the importance of access to Informal recreation areas and many prioritise the creation of new spaces local to the settlement.</p>

## Application of the Accessibility Standard

11.88 The application of this standard is illustrated in maps contained in Appendix B. It is clear that in the majority of cases, Informal recreation areas are situated on the periphery of towns and villages (sometimes outside of walking distance for the majority of residents in the settlement).

11.89 It should be noted that as outlined earlier, large informal recreation spaces have similar functions to countryside recreation sites. As higher order facilities (i.e. larger sites providing a greater range of opportunities), Countryside recreation sites negate the need for informal recreation areas for residents who are within a 10 minute walk time (the local standard for informal recreation areas) of one of these sites i.e. additional informal recreation areas will not be required to serve residents living within 10 minutes walk of a countryside recreation site.

11.90 Table 11.7 summarises the distribution of informal recreation areas and highlights where residents are outside of the catchment for these spaces. It also provides detail of where needs relating to the improvement of existing spaces and / or the creation of new spaces have been expressed (building upon data set out earlier in this section). While many areas seeking to improve the amount of space currently have limited access to such sites, some projects identified are in areas where access is already relatively high.

**Table 11.7 – Access to Informal Recreation Areas**

Hierarchy	Settlement	Access to informal recreation areas	Detail	Quality Issues Raised	Additional Informal/ Improved Access
Major	Biggleswade	Yes	Reasonable access to Informal recreation areas	Yes (formal and Informal)	yes
Small	Brogborough	Yes	Access to informal space to north of village		yes
Small	Chalton	No	No access to informal recreation areas in catchment although Fancott Wood within a mile of settlement		yes
Large	Clifton	Limited	Most residents able to access formal recreation areas although there is a small gap to the west. Limited access to informal spaces		yes
Large	Clophill	Adjacent to settlement	Maulden Wood located immediately to the east of the settlement	Yes	yes
Minor	Cranfield	Yes	Informal recreation areas located to the east of the settlement. More limited access for residents in the west		yes
Major	Flitwick	Yes	Good access to informal spaces particularly to the west		yes
Large	Harlington	No	Some access to informal spaces	Yes	yes
Large	Henlow	No	Lack of Informal recreation areas		yes
Large	Houghton Conquest	Yes	Several informal sites provide good space overall	Yes	yes

Hierarchy	Settlement	Access to informal recreation areas	Detail	Quality Issues Raised	Additional Informal/ Improved Access
Small	Kensworth	No	Limited access to informal space		yes
Minor	Langford	Yes	Good network of Informal recreation areas		yes
Large	Meppershall	No	Limited access to informal spaces		yes
Minor	Potton	Some deficiencies	Informal space located to far east of Potton.	Yes	yes
Large	Silsoe	Yes	Some informal space to the east of the settlement	Yes (and quantity)	yes
Small	Stanbridge	No	No Informal recreation areas provided		yes
Small	Streatley	Yes	Most able to access informal recreation areas		yes
Large	Blunham	No	No access to informal recreation areas in catchment	Yes (and quantity)	
Major	Amphill	Yes	Good distribution of Informal recreation areas. Amphill Park provides resources for residents in this area and negates the need for informal recreation areas in parts of the town within a 10 minute walk of Amphill Park.		
Minor	Arlesey	Yes	Good distribution of informal space	Yes	
Large	Aspley Guise	No	No access to informal recreation areas in catchment		
Small	Aspley Heath	No	No access to informal recreation areas in catchment		

Hierarchy	Settlement	Access to informal recreation areas	Detail	Quality Issues Raised	Additional Informal/ Improved Access
Minor	Barton Le Clay	Some deficiencies	Informal recreation areas serve residents in east and west		
Minor	Caddington	Limited	Two informal spaces to the north of the village mean that some residents have some limited access to local space.		
Small	Campton and Chicksands	Yes	Access to informal spaces to east of village. Campton and Chicksands Wood also in vicinity.		
Major	Dunstable	No	Sparse distribution of informal recreation areas. Some residents to the west are within a 10 minute walk of Dunstable Downs and additional informal recreation areas would not be required to meet needs of these residents.		
Small	Dunton	No	Lack of Informal recreation areas		
Large	Eaton Bray	No	No informal space within immediate catchment of settlement		
Small	Eversholt	No	No access within settlement to informal recreation areas		
Small	Everton	No	No local access to informal spaces		
Minor	Fairfield	Yes	Most residents within walking distance of informal recreation area		
Small	Flitton	No	Provision located between Flitton and Greenfield - access for some residents is further than the target catchment		
Small	Gravenhurst	No	No informal space within settlement		
Small	Greenfield	No	Provision located between Flitton and Greenfield - access for some residents is further than the target catchment		

Hierarchy	Settlement	Access to informal recreation areas	Detail	Quality Issues Raised	Additional Informal/ Improved Access
Small	Haynes	Yes	Some residents have access to Informal recreation areas	Yes	
Large	Heath and Reach	No	There is no local Informal recreation areas.	Yes	
Large	Hockliffe	No	No access to informal recreation area		
Major	Houghton Regis	No	Informal recreation areas is sparse		
Small	Husborne Crawley	No	No Informal recreation areas provided		
Major	Leighton Buzzard	No	Informal recreation areas sparse		
Small	Lidlington	Yes	Good distribution of informal space		
Minor	Marston Moretaine	Yes	Even distribution of informal space that is accessible to most residents. Some residents in close proximity to Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park, which negates requirement for additional Informal recreation areas		
Large	Maulden	Yes	Even distribution of informal spaces. Most residents within catchment of informal space		
Small	Millbrook	Yes			
Small	Moggerhanger	No	Limited local access to informal recreation areas		
Small	Northill	Yes	Several informal recreation areas		

Hierarchy	Settlement	Access to informal recreation areas	Detail	Quality Issues Raised	Additional Informal/ Improved Access
Small	Old Warden	Yes	Swiss Garden (currently closed for renovation) provides access to an area of informal recreation (although it must be noted that there is a fee).		
Small	Pulloxhill	No	Most residents within catchment of informal space		
Small	Ridgmont	No	No Informal recreation areas provided		
Small	Salford	No	No Informal recreation areas provided		
Major	Sandy	Yes	Some access to Informal recreation areas and small amenity spaces)		
Minor	Shefford	Yes	Good access throughout to informal recreation areas.		
Large	Shillington	No	No access to informal space		
Large	Slip End	No	No informal space within vicinity of settlement		
Small	Southill	No	No access to informal space		
Small	Stondon	No	No local access to informal recreation areas	Yes	
Minor	Stotfold	No	No local access to informal recreation areas		
Small	Studham	Yes	Studham Common located to south of the village - many residents within catchment of this amenity.		

Hierarchy	Settlement	Access to informal recreation areas	Detail	Quality Issues Raised	Additional Informal/ Improved Access
Small	Sundon	Yes	Informal recreation areas provided to the north. In close proximity to Sundon Hills Country Park		
Small	Sutton	No	No access within walking distance to informal spaces		
Small	Tempsford	No	No provision - all residents outside catchment		
Small	Tilsworth	No	No access to Informal recreation areas within settlement		
Minor	Toddington	No	No access to Informal recreation areas within settlement		
Small	Totternhoe	Yes	Due to the linear nature of Totternhoe, some residents outside the catchment. Good access to Totternhoe Knolls	Yes	
Small	Upper Caldecote	No	Limited access to informal recreation area		
Large	Westoning	No	No informal space within catchment		
Large	Woburn	No	No access to informal spaces		
Small	Wrestlingworth	No	No provision - all residents outside catchment		

## **Impact of Ecological Sensitivity on Access to Informal Recreation Areas**

11.91 The deficiencies identified on previous pages do not however take into account the ecological and biodiversity functions of existing open spaces.

11.92 As outlined earlier in this section, some of these informal recreation areas have a primary purpose of ecological conservation, and are vulnerable to recreation pressures, while still being valued for their ability to provide quite recreation spaces, and contact with nature. As such, the sites are valued from a recreational point of view, but their capacity to sustain visitors is more limited. Sites have been categorized as high, medium or low sensitivity, depending on whether they are very vulnerable to recreation pressures, moderately vulnerable to recreation pressures, or primarily a recreational asset with limited ecological sensitivity and vulnerability to recreation pressures.

11.93 To acknowledge this, and to represent the reduced recreational capacity of a site, the catchment area of those sites that are ecologically significant can be amended as follows:

- Sites of high ecological and biodiversity sensitivity – catchment area reduced by 50%
- Sites of medium ecological and biodiversity sensitivity – catchment area reduced by 25%
- Sites of low ecological and biodiversity sensitivity – catchment remains as recommended standard.

11.94 For informal recreation areas, this means that although residents are willing to travel up to 10 minutes to reach a site;

- Sites of high ecological sensitivity are considered only able to serve residents within a 5 minute walktime
- Sites of medium ecological sensitivity have a catchment area of 7.5 minutes drivetime
- Sites with low ecological sensitivity have a 10 minute catchment area

11.95 The impact of consideration of the level of ecological sensitivity of each site on the application standard is illustrated in Appendix B. It can be seen that a much higher amount of residents are outside of the catchment area for Informal recreation areas and that to successfully balance the recreational function of countryside sites with biodiversity and ecology, more Informal recreation areas are required. There are particular implications of the reduced catchment area in;

- Ampthill (2 sites highly sensitive and one medium sensitivity)
  - Arlesey (2 sites highly sensitive and one medium sensitivity)
  - Biggleswade (1 site highly sensitive and three sites of medium sensitivity)
  - Flitwick (2 sites of medium sensitivity and one highly sensitive)
  - Langford (4 sites considered highly sensitive)
  - Leighton Buzzard (one site highly sensitive and 3 medium sensitivity)
  - Maulden (three sites highly sensitive and one medium sensitivity)
  - Sandy (one site highly sensitive and 2 sites medium sensitivity)
- It is also important to note that in the following areas, all current informal space is very ecologically sensitive and therefore has a limited capacity to sustain visitors:

- Caddington (both sites highly sensitive)
- Dunstable (only site highly sensitive, although it should be noted that residents are also close to Dunstable Downs)
- Houghton Regis (only site highly sensitive)
- Langford (all sites medium sensitivity)
- Maulden (three of four sites highly sensitive)
- Potton (only site highly sensitive)
- Sandy (all sites high or medium sensitivity)
- Shillington (both sites highly sensitive)
- Southill (both sites of medium / high sensitivity)
- Streatley (only site highly sensitive)
- Studham (only site highly sensitive)
- Totternhoe (only site highly sensitive)

## Quantity

### Setting Quantity Standards

11.96 Overall, consultation demonstrates satisfaction with the amount of sites provided. More specifically however with regards informal recreation areas, many strategic documents and community exercises demonstrate an aspiration for additional sites. This is also in line with Natural England and Woodland Trust priorities, which suggest that more spaces are required to meet targets.

11.97 Reflecting this, application of the accessibility standard indicates that there are numerous settlements where residents are outside of the catchment area of spaces and these catchments are further reduced when taking into account the impact of ecological sensitivity on visitor capacity.

11.98 For informal spaces, it is much more difficult to accurately project need, in particular because such sites are frequently opportunity led and are created from natural settings, rather than made environments.

11.99 While current provision is equal to circa 1800 hectares, this is skewed significantly by several large sites of over 20 hectares and above. As it is not expected that such sites would be replicated locally in all areas, these should be excluded, leaving 468 hectares of space dedicated to informal recreation.

11.100 Natural England standards and Woodland Trust standards both support the need to increase the amount of accessible natural / informal space in the area. Natural England Standards seek to ensure that at least 2ha of accessible natural space is provided per 1000 population. It is clear that this is just above levels currently evident in Central Bedfordshire (1.7ha per 1000 population of informal space).

11.101 Table 11.7 demonstrates that there are 40 settlements that do not currently have access to any informal spaces within 10 minutes walktime and furthermore, residents of many settlements with some informal space are also outside the catchment. Added to this, analysis indicates that there are numerous sites that are ecologically sensitive and where the catchment area is reduced as a consequence.

11.102 Assuming the average size of an informal space (based on the Central Bedfordshire average) to be 4.4ha, and that each settlement (in the settlement hierarchy) without any existing provision requires one site, a total of 644.7 hectares would be required (equivalent to 2.5 ha per 1000 population). This is slightly higher than the target set by Natural England (perhaps due to the rural nature of some parts of Central Bedfordshire and the need to provide additional spaces to meet accessibility targets).

11.103 This standard provides an indication of the minimum requirement for provision, as it assumes that all sites are able to function at 100% capacity (assessment of the ecological value of sites has shown that this is not the case) and also assumes that just one site per settlement is sufficient.

**This equates to a total requirement of 640 ha to meet current demand (equivalent to 2.5 per 1000 population)**

11.104 The recommended local quantity standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

### Quantity

Informal Recreation Areas - Quantity Standard
Informal recreation areas – 2.5 ha per 1000 population
Justification
This figure represents the minimum requirement for informal recreation areas in Central Bedfordshire if all residents were to be located within a 10 minute walktime of a formal recreation area. This is a minimum standard, as in reality, it is essential that the ecological sensitivity of existing sites, and the subsequent impact on their visitor capacity is taken into account.

### Application of the Quantity Standard

11.105 Table 11.8 illustrates the application of this standard in each of the settlement hierarchies. It must be noted that this provides a broad indication only as quantity standards should really be considered at a local level in conjunction with accessibility and used to determine the impact of new provision rather than the adequacy of the amount of existing informal space.

11.106 The application of this standard excludes sites of 20ha or above, although they should be taken into account when considering overall adequacy of facilities.

**Table 11.8 – Indicative shortfalls and surpluses of Informal Recreation Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

Area	Required (Current)	Required (Future)	Shortfall / Surplus (Current)	Shortfall / Surplus (Future)
Major Service Centres	330.2	378.7	-318.3	-366.8
Minor Service Centres	117.1	133.6	161.3	144.8
Large Villages	96.9	103.9	248.8	241.8
Small Villages	61.5	63.9	364.5	362.1

11.107 It is clear that there are particular shortfalls in the major settlements, perhaps understandably as this type of space is less likely to naturally occur in urban areas.

11.108 Analysis of the adequacy of provision in each settlement provides a much closer understanding of the provision that is available and the largest deficiencies are currently in the following settlements:

- Dunstable
- Leighton Buzzard
- Houghton Regis
- Sandy
- Potton (although provision is sufficient when taking into account Potton Wood)
- Toddington
- Marston Moretaine
- Biggleswade (although provision is sufficient when taking into account Biggleswade Common)

11.109 Again considering only sites below 20ha, population growth will see the largest shortfalls in provision in the following settlements;

- Leighton Buzzard
- Dunstable
- Houghton Regis
- Biggleswade
- Sandy
- Marston Moretaine
- Flitwick
- Stotfold
- Potton

## Quality

### Setting Quality Standards

11.110 Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents, as well as their aspirations in relation to the type of spaces that they would like to see provided. Supporting this, site visits have provided an overview of the quality of recreation areas.

11.111 For informal spaces, it is clear that a greater balance between improvements to the quality of spaces and the creation of new spaces (or access to inaccessible sites).

11.112 Information collated can be used to identify the key components of each type of open space in relation to quality and to set a quality standard that should be used as a basis for improving existing spaces as well as the creation of new spaces. The quality standard for informal recreation areas is set out below.

Informal Recreation Areas - Quality Standard	
Local consultation, national guidance and best practice indicate that new and existing informal recreation areas should meet with the following criteria;	
Size and Location	Appropriately located for local catchment (within 10 minute walk time of target residents) Accessible via safe footpaths Clear boundaries that are locally appropriate and promote security
Character	Predominantly natural space Balance between recreation and conservation
Access	Clearly defined pathways Links with Public Rights of Way and cycle routes Compliant with DDA – access audit in place
Facilities	Clearly defined paths Appropriate and regular seating Information and signage both to and within the site as well as at the main entrance, including interpretation boards Appropriate bins Management of dog fouling Sufficient parking
Activities	Volunteer opportunities for the local community (linked with section 4)

### Application of Quality Standard

11.113 Several informal recreation areas fall below the level where all factors are considered to be acceptable or above on the site visits matrix (66%). Quality improvements required are included within Appendix A.

## Summary – Issues Identified

## Usage

26% of respondents to the telephone survey visit large recreation areas at least once per week and a further 22% use these spaces at least once per month. This makes this type of open space one of the most frequently visited across Central Bedfordshire. Just 35% of residents never visit a large recreation area meaning that these spaces serve the highest proportion of residents of all types of open space in the area.

Use of large recreation areas varies more between different demographic groups than most other types of open space. In particular, usage by residents over the age of 55 is relatively low and residents with a disability are also less likely to use a large recreation area. Residents with dependents are far more likely to visit such a site than others. While relaxation, walking and exercise, play, sports and events are the main reasons for visiting large recreation areas, other than time and interest, the most common barriers to use are lack of local spaces and difficulties accessing sites. Residents in Leighton Buzzard and the rural South and those in large villages highlight greater concerns about accessing these spaces than in other areas. Removal of barriers to access is likely to increase the overall usage of these spaces.

## Quantity and Quality

There are circa 1800 hectares of land dedicated to informal recreation areas. This is a large amount of space, influenced by the size of sites as there are several informal recreation areas over 20ha in size. These sites are more abundant in the north of Central Bedfordshire and in smaller settlements and spaces are quite unevenly distributed.

The household survey demonstrates an overall view that there are enough large recreation areas (64%) meaning that satisfaction is higher than most types of open space in Central Bedfordshire and there are no clear differences in views between residents of different sectors of the population. Despite this, many local green infrastructure studies prioritise the creation of new (and improvement of existing) informal recreation areas.

Like the quantity of provision, overall, the quality of informal recreation areas is viewed positively although opportunities for improvement are identified, including cleanliness and maintenance and seating. Dog fouling is also identified as a key issue at these sites. There are no clear variations in views or actual quality by area or settlement hierarchy. Consultation with Town and Parish Councils, as well as a review of green infrastructure studies highlights a clear emphasis on improvements to amount of these types of space, as well as some improvements to the quality of existing provision.

Like many other types of open space, residents of Central Bedfordshire expect to find large recreation areas in close proximity to the home. With the exception of small villages, residents in all tiers of the settlement hierarchy would expect to find a large recreation area within walking distance of the home (circa 10 minutes). A local standard has therefore been set at a 10 minute catchment area. The ecological sensitivity of many of these sites however has an impact on the number of visitors that can be sustained without detrimental impact on biodiversity, and those sites with high sensitivity in reality have a reduced catchment (5 minutes) and those with a medium sensitivity able to serve only residents within a 7.5 minute catchment.

Application of this accessibility standard demonstrates that informal recreation areas tend to be located on the edge of the settlement and at least 40 settlements do not have access to any Informal recreation areas. To ensure that each settlement contains at least one space, the minimum requirement for provision (quantity standard) of large informal formal recreation areas

across Central Bedfordshire is therefore 2.5 per 1000 population.

Application of this standard demonstrates that while many areas meet this standard currently, population growth will have a significant impact on the demand for large recreation spaces, with further deficiencies by 2022.

The use of the quality standard to guide improvements to existing sites is also of central importance for informal recreation areas, but the provision of new spaces to meet local needs is equally as important.

## **Step 5 – Identifying Priorities**

### **Key Issues to Address**

11.114 The above analysis therefore indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to informal recreation areas:

- Usage figures demonstrate that large recreation areas are used by a higher proportion of the population than any other type of open space and they therefore represent a valuable resource
- The location of sites is one of the key determinants of use and consultation suggests that residents expect to be within a 10 minute walk time of a large recreation area. The ecological sensitivity of many of these sites however means that in reality sites serve a much smaller catchment as the number of visitors that they can adequately accommodate without detrimental impact is reduced (by 50% for those with high sensitivity and by 25% for those of medium sensitivity)
- In some settlements improvements to the quality of existing sites are considered to be as if not more important than the creation of additional sites. In many areas however, residents are outside of the catchment for sites and there is a need for new areas. New informal spaces are a particular priority of many of the Local Green Infrastructure Plans
- While it is essential that biodiversity is balanced with recreational uses, some improvements are needed at some sites to enhance the recreational experience and in particular a need to ensure that all sites are attractive and welcoming to the user.
- Population growth is likely to see an increase in demand for this type of facility and a consequent increase in visitor numbers.

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

11.115 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- ensure that all residents have appropriate access to informal recreation areas
- attract users from all sectors of the population
- meet user aspirations relating to quality of provision as well as local priorities and national objectives and promote the provision of a strategic network of high quality informal recreation areas; and
- maintain a balance between the recreational function of these sites and biodiversity and conservation features

## Key Priorities

11.116 It is therefore recommended that key priorities for the delivery of informal recreation areas across Central Bedfordshire are as follows:

- promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Strategy
- promote access to informal space within a 10 minute walktime of at least one recreation area. Where residents are within a 10 minute walk time of a countryside recreation site, this negates the need for additional informal recreation area. Where sites are highly ecological sensitive, they have a reduced catchment and this should be taken into account when evaluating the need for new open space
- ensure that the impact of population growth on Informal recreation areas is recognised through the inclusion of policy requiring development to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through on-site provision of facilities, CIL and planning contributions. The impact of increased visitor numbers on informal sites (particularly those with primary or secondary conservation functions) should also be carefully monitored and accessibility should be used as the primary determinant of additional need.
- work with communities and partners to ensure that all sites meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section. Prioritise qualitative improvements over additional spaces where residents are already within the appropriate catchment of a space;
- facilitate access routes from nearby settlements to these sites, including safe footpaths and cycling opportunities;

## Site / Area Specific Implications

Table 11.9 summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 11.9 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites
<b>New provision</b>
Areas without access or with limited access to informal recreation areas. Most settlements in Central Bedfordshire have issues with existing access, but the following also have either large quantitative deficiencies and/ or expressed need in Green Infrastructure assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leighton Buzzard</li> <li>• Dunstable</li> <li>• Houghton Regis</li> <li>• Stotfold</li> <li>• Toddington</li> <li>• Chalton</li> <li>• Harlington</li> <li>• Henlow</li> </ul>

- Kensworth
- Meppershall
- Stanbridge

New provision and / or improved access will be needed in all areas where provision is currently lacking either in quantitative or qualitative terms.

New provision should also be considered where sites are particularly ecologically sensitive and therefore have a limited visitor capacity. Settlements that are particularly impacted in this manner are;

Ampthill

Arlesey

Biggleswade (also already area of high quantitative deficiency)

Flitwick (also already area of high quantitative deficiency)

Langford

Leighton Buzzard(also already area of high quantitative deficiency)

Maulden (also already area of high quantitative deficiency)

Sandy (also already area of high quantitative deficiency)

Caddington

Dunstable (also already area of high quantitative deficiency)

Houghton Regis (also already area of high quantitative deficiency)

Caddington.

Areas of new development where incoming residents will create quantitative deficiency and / or are outside of catchment for existing open spaces.

### Quality Enhancements

As well as increasing the amount of Informal recreation areas, qualitative improvements in areas where there are already informal recreation spaces should be prioritised. Evidence suggests that high quality sites are highly valued but in some instances, there is a need to improve their recreational function while respecting ecological and biodiversity priorities.

- Priority for improvement should be given to high value sites – sites serving unique catchment areas but are of poor recreational quality
- Areas which contain clusters of poor quality provision
- Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where additional residents will place additional pressure on existing facilities.

## 12. Small Amenity Spaces

### Introduction

12.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to small amenity spaces in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Context and Definition

12.2 For the purposes of this study, small amenity spaces have been defined as follows:

**“small, local spaces which may enhance the local area and provide some opportunities for casual recreation use, e.g. dog walking, casual play.”**

12.3 These spaces are therefore likely to contain fewer facilities than other larger types of informal space including large formal recreation areas and informal recreation areas, urban parks and countryside recreation sites. Like for these other types of space however, if a specific type of facility is provided within the small recreation space (for example a play area) this has been categorised separately to ensure that no double counting of site area takes place. Almost all sites classified within this section feature just a small grassed area.

12.4 This section presents the findings of the local needs and assessment and the audit of provision and presents a summary of the usage, quality, quantity and accessibility of small amenity spaces across Central Bedfordshire.

### Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision

#### Usage Profile

12.5 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open spaces types detailed in the study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space.

#### Household Survey Responses

12.6 27% of respondents to the telephone survey visit small amenity spaces at least once weekly and a further 14% use these spaces at least once per month. This makes this type of open space one of the most frequently visited and more users visit small amenity spaces daily than any other type of open space. Despite this, 49% of residents never use a small amenity spaces. Use is predominantly consistent across different demographic groups although it is noticeable that;

- non white British residents use small amenity spaces significantly more frequently than white British residents (46% visit weekly or more compared to 25%). A similar proportion of residents of white and non white British origin never visit these spaces;
- a slightly higher proportion of older residents never visit small amenity areas although frequency of use is higher in those that do than younger age groups;
- residents with a disability are less likely to visit a small amenity space. Just 9% visit weekly (compared to 30%) and 67% never use these sites; and
- like all other types of open space (except allotments), residents with dependents are more likely to use large recreation areas than those without. Residents with dependents aged below 8 are most likely to use these spaces, with 49% visiting weekly (compared to 25% overall) and just 24% never using them.

### **Usage of Small Amenity Areas by Placemaking Areas**

12.7 There is little variation in use of small amenity spaces in the different placemaking areas of Central Bedfordshire. The proportion of residents that never visit such space and actual usage figures are the same in all areas.

### **Usage of Small Amenity Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

12.8 Like in the different geographic areas, there are few variations between the different settlement hierarchies in use of small amenity spaces. Residents in small villages use these spaces more frequently than any other (34% weekly or more) and use is notably lower in Major Service Centres (14% weekly or more frequently). Use across the remaining settlement hierarchies is similar.

### **Reasons for Visiting Small Amenity Areas**

12.9 Reasons for visiting small amenity areas are similar to those for all other types of space, although these sites are particularly important for play. Across Central Bedfordshire, residents visit these spaces for;

- Play (39%)
- Walk and exercise (39%)
- Relax (34%)
- Peace and tranquillity (3%).

### **Reasons for Visiting Small Amenity Spaces by Placemaking Area**

12.10 The reasons for visiting small amenity spaces are the same in each of the Placemaking areas.

### **Reasons for Visiting Small Amenity Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

12.11 The reasons for use in each of the settlement hierarchies are the same, although a particularly high proportion of residents in the small villages indicate that they use these spaces to walk and exercise.

## **Barriers to Use**

12.12 A lack of time (27%) and interest (23%) are the main barriers to the use of small amenity spaces. Few other issues are identified with a lack of facilities (4%) and a lack of local facilities (3%) being the next most common answers.

12.13 There are also few variations in perceived barriers between different segments of the population, although a higher proportion of residents with a disability indicated that a difficulty in accessing these spaces prevents them from visiting. It is also noticeable that a lack of interest is much more evident in those without dependents while those with dependents suffer from time pressures. Residents with children are more likely to highlight a lack of awareness.

## **Barriers to Use of Small Amenity Areas by Placemaking Area**

12.14 The barriers to use are consistent across all parts of Central Bedfordshire. It is however apparent that there is a greater degree of concern around the lack of provision in the Leighton Buzzard and rural south (and to a degree in the west area) than in other parts. A significantly higher proportion of residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis have no interest in these spaces than in other parts of Central Bedfordshire.

## **Barriers to Use of Small Amenity Areas by Settlement Hierarchy**

12.15 Barriers to use are also the same in each settlement hierarchy. It is clear however that a higher proportion of residents in the Major and Minor Service Centres are not interested in these spaces than in the large and small villages.

## **Current Provision and Views on Current Provision**

### **Quantity**

12.16 The audit reveals that over 140 hectares is dedicated to small amenity spaces in Central Bedfordshire.

12.17 Table 12.1 summarises the distribution of the existing small amenity spaces across Central Bedfordshire.

**Table 12.1 – Size Distribution of Small Amenity Areas across Central Bedfordshire**

Area	No. of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Number of Sites Above 0.2ha)	Total Provision (Ha) Excluding Sites under 0.2ha	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha.
Central Bedfordshire	295	140.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	111	123.4	0.5	0.4	1.1

Table 12.2 summarises the distribution of small amenity spaces by placemaking area.

**Table 12.2 – Size Distribution of Small Amenity Spaces by Placemaking Area**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Number of Sites Above 0.2ha)	Total Provision (Ha) Excluding Sites over 20ha	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	34	30.8	0.6	0.5	0.9	16	28.8	0.6	0.5	1.8
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	38	34.5	0.6	0.6	0.9	18	32.2	0.6	0.5	1.8
North	223	75.4	0.5	0.4	0.3	77	62.4	0.4	0.4	0.8
Central Bedfordshire	295	140.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	111	123.4	0.5	0.4	1.1

Table 12.2 confirms that provision is relatively consistent across different placemaking areas in Central Bedfordshire.

12.18 In order to evaluate whether there are any differences in the distribution of small amenity spaces according to the size of the settlement, Table 12.3 summarises the distribution of these facilities by settlement hierarchy.

**Table 12.3 – Distribution of Small Amenity Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Total Provision (Hectares) (sites above 0.2ha)	Hectares per 1000 population (above 0.2ha) Current	Hectares per 1000 population (above 0.2ha) Future
Major Service Centres	146	70.1	0.50	0.44	0.5	146	61.24	0.44
Minor Service Centres	54	19.5	0.39	0.34	0.4	54	17.2	0.35
Large Villages	52	23.1	0.56	0.52	0.4	52	19.4	0.47
Small Villages	39	17.3	0.66	0.64	0.4	39	14.9	0.57

### Quantity of Provision – Key Issues

12.19 Tables 12.1 – 12.3 illustrate the following key issues regarding the number, type and size distribution of small amenity spaces:

- 17ha is dedicated to sites of 0.2ha and below, while the majority of sites are above this threshold.
- If no additional small amenity spaces are provided, population growth will see provision decrease from 0.5ha per 1000 population to 0.4ha per 1000.
- There is little variation in provision across different geographical areas, with the amount of small amenity spaces provided ranging from 0.5ha per 1000 (north) to 0.6 ha (both other areas and Central Bedfordshire as a whole). It should be noted however that within the north area, 43% of provision is located in the east, meaning that provision is slightly skewed towards the west. The average site size is substantially larger in the south of Central Bedfordshire than in the north.
- Smaller settlements (large villages and small villages) have a higher level of provision per 1000 population than major and minor settlements. The average size of sites is however relatively consistent in settlements of all sizes and sites below 0.2ha are also dispersed across the settlement hierarchy
- Population growth will have a significant impact upon the amount of provision per 1000 population. This is particularly evident in the major and minor settlements.

### Quantity of Small Amenity Spaces– Consultation Responses

#### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

12.20 A review of the priorities of Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans reveals that small amenity spaces are of lower priority for many than other types of open space. Furthermore, the majority of expressed needs relate to the improvement of existing facilities rather than the creation of new sites.

12.21 The key priorities included in current documents in relation to the amount of small amenity spaces are set out below. This list includes views provided as part of Town and Parish Council consultation, as well as those set out in adopted policy documents.

- New public open space around Houghton House (Amphill GI)
- Creation of new space (Chequers Farm) in Clifton – GI
- Harlington Parish identified gap in provision for older residents – actively trying to secure new amenity spaces (Parish Consultation)
- Henlow – new pocket park(GI)
- Ickwell – Parish plan identifies demand for more public open spaces
- Upper Shelton – requirement for additional space (GI)

## **Household Survey Responses**

12.22 The household survey demonstrates that there is an overall view that there are enough small amenity spaces, with 53% stating that there are enough of these spaces and 7% believing there are too many. 31% consider there to be not enough, while a further 9% suggest that there are only nearly enough. While this means that perceptions are less conclusive than some other types of open space, it does demonstrate overall satisfaction.

12.23 There are few clear differences in views between residents of different sectors of the population. It is however notable that while the majority believe there to be sufficient small amenity spaces, residents with dependents aged below 8 believe there to be a need for more provision (56% state that there is not enough or only nearly enough of these spaces). Younger residents in the 18 – 34 bracket are more likely to indicate that more spaces are required than older residents.

## **Views on Quantity of Small Amenity Spaces by Placemaking Area**

12.24 The household survey demonstrates that there is little variation in opinion on the adequacy of existing small amenity spaces across Central Bedfordshire with the exception of in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. 56% of residents in this area believe that there is a need for more small amenity spaces. This is perhaps slightly surprising as it is also in this area where the highest proportion of residents have no interest in this type of open space. Provision in the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area is equivalent to that in other areas in terms of quantity, suggesting that there may be other reasons for dissatisfaction of residents. The average size of spaces is also consistent with the Leighton Buzzard and Rural South area.

## **Views on Quantity of Small Amenity Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

12.25 Analysis of the household survey demonstrates that there is a distinction between opinions at different levels of the settlement hierarchy. Residents in the major and minor service centres are slightly more dissatisfied with a higher proportion of residents indicating that there are not enough or only nearly enough small amenity spaces. Residents in the small villages and large villages are happier with the amount of provision. At all levels of the settlement hierarchy, more than 50% of residents are happy with the amount of small amenity spaces provided.

12.26 Reflecting these views, the amount of spaces per 1000 population is lower in the major and Minor Service Centres than in the large and small villages.

## **Town and Parish Councils**

12.27 Analysis of responses to the Town and Parish Council survey demonstrate more conclusively that there is considered to be sufficient provision. 65% indicate that there are

enough small amenity areas and only 25% suggest that more are required. There are however mixed views hidden behind these responses, as some respondents caveat their perceptions by indicating that there are not enough spaces of sufficient quality and concerns over the value of very small spaces are also raised. Two Parishes indicate that there are no such spaces within their area.

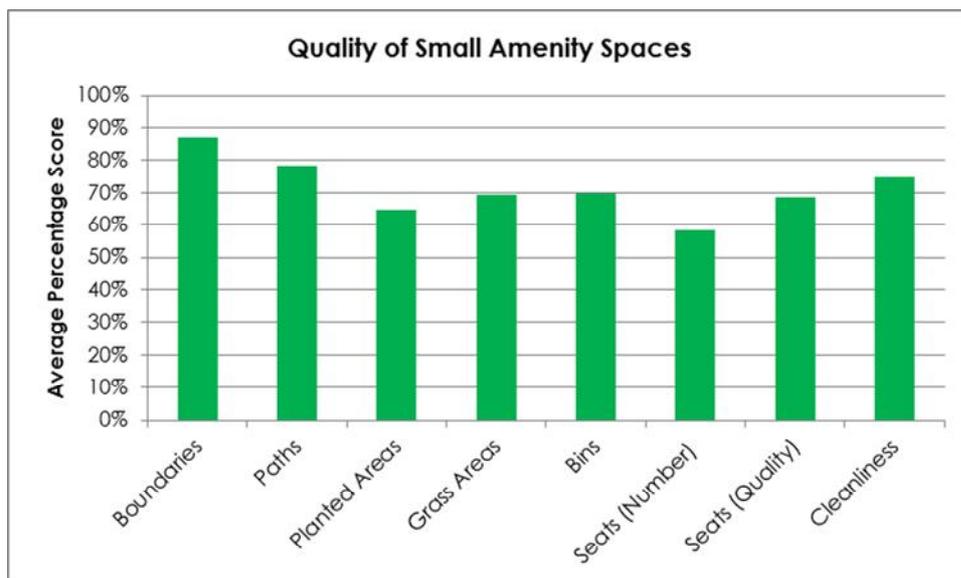
## Current Provision

### Quality

12.28 The quality and value of small amenity spaces were assessed using a quality assessment matrix. Visits revealed that the average quality score achieved by small amenity spaces was 51.4%, meaning that they are amongst the lowest quality spaces in Central Bedfordshire.

12.29 Chart 12.1 summarises the findings of site visits and highlights that the lowest scoring feature is the amount of benches and the condition of planted areas also requires improvement. In contrast, site boundaries achieve the highest scores and the condition of paths is also comparatively positively rated.

**Chart 12.1 – Quality of Small Amenity Spaces**



### Quality of Small Amenity Spaces Sites by Placemaking Areas

12.30 Table 12.4 summarises the scores attributed to different features of small amenity spaces during site visits by placemaking area. It notes that the overall quality of facilities is highest in the north and lowest in Dunstable and Houghton Regis.

12.31 It is clear that the overall quality scores achieved in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south are relatively low. When examining the scores in detail that many individual features are ranked relatively highly in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south. This suggests that sites in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south lack the basic provision (and therefore achieve a lower overall score) but those that do have facilities (for example seating) are well maintained and of good quality.

**Table 12.4 – Quality of Small Amenity Spaces by Placemaking Area**

Placemaking Area	Boundaries	Paths	Planted Areas	Grass Areas	Bins	Seats (Number)	Seats (Quality)	Cleanliness	Total Score
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	75%	67%	70%	67%	92%	0%	0%	70%	37%
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	89%	90%	87%	76%	93%	92%	75%	79%	44%
North	88%	79%	62%	68%	66%	56%	68%	75%	54%

### Quality of Sites by Settlement Hierarchy

12.32 Table 12.5 summarises the scores attributed to different features of small amenity spaces during site visits by Settlement Hierarchy. It indicates that there is little difference in the quality of sites across settlements of different sizes. It is however clear that overall, the quality is marginally lower in the Major Service Centres. The provision of seating is notably better in the villages and for many elements, sites in the large villages achieve the highest scores.

**Table 12.5 – Quality of Small Amenity Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Boundaries	Paths	Planted Areas	Grass Areas	Bins	Seats (Number)	Seats (Quality)	Cleanlines	Overall Quality Core
Major	84%	79%	62%	67%	83%	58%	61%	72%	48%
Minor	86%	80%	67%	73%	51%	48%	79%	76%	56%
Large	92%	80%	67%	70%	83%	73%	64%	78%	54%
Small	93%	69%	68%	74%	69%	64%	72%	81%	57%

### Quality of Provision – Consultation Responses

#### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

12.33 While consultations provide an overview of the quality issues experienced, as well as components that are important in the provision of small amenity spaces, reviews of the existing Green infrastructure studies, Parish plans and detailed consultation provide a more in depth understanding of site specific priorities related to small amenity spaces. Areas / sites specifically referenced as requiring improvement are set out below;

- Potential to improve quality significantly – Houghton Regis (Town Council)
- Cranfield Pocket poorly used and requires improvements. Opportunities also to upgrade village greens (GI plan)
- Aspley Guise amenity spaces – recently upgraded and improved (Parish Council)
- Harlington – requirement to upgrade village pond area
- Silsoe –improvements to village green (Parish Plan and GI)
- Upper Caldecote – small amenity space suffers from antisocial behaviour (Parish)
- Dunton – Parish plan seeks to make better use of existing space
- Ridgmont – Parish Plan seeks to establish new village green
- Wrestlingworth – need to improve facility (Parish Plan)

## Household Survey Response

12.34 The telephone survey confirms that the quality of small amenity areas is viewed positively. 65% of respondents rate these spaces as good or very good and only 10% consider them to be poor or very poor. Very few residents highlighted the quality of facilities as a barrier to use, further emphasising this point.

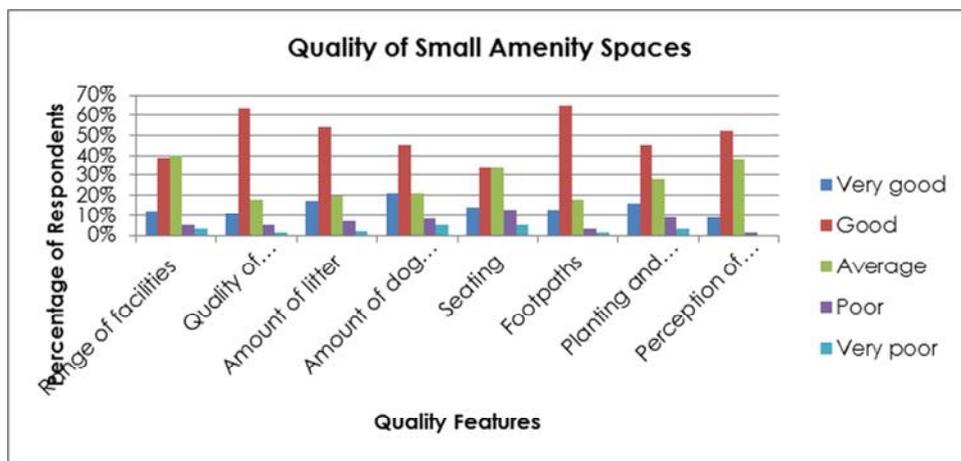
12.35 There are few clear differences in perceived quality between different sectors of the population. It must however be noted that a higher proportion of residents of non white British origin (a group that use these spaces frequently) consider these spaces to be of poor quality.

12.36 Chart 12.2 (which considers the views just of those that use facilities) evaluates the perceived quality of key components of a small amenity space. It reveals that with the exception of toilets and signage (which are rated more negatively), the most common response for each component is good.

12.37 The areas where the highest levels of satisfaction are recorded are as follows:

- Quality of maintenance (75% good or very good)
- Amount of Litter (71% good or very good)
- Amount of dog fouling (66% good or very good)

**Chart 12.2 – Perceptions of Quality Factors for Small Amenity Spaces**



12.38 Areas where the highest levels of dissatisfaction are evident are:

- Seating (18% poor or very poor)
- Planting and Landscaping (13% poor or very poor)
- Dog fouling (12% poor or very poor)

12.39 It must be noted that whilst these are the areas of highest dissatisfaction in relation to small amenity spaces, these are relatively low proportions of the population. There are few clear differences in terms of the views of different sectors of the population although in general, it is those with dependents that have raised issues around seating. Residents of non white ethnic origin, many of whom regularly use this type of open space, are positive about all aspects of these facilities with the exception of seating and the range of facilities provided, which are rated poorly.

12.40 The above features are reflected in the site visits, with the amount of seating provided being the most lowly rated feature and planting and landscaping the second. Quality assessments therefore reinforce the findings of the consultations.

### **Placemaking Area**

12.41 The household survey reveals that the overall perceptions are similar across all parts of Central Bedfordshire. The most positive views are found in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south while these spaces are perceived much more negatively in the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area (where actual quality is lowest). It is also noticeable that views in West Central Bedfordshire are more polarized than for some other typologies (in particular in relation to maintenance and seating) and perceptions in Dunstable and Houghton Regis are also lower primarily with regards the range of facilities provided at these sites.

### **Settlement Hierarchy**

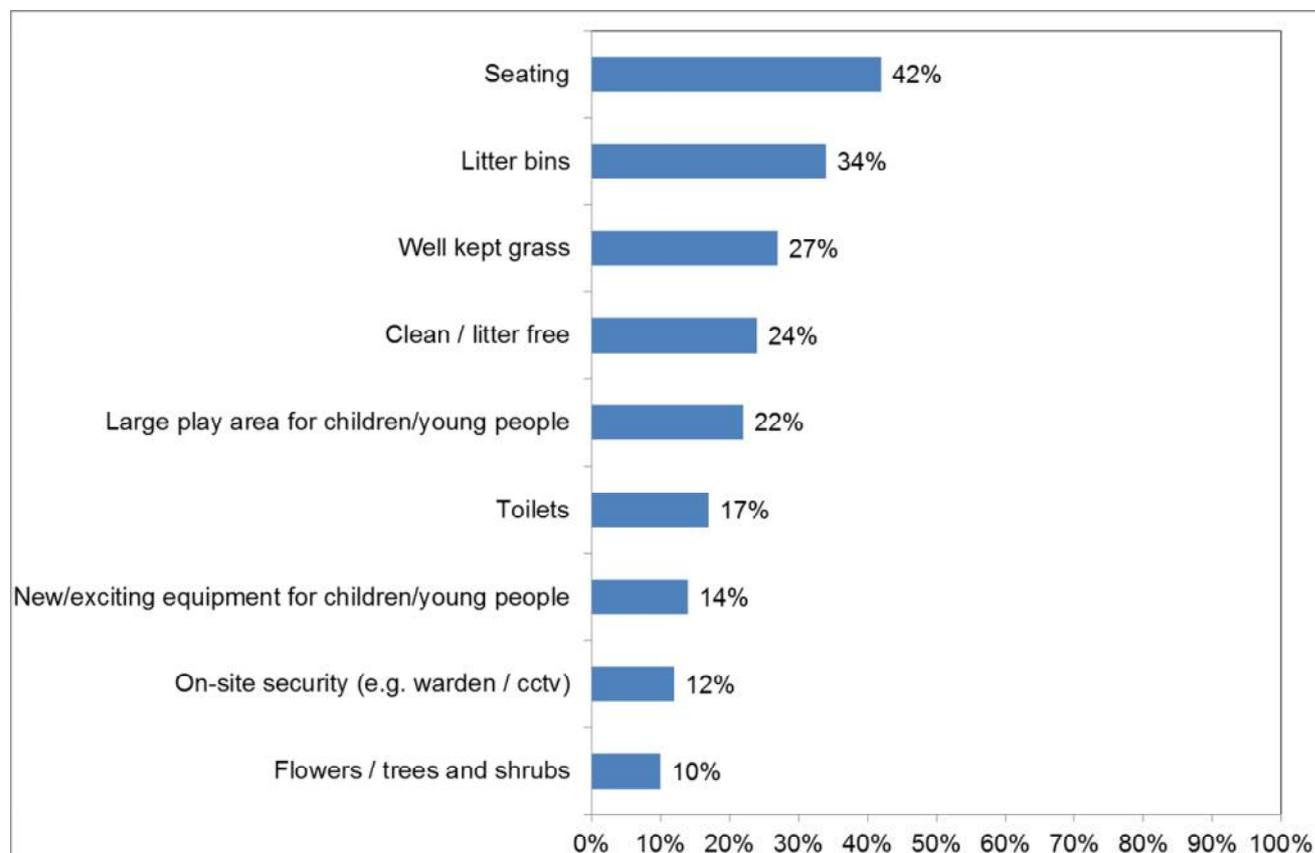
12.42 There is little clear variation in the views of residents according to the size of settlement in which they live although some differences in views are noticeable. In the large villages, a higher proportion of residents are satisfied with the quality of provision and over three quarters of respondents consider small amenity spaces to be good or very good.

12.43 In contrast, residents living in the Minor Service Centres are more negative about the majority of components than their counterparts. It is also clear that small amenity areas in the major and Minor Service Centres are perceived to offer a wider range of opportunities than those in the large and small villages.

### **Quality of Provision - Aspirations**

12.44 Chart 12.3 illustrates the factors that residents of Central Bedfordshire consider most important in the provision of high quality small amenity areas. It confirms that facilities are expected to be basic with limited facilities, but highlights the importance of maintenance as well as the provision of appropriate seating.

**Chart 12.3 – Aspirations for Small Amenity Areas**



### **Town and Parish Councils**

12.45 The quality of small amenity spaces is not viewed as positively by Town and Parish Councils as other types of Informal recreation areas. 10% consider these spaces to be poor, and just 25% rate them as good. Dog mess, vandalism and misuse were highlighted as an area of concern. The lack of amenity offered by these spaces was also highlighted and it was highlighted as being essential to ensure that these sites were functional. This was also reflected in public consultation, which demonstrated that play was one of the key drivers for usage of these spaces.

12.46 The survey demonstrates a strong perception that improvements to the quality of existing small spaces are as important as the provision of more sites, with just three respondents indicating that they would prioritise quantity over quality (Blunham Parish Council, Marston Moretaine Parish Council and Wrestlingworth and Cockayne Hatley Parish Council). Reflecting the lower levels of value placed on these spaces by Town and Parish Councils, just five placed improvements to small amenity spaces within their top three priorities for improving open spaces.

### **Accessibility**

12.47 Access to open space and recreation facilities is as important as the quality of provision. Using the findings of the household survey, Table 12.6 summarises the mode of transport that

residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use, and actually use, to reach a small amenity space and the type of transport that users actually do use.

**Table 12.6 – Mode of Travel**

<b>Expected vs Actual</b>	<b>Walk</b>	<b>Cycle</b>	<b>Public Transport</b>	<b>Car</b>
Expected	93%	1%	0%	5%
Actual	93%	1%	0%	6%

12.48 Table 12.6 demonstrates that there is an almost unanimous expectation that residents will find a small amenity space within walking distance of their home. Analysis of actual usage patterns (through the household survey) demonstrate that in the majority of cases, these expectations are reached, with 93% of users walking to a small amenity space.

### **Views by Settlement Hierarchy and Placemaking Area**

This view is consistent across all placemaking areas and all settlement hierarchies.

### **Steps 3 and 4 - Setting and Applying Local Standards**

12.49 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

12.50 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space.

12.51 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of large recreation areas. Existing provision can then be measured against these benchmarks to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

12.52 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for large recreation areas is outlined below.

### **Accessibility**

12.53 As outlined in Section 2, standards are set using an accessibility led approach. It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to get there. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

12.54 The survey data set out earlier in this section demonstrates that there is a clear view that small amenity spaces should be within walking distance of the home and this is replicated across all demographic groups and within each placemaking area and settlement hierarchy.

12.55 To consider how large recreation areas fit into aspirations for the open space network in Central Bedfordshire, Table 11.7 uses the raw data collated in the household survey to evaluate

the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach a small amenity space in each of the settlement hierarchies.

12.56 To fully understand the spread of responses (and therefore the expectations of all residents), it categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is therefore equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach an amenity space. PPG17 indicates that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 12.7 – Travel Expectations – Small Amenity Spaces (calculated from household survey)**

Mode of Transport	Walk Time			
	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	5	10	12	30
Major	5	5	10	20
Minor	5	10	15	30
Large	5	10	10	30
Small	2	5	10	30

12.57 Table 12.7 reveals the following key findings in relation to accessibility expectations;

- 25% of residents across Central Bedfordshire would only be willing to walk up to 5 minutes to reach a small amenity space (1st quartile). Residents in the small villages have higher expectations (only willing to walk up to 2 minutes);
- the remaining 75% would travel for at least 5 minutes to reach a small amenity space. The maximum distance any resident would be willing to travel is 30 minutes; and
- the modal response is 10 minutes walk and the average response is a 10 minute walk time.

12.58 This suggests that a 5 minute walk time to reach a small amenity space is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population.

12.59 It is also important to take into account the views arising from other consultations. All consultations clearly demonstrate that small amenity spaces are expected to be the most local form of open space available and that they should be located in close proximity to the home. Location is a key determinant of usage.

12.60 Statistical data therefore suggests that 75% of residents will walk up to 5 minutes to reach a recreation area and other consultation suggests that this is an appropriate distance for the local standard to be set at.

12.61 The recommended local accessibility standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

## Accessibility

Small Amenity Spaces - Accessibility Standard	
5 walk time (240m)	
Justification	
The findings of the consultation demonstrate that over 90% of residents would expect to walk to an amenity space and this is consistent across all areas of Central Bedfordshire and in almost all demographic groups.	
9.1 At least 75% of users are willing to travel 5 minutes to reach a small amenity space and this is reinforced by the modal response (10 mins) and the average response (10 mins).	

### Application of the Accessibility Standard

12.62 The application of this benchmark is illustrated in maps contained in Appendix B. In applying the accessibility standard for small amenity spaces, it should be noted that there are many overlaps in the function of amenity green space, urban parks and large formal recreation areas. To this end, where residents are within 240m of a park or large recreation area (the recommended catchment for amenity green space), as higher order facilities, it can be considered that the presence of these sites negates the need for further small amenity spaces as the larger spaces fulfil this function.

12.63 As such, application of the accessibility standard taking into account small amenity spaces alone demonstrates that there are significant deficiencies in almost every settlement.

12.64 When taking into account the role of large formal recreation areas (both formal and informal) shortfalls are reduced significantly. Areas remain however, where residents are further than 5 minutes walk to any form of amenity space in most settlements.

### Quantity

#### Setting Quantity Standards

12.65 Overall consultation demonstrates satisfaction with the amount of sites provided and in many areas, the emphasis is placed on improvements to the quality of sites rather than the provision of additional facilities.

12.66 Reflecting this, application of the accessibility standard indicates that there are some areas where residents are outside of the catchment area for facilities.

12.67 Application of the accessibility standard of a five minute catchment (taking into account the role of large recreation areas and parks) demonstrates however that there remain some gaps in provision and areas where additional spaces are required.

12.68 Chapters 10 and 9 outlined a requirement for some additional formal recreation areas and parks. By definition and given the overlap in roles that these type of sites have, the provision of these additional sites would go some way to addressing the deficiencies in more local types of open space (some residents will be within a 240m catchment of the new sites)

and therefore the need for new small amenity spaces would be negated. There remains however a requirement for additional small amenity spaces in some parts of Central Bedfordshire.

12.69 Table 12.8 therefore summarises the additional requirement for small amenity spaces. To ensure that the standard is reflective of need and given the uncertainties around additional large recreation areas to be provided (their location, size etc), it assumes that half of the gaps identified for small amenity spaces will be filled by the provision of new large spaces. It also excludes sites 0.2ha and below and assumes that the size of new sites is in line with Central Bedfordshire wide average.

**Table 12.8 – Baseline Demand for Small Amenity Spaces**

Area	Total Provision (Ha)	Additional Provision Required (Ha)	Total Provision Required (Ha)
Central Bedfordshire	123.4	25.3	148.7

12.70 Taking into account requirements for additional amenity space, overall across Central Bedfordshire there is a total requirement for 148.7 hectares of small amenity spaces to meet current demand. This equates to 0.58 ha per 1000 population.

### Quantity

Quantity Standard
0.58 ha per 1000 population
Justification
This figure represents the minimum requirement for small amenity spaces in Central Bedfordshire if all residents were to be located within a 5 minute walk time of a local site (taking into account the presence of large recreation areas, which as a higher order facility, negate the need for smaller amenity spaces).

### Application of the Quantity Standard

12.71 Table 12.9 illustrates the application of this standard in the placemaking areas outlining current and projected future deficiencies. It must be noted that these provide a broad indication only as quantity standards should really be considered at a local level in conjunction with decision making relating to accessibility.

**Table 12.9 – Shortfalls / Surpluses of Small Amenity Spaces by Placemaking Area**

Area	Amount Required Current	Amount Required Future	Shortfall Surplus Current	Shortfall / Surplus Future
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	30.2412	33.8604	-1.41	-5.03
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	31.3606	36.1166	0.81	-3.94
North	86.449	98.5478	-24.05	-36.15
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	148.0508	168.5248	-24.65	-45.12

12.72 Table 12.9 therefore demonstrates that there are shortfalls currently in all areas except Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South, where there is just sufficient provision currently. Projected population growth will see shortfalls in all areas by 2022, and an overall shortfall of 45.12 ha in Central Bedfordshire. Table 12.10 illustrates the shortfalls and surpluses by settlement hierarchy. It indicates that the largest shortfalls are in the major settlements and it is in these settlements where population growth will have the highest impact.

**Table 12.10 – Shortfalls / Surpluses Small Amenity Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Required (Current)	Required (Future)	Shortfall / Surplus (Current)	Shortfall / Surplus (Future)
Major Settlements	81.1	93.1	-19.9	-31.8
Minor Settlements	28.8	32.8	-11.6	-15.6
Large Villages	23.8	25.5	-4.4	-6.1
Small Villages	15.1	15.7	-0.2	-0.8

12.73 Application of this standard at a settlement level indicates that the following settlements currently have the greatest shortfalls:

- Dunstable
- Leighton Buzzard
- Stotfold

- Flitwick
- Biggleswade
- Pottton
- Arlesey
- Ampthill
- Toddington

12.74 In total, by 2022, 49 settlements will have deficiencies of small amenity spaces. These will be greater than 2 hectares in the following locations:

- 
- Dunstable
- Leighton Buzzard
- Biggleswade
- Flitwick
- Stotfold
- Arlesey
- Ampthill
- Pottton
- Marston Moretaine
- Toddington

12.75 All settlements that currently have sufficient provision to meet the baseline standard will continue to do so by 2022.

## **Quality**

### **Setting Quality Standards**

12.76 Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents, as well as aspirations that they have in relation to the type of spaces that they would like to see provided. Supporting this, site visits have provided an overview of the quality of small amenity spaces.

12.77 For small amenity spaces, on the whole, improvements to the quality of provision were seen as a greater priority by consultees than the creation of additional spaces (although new provision is required in some areas).

12.78 Consultation and feedback can be used to identify the key components of each type of open space in relation to quality and to set a quality standard that should be used as a basis for improving existing spaces as well as the creation of new spaces.

12.79 The quality standard for small amenity spaces is set out below

## Quality

Small Amenity Spaces - Quality Requirements	
Size and Location	At least 0.2ha in size and shaped in a way that means that the site is a functional recreation space (and on a level gradient) Appropriately located for local catchment (within 5 minute walk time of target residents) Accessible via safe footpaths Clear boundaries that are locally appropriate
Character	Small recreation area for local residents Appropriate for residents of different ages
Access	Clearly defined pathways to the site
Facilities	Clearly defined paths Appropriate and regular seating Appropriate bins Management of dog fouling May also contain play equipment

## Application of the Quality Standard

12.80 For each type of open space, several sites fall below the level where all factors are considered to be acceptable or above on the site visits matrix (66%). Quality improvements required are included within Appendix A and Appendix A also provides an understanding of sites that achieve low scores on the site assessment.

## Summary – Issues Identified

### Usage

27% of respondents to the telephone survey visit small amenity spaces at least once weekly and a further 14% use these spaces at least once per month. This makes this type of open space one of the most frequently visited and more users visit small amenity spaces daily than any other type of open space. Small amenity spaces are particularly frequently used by non white British residents.

Like most other types of space in Central Bedfordshire, the main reasons for using small amenity spaces are play, walk and exercise and relaxation. Few barriers to the use of these facilities are identified other than a lack of time and interest. There is little variation in usage across Central Bedfordshire, although it is clear that residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis have less interest in these spaces than those in other parts. Further analysis of usage demonstrates that these spaces are particularly important for residents in small villages.

### Quantity and Quality

The telephone survey indicates that there is an overall view that there are enough small amenity spaces and consultation with Parish and Town Councils confirms this more conclusively.

Analysis of existing provision confirms that the distribution of small amenity spaces across Central Bedfordshire is relatively even. In Dunstable and Houghton Regis (where provision is

lowest) the proportion of residents believing that additional spaces are required is highest. There are slightly lower levels of provision in major and minor service centres than in the large and small villages. The quantity of small amenity spaces is not a clear priority of many of the local Green Infrastructure documents or Parish plans.

### **Quality, Quantity and Accessibility**

Site visits reveal that the average quality score achieved by small amenity spaces is amongst the lowest of all types of open space, with particular issues with the amount of benches and seating available. While consultation demonstrates a more positive perception of quality, many of the issues raised are similar. The quality of small amenity spaces is not viewed as positively by Town and Parish Councils as other types of Informal recreation areas. 10% consider these spaces to be poor, and just 25% rate them as good. Dog mess, vandalism and misuse were highlighted as areas of concern. The lack of amenity offered by these spaces was also highlighted. Overall, consultation suggest that improvements to the quality of existing spaces is perhaps more important than the provision of additional sites.

Amenity spaces are expected local to the home, within a 5 minute walk time. There are many overlaps in the function of amenity green space and parks and large recreation areas. To this end, where residents are within 280m of a park or large recreation area (the recommended catchment for amenity green space), as higher order facilities, it can be considered that the presence of these sites negates the need for small amenity spaces. Small amenity spaces are still however important in order to provide a local resource. When excluding consideration of the large recreation areas, there are gaps in access based upon a five minute catchment in almost every settlement. When taking into account the role that larger sites play, it is clear that gaps reduce significantly, although there remain areas of many settlements outside of the 5 minute catchment to local recreation space.

Population growth will however see demand for amenity spaces increase and there will be shortfalls of circa 45 ha by 2022. The key shortfalls currently are in Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard,

Stotfold, Flitwick, Biggleswade, Pottton, Arlesey and Toddington. All settlements that currently have sufficient provision will still meet the standard by 2022 and it is the areas of highest growth where there are already existing deficiencies.

There are some overlapping catchments (i.e. sites serving the same target residents) and these spaces may not be as highly valued as those serving unique catchments.

## **Step 5 – Identifying Priorities**

### **Key Issues to Address**

12.81 The above analysis therefore indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to small amenity spaces;

- Usage figures demonstrate that large recreation areas are frequently used, and in particular by residents of non white ethnic origin. They are important sites, particularly in the smaller villages

- The location of sites is one of the main determinants of use and almost all residents expect to walk to a facility. Sites are expected to be local to the home (within 5 minutes)
- Site visits reveal that the quality of small amenity spaces is lower than some other types of space and Parish / Town Councils confirm this viewpoint. There are concerns about the functionality of sites and issues raised about the impact that poor quality and poorly managed sites can have on the local community. Consultation and strategic documents highlight that these issues are of lower priority than those raised in relation to some other types of space
- Population growth may to see an increase in usage of these types of space and a requirement for additional spaces, particularly if all residents are to be within 400m of a proposed site. The quality of spaces is however as important as the amount of space, and there is a strong interrelationship between quality, quantity and function.

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

12.82 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- Ensure that all residents have appropriate access to small amenity spaces (taking into account the role that large recreation areas play)
- Meet user aspirations relating to quality of provision and functionality
- Maintain a balance between quality and quantity of provision and promote the strategic distribution of high quality sites

### **Key Priorities**

12.83 It is therefore recommended that key priorities for the delivery of small amenity spaces across Central Bedfordshire are as follows:

- promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Strategy
- Work with communities to ensure that all sites meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section. Sites should be functional and appropriately located
- Seek to ensure that all residents are within a 5 minute walktime of at least one open space (either a small amenity space or a larger recreation area). Sites should meet with minimum size criteria to ensure that they have a functional recreation purpose. New small amenity spaces should not be required where residents are within the catchment of a larger formal recreation area / countryside recreation site / urban park
- Ensure that the impact of population growth on usage of these spaces is recognised through the inclusion of policy requiring developers to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through CIL and developer contributions.
- Review the function of existing amenity spaces where sites serve overlapping catchments and are of poor quality.

### **Site / Area Specific Implications**

12.84 Table 12.10 summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 12.10 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites
<b>New provision</b>
Areas without access or with limited access to small amenity spaces – most settlements, but key deficiencies in Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Stotfold, Flitwick, Biggleswade, Pottton, Arlesey and Toddington.
Areas of new development where incoming residents will create quantitative deficiency and / or are outside of catchment for existing open spaces.
<b>Quality Enhancements</b>
Quality of amenity spaces as if not more important than additional sites. Priority given to high value sites – sites serving unique catchment areas but are of poor quality
Areas which contain clusters of poor quality provision
Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where residents are likely to use existing facilities.

## 13. Children's Play Space

### Introduction

13.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to children's play space in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Context

13.2 The vision of the Central Bedfordshire Children and Young People's Plan 2011 - 2014 (Central Bedfordshire Children's Trust) is:

'We want every child in Central Bedfordshire to enjoy their childhood and have the best possible start in life. We want every child to do well at school, make friends and build strong relationships with their family. By the age of 19, as young adults, we want every young person to have the knowledge, skills and qualifications that will give them the best chance of success, so that they are prepared to take their full place in society as a happy, healthy, contributing and confident citizen'.

- The provision of children's play space is just one means of contributing to this overall vision (and indeed it is recognized that the effective provision of many other types of open space considered in this assessment will also directly contribute to these priorities. There is a wealth of evidence outlining the importance of play and the benefit that this has on mental and physical health and wellbeing. A recent literature review by Play England highlights brings together all research on play provision and the importance of play (A World Without Play – A Literature Review – 2012). It concludes that;
- there is a strong and growing direct relationship between play, health, cognition and well-being and benefits are both immediate and long term;
- play is important for children's physical, psychological and social well-being and development but also for the wider community and society. Play supports physical and mental well-being, educational development, brain development, language development, spatial and mathematical learning, creativity, and identity formation;
- access to play spaces in local communities for children is essential. The importance of adults having positive attitudes towards children playing freely outside is also highlighted;
- there is a need to safeguard children's health and well-being through the provision of high quality spaces and facilities for play and local outdoor facilities are an important part of this. The report states that "there should be greater emphasis in planning and

housing redevelopment on the preservation of good-quality public space, where children feel safe and where they can congregate and play without being considered a nuisance by neighbours and other users. If social barriers, such as fear, embarrassment or discriminatory attitudes, as well as physical barriers, are addressed, then accessible play spaces can be created for both disabled and non-disabled children (Dunn 2004)”; and

- it is not enough to merely provide excellent play opportunities for children. There is also a need to foster a culture of tolerance towards children playing, and children must be given the time they need to engage in free play.

## Definition

13.3 For the purposes of this study, children’s play space has been defined as follows:

**“Equipped play areas for children e.g. swings, slides and climbing frames”. The broad objective of the provision of these facilities is to ensure that children have opportunities to interact with their peers, to learn social and physical skills and be physically active”**

13.4 This typology therefore encompasses a range of outdoor play spaces, from small areas of green space with a few pieces of equipment to large, multi purpose play areas. In order to facilitate analysis and interpretation of the range of facilities that this broad typology can encompass, provision can be subdivided as follows:

- **Local Areas for Play (LAP)** – a doorstep facility (i.e. very local) – a small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults. This space is likely to incorporate a small number of items of fixed play equipment together with some interesting and attractive landscape features
- **Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP)** – a local facility – a larger space which is likely to include more items of fixed play equipment and is intended to cater for the growing needs of older children
- **Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP)** – a neighbourhood space – a very large play area which includes a variety of play experiences for older children and young teenagers, but which can also be combined with provision for younger children to create a destination site for all ages of children

13.5 Facilities included in this section in general fall under the typologies of either LAP or LEAP. NEAPs are primarily included in Section 14, Facilities for Young People, as they target older children.

13.6 The detailed composition of each play area type is set out in the design guidance.

13.7 The provision of facilities for children does not negate the need for outdoor provision for young people and vice versa. In light of the differences between provision for children and young people, this typology has been divided and the provision of Facilities for Young People across Central Bedfordshire is discussed in Section 14. It may however be necessary (or appropriate) to provide play facilities meeting the needs of both age groups on the same site and / or in the same location and this will be discussed further both in this section and in Section 5, summary and guidance for new development.

13.8 There is a wealth of documentation providing advice and guidance on effective design for play facilities. These include:

13.9 Play England: Design for Play – A guide to creating successful play spaces (2008) which provides guidance for the successful development of play spaces. It references the following 10 key principles:

- 'bespoke' - fits in with surroundings and enhances the local environment. Key features of the existing space should be built into the design, e.g. a tree with character, an old sculpture
- are well located – located where children would play naturally and have an effective balance between surveillance and seclusion
- make use of natural elements - grassy mounds, planting and logs can all help to make a more attractive and playable setting for equipment, planting can also help attract birds and other wildlife
- provide a wide range of play experiences – successful play space can be used in different ways by children and young people of different ages and interests and can also be important social spaces for parents and carers. Non-prescriptive play equipment and features that encourage and promote imagination and creativity help to achieve this principle
- are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children - though many play providers focus on equipment that is wheelchair-accessible, it is important to recognise that there are many different types of disability or special need. Non-prescriptive equipment, which can be used flexibly may be of benefit
- allow children of different ages to play together – where possible avoid segregating children on the basis of age or ability, and lay out the facility so that equipment and features can be used by a wide range of children
- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge – include opportunities to experience challenge and excitement. Children need to take risks to learn how to manage risks
- are sustainable and appropriately maintained - consider using recycled or sustainably sourced materials. Long-term maintenance and sustainability are also vitally important considerations in the design process, but in successful play spaces do not overshadow the scheme's play value and ability to meet the play needs of children and young people. Good play spaces are designed and constructed bearing in mind sustainability but they are not necessarily tidy, and bits of scrub or long grass, fallen leaves and twigs, may all provide additional play opportunities
- allow for change and evolution - Some 'slack space' with no predefined function should be built into the layout – this increases the potential for change and evolution
- meets community needs – early and ongoing community engagement will help ensure that the facility is valued in the community

13.10 Fields in Trust (formerly National Playing Fields Association) has produced similar documentation relating to the importance of play and good design in play facilities (Planning and Design in Sport and Outdoor Play) and refers to the research undertaken by Play England. In addition, they recommend local standards for play space, specifically:

- **Quantity** – a minimum of 0.25ha per 1000 population equipped play space should be provided and a further 0.55ha per 1000 population set out for informal play
- **Accessibility** – residents should be within 100m of a local play space, 400m of an equipped play space and 1000m of a neighbourhood space and / or facility for young people; and
- **Quality** of provision should also be measured and local standards should be set

13.11 The Government Strategy for Play (Fair Play DCFS and DCMS 2008) set out the priorities for play across the UK and seeks to support and develop opportunities for play through an imaginative and flexible approach to the creation of new play spaces.

13.12 While national funding for play has ceased, the other aims of the strategy remain relevant, including:

- in every residential area, there is a variety of places for play, free of charge, both supervised and unsupervised
- local neighbourhoods are, and feel, safe and interesting places to play
- routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people
- parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well-maintained and well-used
- children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours
- children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property; and
- children, young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces; and play places are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, children of both genders, and children from minority groups in the community

13.13 The key messages from these strategic documents have been incorporated throughout this assessment and in the derivation of priorities.

## **Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision**

### **Usage Profile**

13.14 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open spaces types detailed in the study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space.

## **Household Survey Responses**

### **Usage**

13.15 24% of respondents to the telephone survey use equipped play spaces at least once weekly. A further 13% visit such facilities at least once per month but 57% of those questioned never use children's play areas. The target age range for these facilities (and the fact that children were not questioned as part of the household survey) is likely to impact on the survey findings, which suggest that usage of play space is more restricted than some other types of open space.

13.16 Perhaps unsurprisingly, those with dependent children use place spaces for children more frequently, specifically:

- 41% of those with children aged up to 8 visit play spaces at least once per week and a further 28% visit once per month. Only 4% of families with children in this age bracket do not visit play areas; and
- usage is however lower for those with children aged 9 – 13. Only 12% use facilities at least once per week and a further 36% visit monthly. 31% of people with children in this age bracket do not use facilities

13.17 There is evidence of some variation in usage of play spaces between different sectors of the population. Notably:

- non white British residents are more like to use play areas regularly - (9% visit daily compared to 3% across Central Bedfordshire) and 30% visit at least once per week (25% across Central Bedfordshire). 69% of those who consider themselves to be a non white British residents however never use play spaces compared to 55% of the white British population. This suggests that facilities are therefore either very regularly used or not at all
- use of play spaces by those with a disability is lower. 29% of those with a disability use play spaces once per week or more compared to 35% who do not have a disability;
- there is little variation in use by socio economic group although those describing themselves as falling into socio economic group D/E are less likely to visit a play space

### **Usage of Children's Play Spaces by Placemaking Area**

13.18 There are few variations between the usage patterns in different parts of Central Bedfordshire, with 26% of residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 23% of residents in the east and 30% of residents in the west using play spaces once per week or more. The notable exception is in Leighton Buzzard, where only 18% of residents use play spaces this frequently. 70% of residents in this area do not use play areas compared to 50% in the east, 52% in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and 58% in the west.

### **Use of Children's Play Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

13.19 There is also little diversity in usage between residents in settlements of different sizes, with the exception of residents in the smaller villages who use play spaces much less frequently.

### Reasons for Visiting Children’s Play Spaces

13.20 Respondents that use play spaces indicate that the main reasons for doing so are:

- Children’s play (87%)
- Walk and exercise (13%)
- To relax (13%)
- Dog walking (1%)
- Picnic (1%)

### Reasons for Visiting Children’s Play Spaces by Placemaking Area

13.21 There are no real differences in the reasons for using play areas in the different placemaking areas.

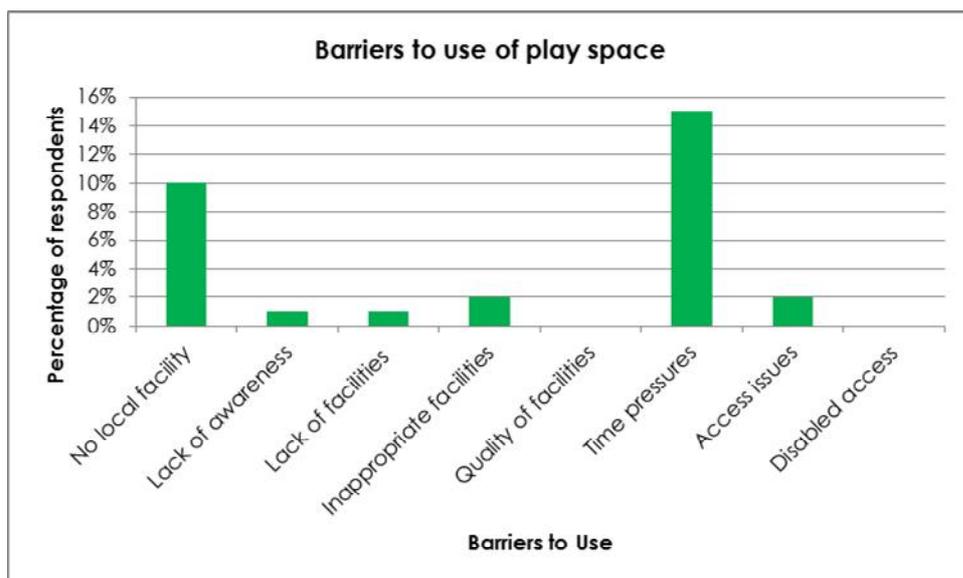
### Reasons for Visiting Children’s Play Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy

13.22 There are no clear differences in the reasons for using play areas in the different settlement hierarchies.

### Barriers to Use

13.23 Chart 13.1 below sets out the key barriers to use of play spaces. While a lack of interest in this type of space (due to the target age range) is the main reason for not using a play space, it reveals that other than time pressures, the lack of local facility is the only other clear barrier to usage.

**Chart 13.1 – Barriers to Use of Children’s Play Spaces**



13.24 Analysis of use across the different segments of population reveals little variation in reasons or barriers to use, with the only issues evident being:

- female users are more likely to highlight safety concerns and issues with the equipment, while it is predominantly male users that suggest that they have a lack of time
- the distance to a facility is more important to older residents (grandparent age) and to residents who are classified within lower socio economic groups; and
- lack of awareness of the location of facilities is particularly apparent amongst the 18 – 34 age group in comparison with other groups

13.25 For those residents with dependents aged between 0 and 8, the main reasons for not using facilities are safety of facilities, a lack of time and a lack of interest. These factors are the same for those with children aged between 9 and 13.

### **Barriers to Use Children’s Play Spaces by Placemaking Area**

13.26 There is little difference in the barriers to use of open space in each Placemaking area. It is however clear that a significantly higher proportion of residents in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South have no interest than in other areas of Central Bedfordshire.

### **Barriers to Use of Children’s Play Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

13.27 A higher proportion of residents in the small and large villages cite difficulties in accessing facilities and more residents also consider facilities to be inappropriate in these areas.

### **Current Provision and Views on Current Provision**

#### **Quantity**

13.28 The audit reveals that almost 26 hectares is dedicated to the provision of facilities for children in Central Bedfordshire. The size of play facilities ranges considerably from sites containing just one piece of equipment, to sites offering a wide range of play facilities. Some sites are contained within a defined space, while others are dispersed across a wider field.

Table 13.1 summarises the distribution of the existing play facilities across Central Bedfordshire.

**Table 13.1 – Current Distribution of Children’s Play Spaces across Central Bedfordshire**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)
Central Bedfordshire	209.00	26.09	0.10	0.09	0.13

Table 13.2 summarises the distribution of Children’s Play Spaces by placemaking area.

**Table 13.2 – Current Distribution of Children’s Play Space by Placemaking Area**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)
27.00	3.27	0.06	0.06	0.12	27.00
39.00	4.42	0.08	0.07	0.11	39.00
143.00	18.40	0.12	0.11	0.13	143.00
Central Bedfordshire	209.00	26.09	0.10	0.09	0.13

13.29 In order to evaluate whether there are any differences in the distribution of play spaces according to the size of the settlement, Table 13.3 summarises the distribution of play spaces by settlement hierarchy. It considers provision per 1000 population, as well as the provision per 1000 of children aged between 5 and 15. It should be noted that not all sites are located in settlements in the settlement hierarchy and therefore figures in Table 13.3 are slightly different than those in Table 13.2.

**Table 13.3 – Distribution of Play Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Ha per 1000 population aged 5 - 17
Major Service Centres	92.00	11.50	0.08	0.07	0.13	0.5
Minor Service Centres	44.00	5.47	0.11	0.10	0.13	0.71
Large Villages	38.00	4.57	0.11	0.10	0.12	0.73
Small Villages	31.00	4.11	0.16	0.15	0.13	1.13

### Quantity of Provision – Key Issues

13.30 Tables 13.1 – 13.3 illustrate the following key issues regarding the number, type and size distribution of Children’s Play Space:

- current provision is equal to 0.10 hectares per 1000 population and that the average site size is 0.13 ha. If no additional play areas were built, provision would decrease to 0.09 ha per 1000 population by 2022

- provision per 1000 population is significantly higher in the North of Central Bedfordshire than in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. Provision in the North is also higher than in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South. The average size of sites is however relatively consistent across Central Bedfordshire as a whole
- the amount of space dedicated to play facilities is higher in the Small Villages (per 1000 population) than in all other areas. Provision in the Large Villages and Minor villages is consistent, however it is significantly lower in the Major Service Centres
- Population growth will see the overall provision per 1000 decline. This will be particularly evident in the Major Services Centres and Minor Service Centres

### **Natural Play**

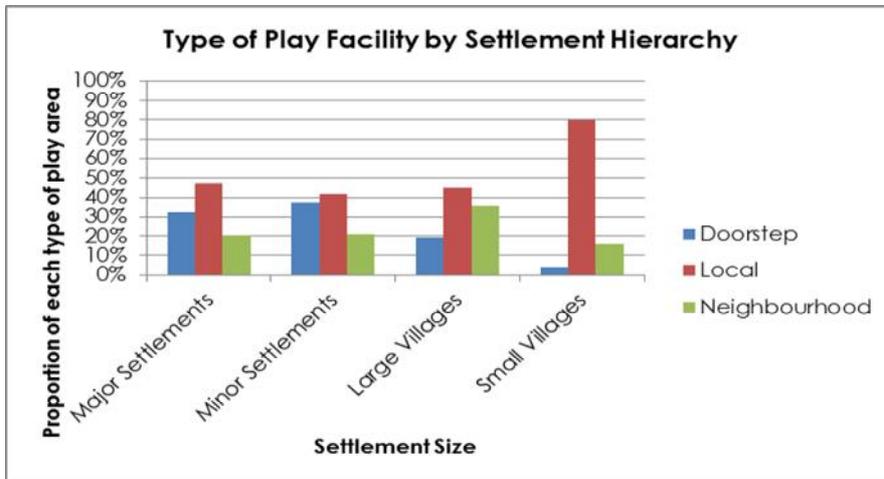
13.31 In addition to formal play areas, the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (2013) identified a renaissance in natural play in Central Bedfordshire. This involves encouraging children to climb, jump, touch and explore the natural environment through play. This may incorporate many different environments, including countryside recreation sites, nature reserves, woodlands, heaths, commons, wetlands and open spaces. Application of natural play principles can be through planting or land-forming within urban play areas, or on a larger scale in more appropriate countryside locations.

Natural play areas are currently found at the following sites:

- Rushmere / Stockgrove Country Park
- Dunstable Downs (formal outdoor fitness equipment)
- Blue Waters and Taiters Way
- Tiddenfoot Country Park (natural play and trim / activity trail)
- Baulk Wood
- Campton Wood (natural play and trim trail)
- Saxon Gate Pocket Park
- Biggleswade Linear Wood
- Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park
- Rectory Wood

13.32 Chart 13.2 outlines the proportion of each type of play area that is provided within each settlement hierarchy. It indicates that while in the Major Service Centres, Minor Service Centres and Large Villages, supply is relatively evenly split between doorstep facilities (LAP), local facilities (LEAP and neighbourhood sites (NEAP), there are fewer neighbourhood play areas (NEAP) within Small Villages. This may influence overall perceptions of facilities.

**Chart 13.2 – Type of Children’s Play Space Provided by Settlement Hierarchy**



**Consultation Responses – Views on Quantity of Children’s Play Space**

**Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans**

13.33 A review of the priorities of Green Infrastructure studies and Parish Plans reinforces the views highlighted through other consultations, with demand for several additional facilities identified. The key priorities are set out below:

- anecdotal requirement for splash park in Dunstable. Significant recent investment in other play areas (Parish consultation)
- Flitwick – lack of provision in west of town (Town Council)
- new facilities required in Houghton Hall ward, Houghton Regis Town Council
- lack of provision – Leighton Linlade (Town Council)
- additional play space required in Sandy – (GI)
- Marston Moretaine – provide additional facilities particularly for 0-10yrs (GI)
- Shefford – requirement for new play provision north of Bedford Road (GI)
- Stotfold – new facilities needed to meet needs of new populations
- Clifton – opportunities for natural play (GI)
- Clophill – adventure play area for ages 6 – 12yrs (Parish Plan)
- Langford – GI study prioritises several new play areas including near Ivel Cottages, Station Road / High Street and south of Cambridge Road
- Broom – funding secured for new play area was lost as no site could be identified
- Ickwell – Parish plan identifies need for facilities for children
- Northill – Parish Plan identifies need for facilities
- Old Warden – no provision, demand identified (Parish)
- Ridgmont – Parish plan sets out requirement for facilities for children aged under 10yrs
- Wrestlingworth – Parish plan identifies need

13.34 While the above sets out aspirations for new facilities, it is clear that the majority of priorities relate to improvements to the quality of existing facilities.

**Quantity of Provision – Household Survey Responses**

13.35 The household survey reveals that:

- just 4% of the population consider there to be more than enough play spaces, while 54% believe that the amount of space is about right
- 36% suggest that there are not enough facilities, while 6% indicate that there are nearly enough

13.36 The above take into account the views of both users and non users of play areas. Overall therefore, more people think that there are enough play areas than believe that there are insufficient. A relatively high proportion of the population are however dissatisfied with the amount of facilities that are provided.

### **Views on Quantity of Children’s Play Space by Placemaking Area**

13.37 The household survey demonstrates that there is little variation in perception between the placemaking areas, with between 33% and 39% of residents suggesting that there are not enough play spaces in each area. Interestingly, the lowest proportion of residents who believe that there are not enough play spaces is found in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South (where tables 13.1 – 13.3 have already demonstrated that provision is lowest). It is in this area where usage is also lowest. Provision in this area is higher than in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, but lower than in the north. This suggests that there may perhaps be other factors influencing these perceptions.

### **Views on Quantity of Children’s Play Space by Settlement Hierarchy**

13.38 Analysis of the household survey demonstrates that despite differences in the distribution of facilities, perceptions are relatively similar in settlements of different sizes. It is however evident that a higher proportion of residents in small villages consider there to not be enough facilities than in larger settlements despite the high levels of provision. This is evident in all geographical areas of Central Bedfordshire and may be reflective of accessibility issues and / or quality issues, as well as concerns about the amount of facilities.

### **Views on Quantity of Children’s Play Space - Town and Parish Councils**

13.39 In contrast to the findings of the household survey, more respondents to the Town and Parish Council survey believe that more play areas are required (59%) than are happy with the amount of facilities. Nearly enough is the most commonly given response. It is evident however that the majority of Town and Parishes indicate that the reason for their views is that the facilities provided are old, in need of upgrade and offer limited play value. This suggests that the real perception is that there are not enough play areas of appropriate quality and that in reality, quality is as much of an issue, if not more so, than the amount of play areas. This is confirmed when analysing priorities – only Fairfield Parish Council, Heath and Reach Parish Council, Northill Parish Council and Eggington Parish Council indicate that they would prioritise the provision of additional facilities over the improvement of existing sites.

13.40 Many Town and Parish Councils do however, express concerns about the impact of population growth on the demand for new facilities and the need to ensure that the number of facilities is kept in balance with the overall population.

## Current Provision

### Quality

13.41 Quality and value of play areas were assessed using a quality assessment matrix. It considers specific components of quality under the following headings:

- Location of site
- Play Value
- Cleanliness and maintenance

13.42 Total scores take into account the relative importance of each facility, with location weighted most highly and play value the lowest. Reinforcing the messages from the telephone survey, visits confirm that there are some high quality play areas and overall, the average score achieved across Central Bedfordshire is 64%. Visits clearly demonstrate that play value is the area of greatest concern, with an average score of 55%. This is illustrated in Chart 13.3.

**Chart 13.3 – Headline Issues from Site Visits – Children’s Play Space**

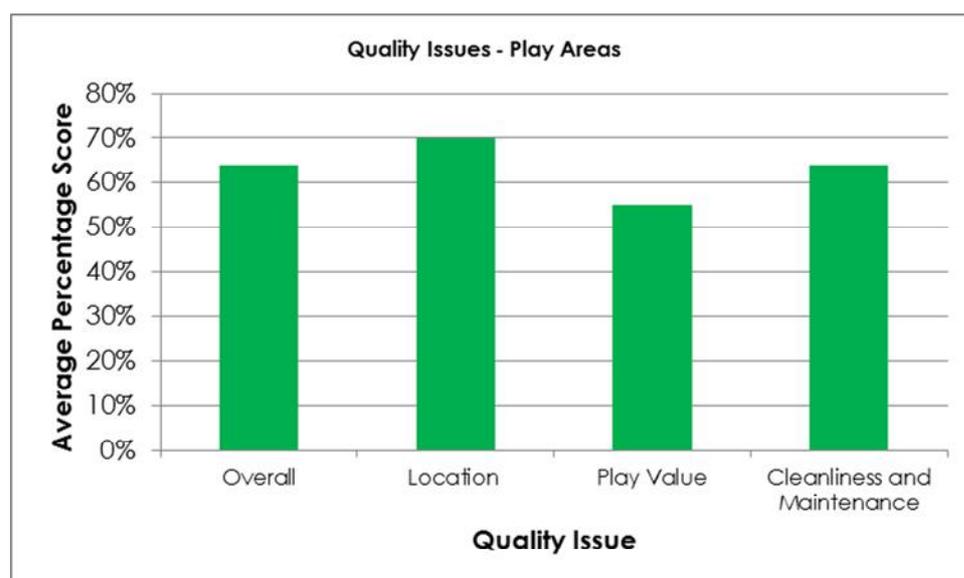


Table 13.4 summarises the scores by type of play facility.

**Table 13.4 – Quality of Children’s Play Space by Size**

Size of Play Area	Location	Play Value	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Overall
LAP - doorstep play areas	77%	46%	72%	65%
LEAP - local play areas	68%	57%	69%	66%
NEAP - neighbourhood play areas	68%	58%	64%	63%

13.43 Table 13.4 indicates that there is relatively limited overall difference in the quality scores achieved by play areas of different sizes with average scores ranging only between 63% and 66%. Small play areas achieved the highest scores in relation to cleanliness and maintenance and location. It was however noticeable that the play value of these sites is significantly lower in comparison to other sites. There is relatively limited difference in play value between local areas of play (LAP) and neighbourhood areas of play (NEAP).

13.44 With regards to the quality of specific aspects of play areas, site visits reveal that the key areas achieving lower scores are:

- facilities for disabled users
- signage
- links with natural environment
- seating for children
- play value / range of facilities offered

13.45 In contrast, features achieving high averages scores included:

- seating for adults
- access routes
- general maintenance
- provision of litter bins
- personal safety and security

### Quality of Children’s Play Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy

Table 13.5 illustrates the average quality scores by settlement hierarchy.

**Table 13.5 – Average Quality Scores for Children’s Play Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Location	Play Value	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Overall
Major	66%	66%	66%	66%
Minor	75%	52%	69%	66%
Large	71%	58%	70%	68%
Small	59%	54%	56%	54%

13.46 Table 10.5 indicates that there is little variation in the quality of play areas according to settlement hierarchy, with the average quality scores consistent across settlements of all sizes with the exception of small villages, where quality is noticeably lower. There are greater challenges in maintaining play facilities in smaller villages.

### Quality of Children’s Play Spaces by Placemaking Area

Table 13.6 summarises the quality of provision by Placemaking area.

**Table 13.6 – Average Quality Scores of Children’s Play Spaces by Placemaking area**

Location	Play Value	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Overall
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Dunstable and Houghton Regis	73%	59%	64%	70%
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	65%	53%	72%	63%
North	71%	62%	62%	65%

13.47 Table 13.6 demonstrates that there is a slightly higher degree of variation. The play value of facilities is higher in the North. Overall however the quality of facilities is highest in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, while facilities in Leighton Buzzard achieved the highest scores in terms of cleanliness and maintenance. Each area however contains examples of high and low scoring play facilities.

### Quality of Provision – Consultation Responses

#### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

13.48 While consultations provide an overview of the quality issues experienced, as well as components that are important in the provision of recreation areas, reviews of the existing Green Infrastructure Studies, Parish Plans and detailed consultation provide a more in depth understanding of site specific priorities related to play spaces.

13.49 Analysis of Green Infrastructure Studies, Town and Parish Council consultation and available Parish Plans reveals the following concerns related to the quality of play areas for children;

- Ampthill - Upgrade Ampthill Park (Town Plan)
- Biggleswade - Refurbishment of play areas (Fairfield Recreation Ground, Heather Drive) – Town Council consultation
- Improvement of Grasmere Play area, Biggleswade through use of natural features (GI)
- Flitwick – quality improvements required, particularly Millennium Park (Town Council)
- Improvement to range of equipment – Houghton Regis Town Council
- Marston Moretaine - Upgrade existing facilities (GI) in particular play area behind Upper Shelton School
- Potton – recently received grant for improvement
- Stotfold – existing facilities out of date and need upgrading
- Blunham – requirement for upgrade identified in Parish Plan
- Harlington – requirement to upgrade existing site (Parish Council)
- Heath and Reach – replace facilities at Thrift Recreation Ground (recently removed)
- Henlow – facilities poor and need upgrading, particularly The Pyghtles
- Maulden – identified need to upgrade facilities (Parish Council)
- Shillington – play area needs upgrading (parish)
- Slip End – play area requires improvements (Parish Plan)
- Brogborough – upgrade of existing play area. Village hall recently removed all equipment so this site is Parish Council priority
- Greenfield – facilities recently upgraded
- Maulden – play area requires additional equipment (Parish)
- Southill – although existing play area has been recently upgraded there is potential to provide further equipment and improve quality (Parish)
- Sutton – play area requires minor repairs (Parish meeting minutes)
- Tilsforth – not enough facilities of appropriate quality (Parish)

- Totternhoe – equipment needs replacing on all three play areas (Parish – ROSPA report)
- Upper Gravenhurst – more equipment needed
- Upper Shelton – facilities require improvement

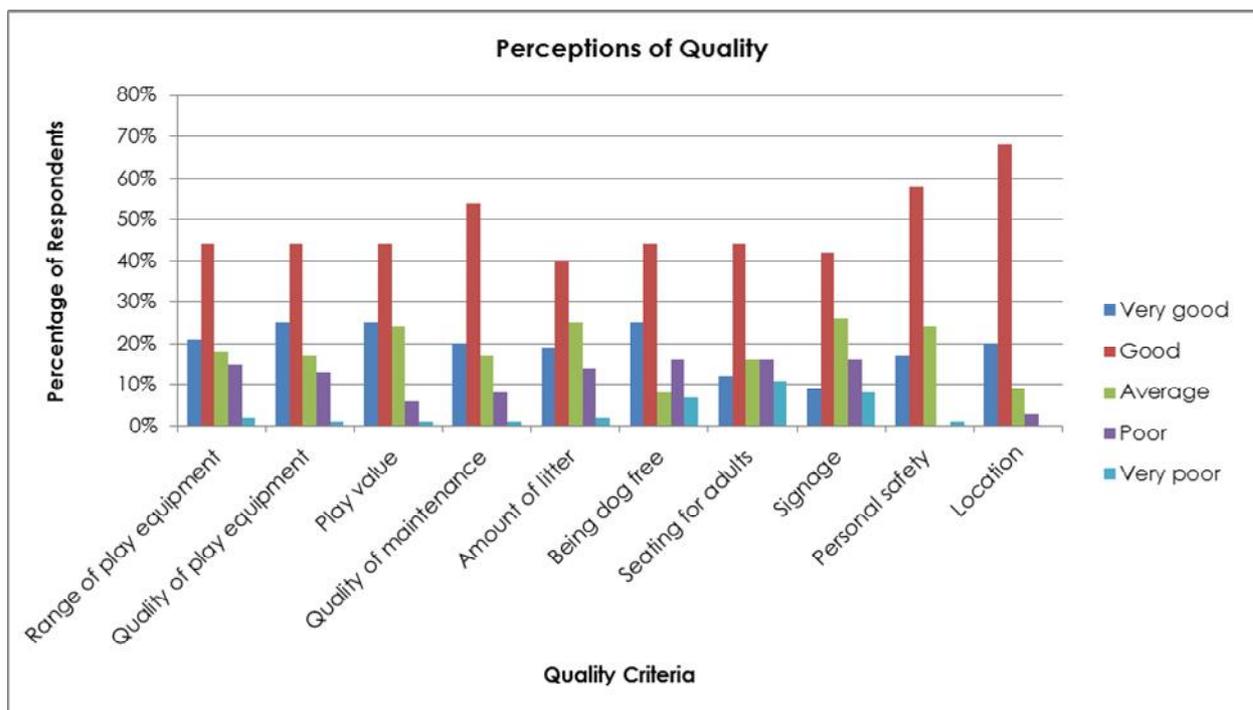
### Household Survey Responses

13.50 The household survey reveals that there are relatively positive perceptions regarding the quality of play areas, with 65% considering provision to be good or very good and just 16% rating it poor or very poor. This takes into account the views of both users and non users.

13.51 Chart 13.4 summarises the viewpoints of the population of Central Bedfordshire as a whole relating to specific aspects for improvement. In general, these reflect the overall findings of site visits and reveal that:

- for each factor, the most common response is good
- there are few concerns relating to the location of existing facilities or the safety of the equipment provided – this concurs with the finding of site visits, which demonstrate that the location of facilities is one of the most positive features of current play provision
- 17% of respondents are unhappy with the range of equipment, while 14% are concerned about the quality. The majority of respondents however rate these factors as good or better. Site visits reveal play value to be the greatest concern; and
- more than 20% of respondents consider the provision of seating and signage to be poor and 23% have concerns about the presence of dogs in children’s play spaces. These features were also evident as issues at some sites across Central Bedfordshire during site visits

**Chart 13.4 – Perceptions of Quality Factors for Children’s Play Space**



## **Views on Quality of Children’s Play Spaces by Placemaking Area**

13.52 Consultation demonstrates that, on the whole, perceptions of users are consistent in each of the different placemaking areas. There are a few noticeable differences, many of which are also reflected in the findings of site visits;

- In general, residents in the west (part of the north placemaking area) rate each factor more positively. The only real exception to this relates to the presence of dogs, which appears to be more apparent in this area than any other. Site visits do not necessarily reflect this, with the quality of facilities relatively even in all three areas and play value lower in the North
- For all factors, there are more polarized perceptions in Dunstable and Houghton Regis than in any other area
- No residents in Leighton Buzzard and Rural South rate the quality of facilities as poor, although it is in this area where there are perhaps the most issues relating to the range of provision. Residents in this area also have significantly fewer concerns about dogs in play areas than in the other three placemaking areas. Site visits do not reveal the reason for this, with few clear issues with dogs identified in any area
- Residents in the east (part of the North placemaking area) are least satisfied with the play value offered by their facilities. Facilities in the North (in which east is included) is revealed by site visits to have the lowest in terms of play value
- Signage is rated much more highly in the west and east (North placemaking area) – site visits also rate the quality of signage marginally higher than in other areas
- Leighton Buzzard and the rural south is the only area where concerns about the location of facilities are evident – this also reflects the findings of site visits, where almost all elements of the location of sites score marginally lower in Leighton Buzzard

13.53 There are no other clear patterns emerging by placemaking area.

## **Views on Quality of Children’s Play Spaces by Settlement Hierarchy**

13.54 The greatest variation in the quality of provision is perhaps evident when considering the perception of quality of users by settlement hierarchy.

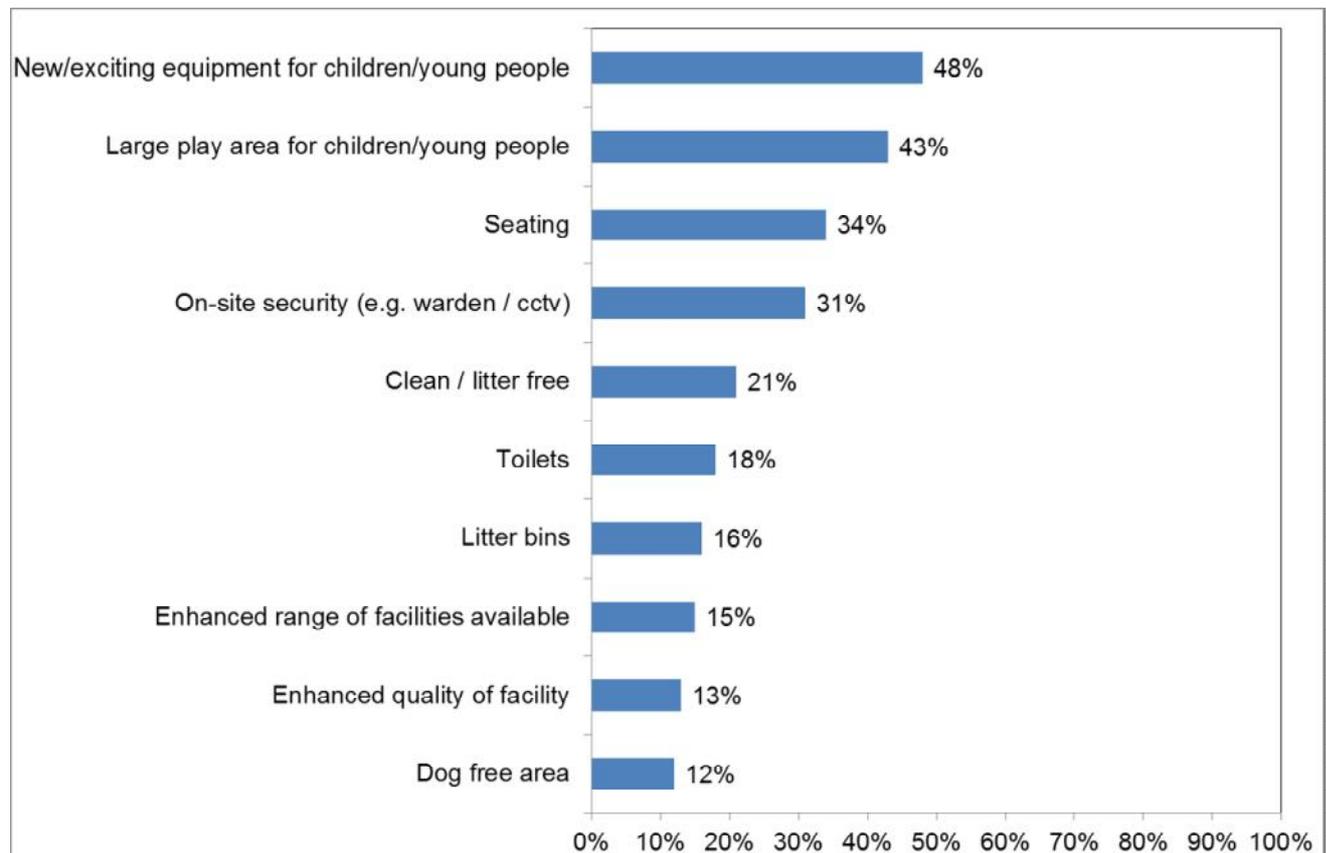
13.55 Consultation reveals that:

- for the majority of components of play areas, those in the larger villages are less satisfied than their counterparts elsewhere
- perhaps unsurprisingly, the range of play equipment provided is seen to be greatest in the Major Service Centres. The smaller the settlement, the smaller the perceived range of equipment (and this correlates to the reality). A higher proportion of residents in the larger settlements consider the quality of maintenance to be good, but there is greater variation, with almost no residents in the villages considering it to be poor. Views in the major and Minor Service Centres are generally more polarized; and
- lower proportions of people consider signage and seating to be poor in the small and large villages than in the major and Minor Service Centres

## **Quality of Children’s Play Spaces - Aspirations**

13.56 Chart 13.5 illustrates the factors that residents of Central Bedfordshire consider most important in the provision of high quality play facilities. It is noticeable that some of the issues raised correlate with those factors more frequently rated as poor (seating / range of facilities).

**Chart 13.5 – Aspirations for the Provision of Children’s Play Spaces**



**Views on Quality of Children’s Play Spaces - Town and Parish Councils**

13.57 As highlighted earlier in this section, while there is apparent discontent with the amount of play areas, only 3 responding Parish Councils would prioritise the provision of additional play spaces over the improvement of existing sites. Many Town and Parish Councils indicate that facilities are old, worn and in need of upgrade and several indicate that they are already seeking grants to address this issue. 23% of Parish / Town Councils consider the quality of their facilities for children to be poor and a further 50% indicate that they are only average. This means that providers rate play facilities as some of the poorest quality open spaces in Central Bedfordshire. It is particularly notable that it is the smaller Parishes that consider their provision to be of lower quality and to offer more limited play value. Tilsworth Parish Council, Heath and Reach Parish Council and Wrestlingworth and Cockayne Hatley Parish Council all consider the quality of their facilities to be poor.

13.58 Reflecting this, the importance placed on appropriate play provision by Town and Parish Councils is clear. While only two Councils prioritise improvements to provision for children over all other types of open space, more than a third make it their second priority and a further 10% consider it to be their third priority.

**Accessibility**

13.59 Access to play areas is as important as the quality of provision. National guidance set out earlier (Play England) highlights the importance of an appropriate location, while consultation demonstrates that location of sites is one of the key barriers to use.

13.60 Based upon the findings of the telephone survey, Table 13.7 summarises the mode of transport that residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use to reach a play facility for children and the type of transport that users actually do use.

**Table 13.7 – Mode of Travel**

Expected vs Actual	Walk	Cycle	Public Transport	Car
Expected	89%	2%	0%	9%
Actual	81%	8%	0%	10%

Table 13.7 demonstrates that;

- on the whole, play facilities are anticipated to be within walking distance of the home (89% would expect to travel on foot).
- Current usage patterns suggest that 81% of users walk to a play facility suggesting that this aspiration of local provision is by and large achieved. The role of bikes in getting users to the facility and the importance of catering for those that do this should also not be underestimated.

13.61 Expectations are broadly similar across all socio – economic and demographic groups. For those with children however, expectations that play areas will be accessible on foot are even higher. For those with dependent children under 8, over 90% of users currently travel on foot. This decreases to 64% for those with children between aged 9 and 13, however it is cycling that is the second most commonly used most of transport and not the car.

13.62 Play England also provide guidance on suggested distance thresholds for play provision (Planning for Play, Play England 2008). Reflecting the aspirations of residents in Central Bedfordshire for local access to play provision, these suggested standards also evidence a need for play provision local to the home. The standards quoted are as follows:

- LAP doorstep play spaces – within 100m (60m straight line distance) of the home
- LEAP local play spaces – within 400m (240m straight line distance) of the home; and
- NEAP neighbourhood play spaces - within 1000m (600m straight line distance) of the home

13.63 Further analysis suggests that there is little variation overall in views in the different placemaking areas and settlement hierarchies, specifically:

### **Placemaking areas**

13.64 The geographical variation in this view is limited. Only residents in the West (North Placemaking area) demonstrate a higher propensity to travel by car (almost 25%). It is however clear that this is linked with current travel patterns, as only 67% of users of play spaces living in

the west currently travel on foot. This compares with 82% in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 75% in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south and 92% in the east placemaking area.

### **Settlement Hierarchy**

13.65 Analysis of aspirations by settlement hierarchy demonstrates some variation in views, with the expectation that facilities for children are accessible on foot particularly apparent in the Major Service Centres. There is a greater acceptance in the large and small villages that there may be a need to travel by car with almost 25% in the smaller villages indicating that they would travel using this mode. This is also reflected in the actual mode of transport of existing users, with a greater reliance on the car in the small villages (36%) and large villages (21%) than in the rural areas.

### **Setting and Applying Standards**

13.66 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

13.67 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space.

13.68 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of large recreation areas. Existing provision can then be measured against these benchmarks to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

13.69 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for large recreation areas is outlined below.

### **Accessibility**

#### **Setting Accessibility Standards**

13.70 As outlined in Section 2, standards are set using an accessibility led approach. This accessibility led approach is particularly important for play areas, as access (along with quality) is the key determinant of usage.

13.71 It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to get there. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

13.72 Survey data demonstrates that there is a strong consensus that residents expect to travel on foot to reach a play area and an expectation that facilities will be located close to the home. Almost 90% of residents have this expectation.

13.73 Using the raw data collated in the household survey, Table 13.8 evaluates the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach an equipped play space for children.

13.74 To fully understand the spread of responses (and therefore the expectations of all residents), it categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or

those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach a play space. PPG17 indicates that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 13.8 – Travel Expectations to Children’s Play Spaces – calculated from Household Survey**

Mode of Transport	Walk Time			
	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	5	10	10	30
Major	5	10	15	60
Minor	5	10	10	30
Large	5	5	15	30
Small	2	5	10	20

13.75 Table 13.8 reveals the following key findings in relation to residents’ accessibility expectations;

- 25% of residents across Central Bedfordshire would only be willing to walk up to 5 minutes to reach a play area (quartile 1). With the exception of the smaller villages (2 minutes) this is common to all settlement hierarchies
- the remaining 75% of residents would walk further than 5 minutes and the majority of responses indicated an expectation of between 10 and 15 minutes; and
- the modal response (i.e. the most common response given) was that a play area should be within 5 minutes of the home. The average response given was 10 minutes

13.76 This confirms that a 5 to 10 minute walk time to a play area is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population.

13.77 It is also important to take into account the views arising from other consultations. Other consultations (as well as the household survey) reinforce the importance of ensuring a balance between the quality of provision, access to the site and the range of equipment provided. Analysis and interpretation of responses to the telephone survey suggest that residents are willing to travel slightly further to a play area containing more equipment, however they also expect to have access to local facilities. It is important that these issues are factored into the calculation of a local standard. Taking this into account, as well as the statistical data which suggests that a 5 – 10 minute catchment area is acceptable, a 10 minute walk time catchment represents an appropriate distance for the standard to be set at.

### Accessibility

Play Areas - Accessibility Standard
10 minute walk time (480m)
Justification

The findings of the consultation demonstrate that play areas are expected local to the home. As a result, there is a strong emphasis that such sites should be accessible on foot (89% would expect to walk). It is also clear that such sites are expected in both rural and urban areas.

In all areas, the average and most common responses are similar (9 and 10 minutes respectively). Views on quality and quantity of provision however indicate that the quality of play areas, and the provision of challenging facilities, is as important as the location of such sites. In order to promote a strategic approach to the provision of play areas, and facilitate the provision of a range of high quality sites, a standard of 10 minutes walk time has been used as a benchmark. This standard takes into account the expectations of residents by promoting the provision of easily accessible, high quality space, catering for all ages.

This figure falls in between criteria suggested by Fields in Trust (FIT) who indicate that residents should expect to travel for 400m to a local facility and 600m to a neighbourhood facility and therefore represents a realistic starting point for analysis of the adequacy of play facilities. It suggests that LAPs (recommended threshold 100m) are of limited value to local residents.

### **Application of the Accessibility Standard**

13.78 The application of this benchmark is illustrated in maps contained in Appendix B. Given that data suggests that residents are willing to travel up to 10 minutes to reach a play space, it can be assumed that areas where residents outside of this travel distance are deficient in provision.

13.79 Application of this standard indicates that the distribution of facilities across Central Bedfordshire is relatively comprehensive, with most residents in the majority of settlements having access to play areas.

13.80 There are few residential areas with no play areas and the main areas of deficiency can be identified as follows:

#### **Placemaking Area**

- **Dunstable and Houghton Regis** – Watling and Manshead wards as well as some central parts (but predominantly industrial and / or commercial so limited significance)
- **Leighton Buzzard and Rural South** – south of Leighton Buzzard town centre and Linslade ward. Many of the gaps cover commercial and industrial areas and so are of limited significance (these areas are not expected to contain play areas)
- **North** – Flitwick (West of town) Heath and Reach (south of village), Totternhoe (east of village), Studham, Old Warden, Houghton Conquest, Northill, Broom, Blunham, Sandy (East of town), Langford (south of village), Harlington (east of village), Westoning (West of village), Ampthill, Salford, Cranfield (west of town), Marston Moretaine (West of town), Aspley Heath

#### **Settlement Hierarchy**

- Major Service Centres – Dunstable Watling and Manshead Wards, Leighton Buzzard Linslade ward and south of town, Sandy (east), Flitwick (West) Ampthill
- Minor Service Centres – Cranfield (west), Marston Moretaine (West), Fairfield
- Large Villages –Langford (South), Houghton Conquest, Harlington (east), Westoning (west), Heath and Reach (south)
- Small Villages – Totternhoe, Studham, Old Warden, Northill, Broom, Aspley Heath, Salford

13.81 Interestingly, further analysis indicates that on the whole, facilities across Central Bedfordshire are evenly distributed and there are very few sites serving overlapping catchment areas.

Maps outlining the distribution of facilities can be found in Appendix B.

13.82 It should be noted that while the 10 minute catchment provides a theoretical indication of accessibility, practical decision making relating to the location of play areas should also consider any impacting barriers, for example the presence of railway lines or significant main roads. Appropriate application of the standard should therefore be assessed on a case by case basis.

## Quantity

### Setting Quantity Standards

13.83 Overall, consultation suggests that the majority of residents believe there to be sufficient equipped play spaces to meet current requirements. There are however almost 40% of residents that suggest that there are not enough facilities and there are several concerns about the quality of facilities.

13.84 Application of the accessibility standard indicates that there are some residential areas where residents are outside of the catchment area for facilities although on the whole, play areas are evenly distributed across Central Bedfordshire. While it is recognised that some play areas have larger catchments due to the amount of facilities that they provide, to ensure consistent access to facilities it is important that all residents are able to access local facilities as a baseline.

13.85 Table 13.9 sets out the minimum amount of provision required across Central Bedfordshire. It is based upon the application of the accessibility standard to settlements in the settlement hierarchy and assumes that a facility will be provided within 480m of the majority of residents based within settlements included in the settlement hierarchy and assumes that all deficiencies identified are met with the provision of one additional play area. It also assumes that the new play area is of average size (0.13ha).

**Table 13.9 – Current Quantity Requirements for Children’s Play Spaces**

Settlement Hierarchy	Current Provision	Required Provision to meet 10 minute catchment	Minimum Current Requirement
Major Service Centres	92 sites – 11.5ha	7 sites – 0.91ha	12.41ha

Settlement Hierarchy	Current Provision	Required Provision to meet 10 minute catchment	Minimum Current Requirement
Minor Service Centres	44 sites – 5.47 ha	3 sites – 0.39ha	5.86ha
Large Villages	38 sites – 4.57 ha	5 sites - 0.65ha	5.22ha
Small Villages	31 sites – 4.11 ha	7 sites – 0.91ha	5.02ha
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	25.65 ha	25.65ha + 2.86ha	28.51ha

### Current Quantity

13.86 Table 13.9 illustrates the **current shortfall of 2.86ha in provision** when calculated against the accessibility standard. The requirement for additional play areas to meet the accessibility standard means that a total of 28.51ha would be required. **This equates to the need to provide the equivalent of 0.11 ha of Children’s Play Spaces per 1000 population.** This level is below the level recommended by Fields in Trust (0.25ha per 1000 population) but ensures that most residents are within the target catchment area.

13.87 It should be noted however that accessibility should be treated as the primary determinant of the requirement of play spaces, together with the quantity standards, and the quality standard should be used to inform where contributions to improve existing are required.

### Quantity

Children’s Play Areas - Quantity Benchmark
0.11ha per 1000 population
Justification
This figure represents the minimum requirement for play areas in Central Bedfordshire if all residents were to be located within a 10 minute walk of such a facility (480m).

### Application of the Quantity Standard

13.88 Table 13.10 summarises current and projected shortfalls based upon placemaking areas to provide an indication of shortfalls and surpluses in the provision of play areas. It must be noted that these provide a broad indication only as quantity standards should really be considered at a local level. Gaps in access to existing play facilities should also be considered as the primary determinant of the requirement for new provision and not the application of quantity standards.

**Table 13.10 – Current and Projected Shortfalls using a standard of 0.11ha per 1000 population**

Area	Amount Required Current	Amount Required Future	Shortfall Surplus Current	Shortfall / Surplus Future	Number of Additional Facilities required (Current)	Number of Additional Facilities required (Future)
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	5.7354	6.4218	-2.47	-3.15	19	24
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	5.9477	6.8497	-1.52	-2.43	12	19
North	16.3955	18.6901	2.00	-0.29	Sufficient	2
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	28.0786	31.9616	-1.99	-5.87	15	45

13.89 Table 13.10 reveals that population growth alone will generate demand for an additional 3.9 hectares of play areas amounting to a total of almost 47 further play areas overall.

### Application of Quantity Standard by Settlement

13.90 Earlier analysis revealed that the size (and content/age range) of facilities is an issue. The following Major and Minor Service Centres do not contain play spaces categorised as a neighbourhood (NEAP) facility:

- Minor Service Centres – Caddington, Shefford
- There are very few neighbourhood (NEAP) facilities in the Large and Small Villages

13.91 Local analysis, particularly when combined with analysis of accessibility, enables the analysis of real deficiencies. Use of this figure (0.11ha per 1000 population) as a benchmark indicates that the biggest deficiencies (in terms of ha per 1000 population) are in the following locations:

- Leighton Buzzard (accessibility deficiency also identified, requirement identified by Parish)
- Dunstable (accessibility deficiency also identified, requirement identified by Parish)
- Houghton Regis
- Sandy (accessibility deficiency also identified, requirement identified by Parish)
- Flitwick (accessibility deficiency also identified, requirement identified by Parish)
- Stotfold (requirement identified by Parish)
- Shefford (requirement identified by Parish)
- Henlow
- Toddington
- Barton-le-Clay
- Maulden (requirement for additional provision identified by Parish)
- Northill and Broom (accessibility deficiencies also identified)
- Langford (accessibility deficiency also identified)
- Clifton (requirement identified by Parish)
- Harlington (accessibility deficiency also identified)

- Westoning (accessibility deficiency also identified)

13.92 As is clear, some of the above settlements have sufficient provision to meet existing accessibility targets. This serves to demonstrate how quantity provides only an indication of the adequacy of facilities and should be considered in conjunction with accessibility rather than in isolation.

13.93 Application of figures relating just to the number of children in the settlement reveal similar findings. Many of the settlements with a deficiency calculated have also been identified as in deficient by Town and Parish Councils.

13.94 In addition to gaps in access to facilities, there are other reasons why settlements may have shortfalls in provision. These are likely to focus on areas of high population which need fewer facilities to serve the needs of residents in accessibility terms, but the amount of people living in close proximity to the site may mean that it is expected to sustain higher numbers of users. Deficiencies against the standard may mean that sites are at capacity. Equally, areas where there is sufficient provision to meet quantity standards but gaps in access may have poorly distributed facilities or large sites.

13.95 It must also be noted that figures are skewed slightly by the higher provision per 1000 population in smaller settlements (which is required to meet accessibility standards). The small population in smaller settlements means that these areas are far less likely to feature amongst the areas with the highest quantitative deficiencies as the requirement for quantity of provision is much lower.

### **Future Provision**

13.96 Application of the quantity standard suggests that by 2022, quantitative shortfalls of provision will be highest in the following settlements:

- Leighton Buzzard
- Houghton Regis
- Dunstable
- Sandy
- Shefford
- Stotfold / Fairfield
- Henlow
- Flitwick
- Arlesey
- Clophill
- Maulden
- Toddington
- Northill
- Aspley Heath

13.97 There are 37 settlements with a total shortfall by 2022. Both Sundon and Streatley currently have sufficient provision, but population growth will generate a shortfall by 2022.

### **Quality**

13.98 Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents, as well as aspirations regarding the type of spaces residents would like to see provided. Supporting this, site visits have provided an overview of the quality of play areas, as well as areas of concern and successful play provision.

13.99 Quality is as important as the quantity of each type of open space and for play areas. Consultation demonstrates that the quality of facilities is linked with perceptions of the quantity of facilities, and that there are considered to be insufficient play areas of the desired quality.

13.100 Linking with national good practice guidance, this input has been used to address improvements needed to existing play spaces and to guide the design of new open spaces and it is hoped that this strategy will promote the creation of higher quality play areas.

13.101 The quality standard for play areas in Central Bedfordshire is set out below. Further detail can be found in the Design Guidance. This will include specifications of facilities included within this typology (including LEAP).

## Quality

Children's Play Spaces - Quality Standard	
Size and Location	<p>Within appropriate distance of target catchment area</p> <p>Accessible via safe footpaths and roads</p> <p>Located in an area of incidental supervision – appropriate balance between seclusion and visibility</p> <p>Appropriate boundaries and buffer zone (not necessarily fenced in line with new guidance)</p>
Access	<p>Compliant with DDA – access audit in place</p> <p>Regular safety audit</p>
Facilities	<p>Bespoke design to suit location</p> <p>Age appropriate play facilities using NEAP, LEAP and LAP play area specifications (details of these play area types can be found in the design guidance)</p> <p>Range of play opportunities offering high play value and inclusive play equipment (details of the play value scale can be found in Appendix D)</p> <p>Formal play equipment and safety surfacing compliant with British Standards BSEN 1176 and 1177</p> <p>Clear signage</p> <p>Fencing, seating and bins</p>

13.102 The detailed requirements for play facilities will be provided in the design guidance.

### Application of Quality Standards

13.103 There are multiple sites falling below 66% (a minimum of all ratings acceptable on the site assessment score) which require improvement to meet standards. These are included within analysis in Appendix A.

### Summary – Issues Identified

#### Usage

For residents with children, equipped play spaces are an important facility. 41% of those with children aged up to 8 visit play spaces at least once per week and only 4% of families with children in this age bracket do not visit play areas. Usage however drops when children reach the age of 9, with only 12% visiting weekly and 31% not using facilities at all. This may indicate a lack of facilities targeting this age bracket, or perhaps suggest that the facilities provide are not meeting local need. Those with disabilities and non-white British residents are less likely to use a facility, although for those non-white British residents that do use a site, frequency of use is high.

Location is one of the main barriers to usage along with lack of time. A small proportion of residents indicate that there are no appropriate facilities. The perceived safety of equipment is also one of the key barriers for female residents and those with dependents, whilst older residents (of grandparent age) are more likely to only take children to use facilities if they are local.

## **Quality, Quantity and Accessibility**

Consultation revealed that the quality and amount of facilities for children is perhaps one of the biggest issues in Central Bedfordshire. While the telephone survey revealed a degree of satisfaction with the amount of facilities (although 36% believe that more are required), 59% of responding Town and Parish Councils indicate that additional facilities are needed. While some Town and Parish Councils have these views because there are no facilities within their village, further analysis revealed that many of these views arise because facilities provided are considered to be old, in need of upgrade and offer limited play value. In many settlements there are not perceived to be enough facilities of appropriate quality.

Reflecting this, site visits reveal a significant range in the quality of provision and in the play value of the play spaces. While there are some examples of high quality facilities, there are also some poorer quality sites and the range of quality is much greater than most other types of open space. The variety of equipment, availability of seating and dog fouling are particularly important to residents. The quality of facilities is revealed to be particularly poor in the small villages.

### **Accessibility**

Play facilities are expected in close proximity to the home and 90% of residents of Central Bedfordshire expect to be able to reach at least one facility on foot. 25% of residents believe that play areas should be within 5 minutes of the home while the majority would only walk between 10 – 15 minutes. Nationally recommended standards (Play England, Planning for Play) suggest that doorstep play areas (LAP) should be located within 100m walk of each home, while local play areas (LEAP) should be within 400m (or 240m straight line distance). Residents of Central Bedfordshire are willing to walk further to reach a play area, but have expectations that high quality facilities with a wide range of equipment will be provided when they reach the site. Consultations also demonstrate that residents are willing to travel further to reach destination facilities i.e. play spaces containing a wide range of opportunities (NEAP).

Application of the 10 minute walk time standard highlights gaps in provision in several areas, most notably in Dunstable Watling and Manshead Wards, Leighton Buzzard Linslade ward and south of town, Sandy (east), Flitwick (West) Ampthill, Cranfield (west), Marston Moretaine (West), Blunham, Langford (South), Houghton Conquest, Harlington (east), Westoning (west), Heath and Reach (south), Totternhoe, Studham, Old Warden, Northill, Broom, Aspley Heath and Salford.

In order to deliver facilities in the above locations (as a minimum baseline) and retain existing sites, a minimum of 0.11ha per 1000 population is required across Central Bedfordshire.

Application of this benchmark reveals several issues, including many areas where there are shortfalls (including most of the above areas) as well as settlements where there are perhaps sufficient facilities to meet accessibility targets, but only small, low quality sites provided.

Future population growth will require additional facilities to meet the needs of new populations. Use of the benchmark of 0.11 ha per 1000 population suggests that up to 45 additional play areas may be required to meet the demands of housing growth.

## **Step 5 – Identifying Priorities**

## **Key Issues to Address**

13.104 The above analysis indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to play spaces:

- Play spaces are important facilities for those with dependents. Use is strongly influenced by location, as well as the safety of facilities. Levels of use by residents with disabilities, as well as those of none white ethnic minority is lower and there is also a lack of awareness of facilities available, particularly in residents aged 18 to 34 (who are likely to have dependents)
- There are concerns relating to the quality of existing facilities and many sites are ageing and in need of upgrading. Added to this, there is a significant range in the play value offered at different sites. There are expectations that high quality facilities will be provided. Site visits reveal particular concerns with the quality of facilities in small settlements, many of whom are struggling with maintenance requirements
- Residents expect to find play areas local to their home and evidence suggests within a 10 minute walk time. Some residents must travel further than 10 minutes to reach current provision. Fewer high quality facilities will better meet the needs of residents than multiple small but dysfunctional sites but local provision remains relatively important for residents
- Population growth is likely to see an increase in demand for play areas and a consequent increase in visitor numbers. New areas of housing development will also require new play facilities to ensure that residents have local access to play. As set out above, there is a need to balance quality with quantity

## **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

13.105 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- Ensure that all residents have appropriate access to local play areas (within a 10 minute catchment) and can also access destination play areas
- Promote the provision of high quality play facilities with strong play value
- Attract users from all sectors of the population, including residents with disabilities
- Meet user aspirations relating to quality of provision as well as local priorities

## **Key Priorities**

13.106 It is therefore recommended that key principles for the delivery of children's play areas across Central Bedfordshire are set as follows:

- promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Strategy
- to promote the strategic distribution of high quality play facilities, seek to ensure that all residents are within a 10 minute walk time catchment of at least one local play area. This should apply to all settlement types. Sites should be of high quality, cater for all age groups (linking with requirements set out in Facilities for Young People Section) and offer a range of play opportunities
- maximise access to a destination play area through the inclusion of these facilities at strategic locations – i.e. country parks, urban parks

- work with providers and communities to ensure that all play areas meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section. This should include the creation of safe access routes to reach play areas. Linking with the quality criteria, sites should be tailored to the character of the area (for example natural play may be appropriate in some settings rather than formal equipment);
- review the distribution of play areas in areas that have overlapping catchments and work with site providers to consider decommissioning sites that are no longer meeting demand (investing instead in larger nearby facilities)
- ensure that the impact of population growth on play areas is addressed through policy requiring developers to provide appropriate on-site children’s play space facilities within the accessibility, quantity and quality standards as set out above. Where new development is not within the catchment of existing facilities, new sites should be strategically planned (taking into account the aspirations for fewer and high quality facilities)
- ensure that where appropriate the impact of population growth on play areas is addressed through policy requiring developers to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through CIL and developer contributions
- increase the access to and sustainability of play provision and address concerns over the management of facilities, support partnership working between Town and Parish Councils and other local organisations including schools

**Site / Area Specific Implications**

13.107 Table 13.10 below summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 13.10 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites that do not have overlapping catchments
<b>New provision</b>
<b>Local Facilities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priorities –Aspley Heath, Old Warden, Salford, Leighton Buzzard (Linslade ward) Dunstable (Watling ward) Sandy, Flitwick, Fairfield Shefford, Maulden, Northill and Broom, Langford, Clifton, Harlington, Westoning.</li> <li>• On-site facilities within new housing development when outside catchment of existing facilities. Off-site contributions to improve existing facilities when within catchment of existing.</li> </ul>
<b>Destination Facilities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sandy</li> <li>• Caddington</li> <li>• Shefford</li> <li>• Countryside recreation sites and urban parks</li> </ul>

Areas of new development where incoming residents will create quantitative deficiency and / or are outside of catchment for existing open spaces.

### Quality Enhancements

All facilities against standards set.

Identified requirements including facilities in the following settlements (identified through consultation and site visits)

Ampthill, Biggleswade, Flitwick , Houghton Regis, Marston Moretaine, Stotfold, Henlow, Maulden, Shillington, Slip End, Brogborough, Southill, Tilsworth, Totternhoe, Upper Gravenhurst, Upper Shelton, Eaton Bray.

Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where residents are likely to increase use of existing facilities.

## 14. Provision for Young People

### Introduction

14.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to facilities for young people in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Context and Definition

14.2 As set out in Section 13, the vision of the Central Bedfordshire Children and Young People's Plan 2011 - 2014 (Central Bedfordshire Children's Trust) is

'We want every child in Central Bedfordshire to enjoy their childhood and have the best possible start in life. We want every child to do well at school, make friends and build strong relationships with their family. By the age of 19, as young adults, we want every young person to have the knowledge, skills and qualifications that will give them the best chance of success, so that they are prepared to take their full place in society as a happy, healthy, contributing and confident citizen'.

14.3 The provision of children's play space is just one means of contributing to this overall vision (and indeed it is recognized that the effective provision of many other types of open space considered in this assessment will also directly contribute to these priorities. Section 13 summarised the wealth of evidence outlining the importance of play and the benefit that this has on mental and physical health and wellbeing, drawing upon a recent literature review by Play England (A World without Play – A Literature Review – 2012). It also highlighted the role that the provision of high quality spaces and facilities for play have in meeting wider aims and objectives.

14.4 This section builds upon the analysis in section 10, which considered the adequacy of facilities for children and considers the needs of young people (aged 12/14 years and above).

14.5 For the purposes of this study, facilities for young people have been defined as follows:

**“Facilities designed to meet the needs of young people such as youth shelters, skate parks and Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA).” The broad objective of the provision of these facilities is to provide opportunities for young people to play interact with their peers and be physically active”**

14.6 Facilities included in this section in general fall under the existing NEAP definition as they target older children but it should be noted that MUGAS are also included within facilities for young people. The relationships between the existing definitions used and the facilities that will be required moving forwards are set out in Section 5. The actual facility to be provided

should be determined through local consultation (for existing populations) and / or discussions and evaluation of other nearby provision and an understanding of the potential target market. The possible facilities that could be included is shown in the design guidance.

14.7 Provision of facilities for children does not negate the need for outdoor provision for young people and vice versa. In light of the differences between provision for children and young people, this typology has been divided and the provision of facilities for young people across Central Bedfordshire is discussed in Section 10. It may however be necessary (or appropriate) to provide play facilities meeting the needs of both age groups on the same site and / or in the same location and this will be discussed further both in this section and in Section 5, summary and guidance for new development.

14.8 While all catering for young people, it must be noted that each range of equipment (and therefore each site) has a different purpose and may serve a specific target audience. This will be considered alongside analysis evaluating the adequacy of provision.

14.9 As already set out in Section 13 (Children's Play Space), there is a wealth of documents providing advice and guidance on effective design for play facilities which apply equally to facilities for young people. These include:

14.10 Play England: Design for Play – A guide to creating successful play spaces (2008) which provides guidance for the successful development of play spaces. It references the following 10 key principles:

- 'bespoke' - fits in with surroundings and enhances the local environment. Key features of the existing space should be built into the design, e.g. a tree with character, an old sculpture
- are well located – located where children would play naturally and have an effective balance between surveillance and seclusion
- make use of natural elements - grassy mounds, planting and logs can all help to make a more attractive and playable setting for equipment, planting can also help attract birds and other wildlife
- provide a wide range of play experiences – successful play space can be used in different ways by children and young people of different ages and interests and can also be important social spaces for parents and carers. Non-prescriptive play equipment and features that encourage and promote imagination and creativity help to achieve this principle
- are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children - though many play providers focus on equipment that is wheelchair-accessible, it is important to recognise that there are many different types of disability or special need. Non-prescriptive equipment, which can be used flexibly may be of benefit
- allow children of different ages to play together – where possible avoid segregating children on the basis of age or ability, and lay out the facility so that equipment and features can be used by a wide range of children

- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge – include opportunities to experience challenge and excitement. Children need to take risks to learn how to manage risks
- are sustainable and appropriately maintained - consider using recycled or sustainably sourced materials. Long-term maintenance and sustainability are also vitally important considerations in the design process, but in successful play spaces do not overshadow the scheme’s play value and ability to meet the play needs of children and young people. Good play spaces are designed and constructed bearing in mind sustainability but they are not necessarily tidy, and bits of scrub or long grass, fallen leaves and twigs, may all provide additional play opportunities
- allow for change and evolution - Some ‘slack space’ with no predefined function should be built into the layout – this increases the potential for change and evolution
- meets community needs – early and ongoing community engagement will help ensure that the facility is valued in the community

14.11 Fields in Trust (formerly National Playing Fields Association) has produced similar documentation relating to the importance of play and good design in play facilities (Planning and Design in Sport and Outdoor Play) and refers to the research undertaken by Play England. In addition, they recommend local standards for play space, specifically:

- **Quantity** – a minimum of 0.25ha per 1000 population equipped play space should be provided and a further 0.55ha per 1000 population set out for informal play
- **Accessibility** – residents should be within 100m of a local play space, 400m of an equipped play space and 1000m of a neighbourhood space and / or facility for young people; and
- **Quality** of provision should also be measured and local standards should be set

## **Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision**

### **Usage Profile**

14.12 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open space types detailed in this study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space.

### **Usage**

14.13 17% of respondents to the telephone survey use facilities for young people at least once weekly and just a further 8% use facilities at least once per month. The remainder of respondents (75%) never use facilities for young people meaning that on face value, these sites are visited much more infrequently than most other types of open space. It must be noted however that this is primarily a consequence of the target age range for these facilities (and the fact that young people within these age ranges were not questioned as part of the survey).

14.14 Perhaps unsurprisingly, those with dependent children expressed higher levels of use of these facilities, particularly those with children aged between 9 and 13. 46% of respondents with young people aged between 9 and 13 used facilities at least once per week, although 48% still do not use facilities. 70% of those with young people aged between 14 and 18 do not use facilities.

14.15 There is little variation in usage of facilities for young people between different sectors of the population. Notably:

- non-white British residents are just slightly more like to use facilities. 83% of those who consider themselves to be non white British residents never use facilities for young people compared to 74% of the white British population
- there is no clear variation in levels of use between those indicating that they have a disability and those that do not; and
- there is little variation in use by socio economic group although those describing themselves as falling into socio economic group D/E are less likely to use a facility for young people with 83% never using such a facility compared to an average of 76%

14.16 It is important to note that population projections indicate that the proportion of people aged between 10 and 14 will increase by 2022 and this is therefore likely to generate further additional demand for this type of facility.

### **Use of Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area**

14.17 There are few variations between the usage patterns in different placemaking areas in Central Bedfordshire, with 18% of residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 15% in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south, 19% of residents in the east and 12% of residents in the west (both in the north placemaking area) using facilities for young people once per week or more. A much higher proportion of respondents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and the West have no interest in the use of these facilities (both over 80%) than in other areas.

### **Use of Facilities for Young People by Settlement Hierarchy**

14.18 Usage in the Major Service Centres is higher than in other areas of Central Bedfordshire, with 23% visiting facilities for young people at least weekly. The next highest frequency is 11% in the larger villages.

### **Reasons for Visiting Facilities for Young People**

14.19 Respondents that use facilities for young people indicate that the main reasons for doing so are:

- Play (53%)
- To relax (31%)
- Sports (24%)
- Walk and exercise (17%)

### **Reasons for Visiting Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area**

14.20 Reasons for visiting facilities for young people in Central Bedfordshire are the same in all placemaking areas and are reflective of the overall patterns of usage in Central Bedfordshire.

### **Reasons for Visiting Facilities for Young People by Settlement Hierarchy**

14.21 Reasons for visiting facilities for young people in Central Bedfordshire do not vary between residents in different size of settlement and are reflective of the overall patterns of usage in Central Bedfordshire.

### **Barriers to Use**

14.22 While a lack of interest in this type of space (due to the target age range) is the main reason for not using these facilities, other barriers to use are also raised. 10% of non users highlight time pressures, while 6% suggest that a lack of local facilities is an issue. A further 4% suggest that there is an overall lack of facilities, while 4% indicate that they are not aware of where there are facilities that they can use.

14.23 Barriers to usage however become more apparent when considering only the views of those with dependent children. 17% of respondents with children aged 9 – 13 and 15% of those with young people aged 14-18 indicate that the lack of local facilities prevents them from using such a site and this is by some distance the most commonly referenced issue. For those with dependents in these two age groups, the proportion of people with a lack of interest in using such facilities drops to below 30%. Notably, no respondents highlight the quality of facilities as a barrier to use.

14.24 Analysis of use across the different segments of population reveals little variation in reasons or barriers to use, with the only issues evident being:

- the distance to a facility is more important to older residents (grandparent age) and to residents who are classified within lower socio economic groups; and
- lack of awareness of the location of facilities is particularly apparent amongst those with a disability

### **Barriers to Use of Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area**

14.25 There are no clear differences in barriers to use between residents in different placemaking areas although it is notable that residents in the east and Dunstable and Houghton Regis are more likely to indicate that there are no local facilities or a lack of facilities. There are also much higher proportions of residents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis (12%) that indicate that they are not aware of the location of facilities than in other areas (4% across Central Bedfordshire). It appears that there is a particular emphasis on travel to these facilities for events in the east of the area.

### **Barriers to Use of Facilities for Young People by Settlement Hierarchy**

14.26 Residents in the Major Service Centres and Minor Service Centres are far more likely to highlight the lack of local facilities (or overall lack of facilities) as a barrier to use than residents in smaller settlements.

## **Current Provision and Views on Current Provision**

### **Quantity**

14.27 Just 4.32 hectares is dedicated to facilities for young people across Central Bedfordshire. The range of facilities varies significantly from skateparks to BMX tracks and teenage shelters and in addition, there are several MUGAs which fulfil a dual role of recreation and sport.

Table 14.1 summarises the distribution of the existing facilities for young people across Central Bedfordshire.

**Table 14.1 – Distribution of Facilities for Young People across Central Bedfordshire**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)
Central Bedfordshire	36.00	4.32	0.02	0.00	0.12

14.28 Broadly speaking, facilities provided can be summarised as follows:

- 6 BMX parks
- 10 skateparks
- 10 Multi Use Games Areas
- 10 shelter / youth areas

Table 14.2 summarises the distribution of facilities for young people by placemaking area.

**Table 14.2 – Distribution of Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	4	0.83	0.02	0.01	0.21
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	16	1.62	0.03	0.03	0.10
North	16	1.87	0.01	0.01	0.12
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	36	4.32	0.02	0.01	0.12

14.29 Table 14.3 summarises the distribution of these facilities by settlement hierarchy. It considers the amount of provision per 1000 population as well as the amount of facilities in relation to the number of people aged between 5 and 15.

**Table 14.3 – Distribution of Facilities for Young People by Settlement Hierarchy**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Ha per 1000 population aged 5 - 17
Major Service Centres	14	2.08	0.01	0.01	0.15	0.09
Minor Service Centres	9	0.83	0.02	0.01	0.09	0.11
Large Villages	9	0.99	0.02	0.02	0.11	0.16
Small Villages	4	0.41	0.02	0.02	0.1	0.11

### Quantity of Provision – Key Issues

14.30 Tables 14.1 to 14.3 illustrate the following key issues regarding the number, type and size distribution of facilities for young people:

- in comparison to other types of facility, much lower levels of space are dedicated to facilities for teenagers and there are significantly fewer facilities for this age group than there are for children
- Growth in the population resulting from housing growth will see provision per 1000 population decline significantly
- Provision is relatively consistent across each area when taking into account the amount of facilities per 1000 population, although it is highest in Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South and lowest in the North
- Provision per 1000 population is consistent in settlements of all sizes, however when taking into account just the amount of young people, provision is high in the Large Villages and low in the Major settlements. Facilities are also on average much larger in the Major settlements than at all other tiers of the settlement hierarchy

### Quantity of Provision – Consultation Responses

#### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

14.31 Reflecting issues raised in Town and Parish Council consultation, a review of Green Infrastructure studies and town/ parish plans also highlights significant concerns with the amount of facilities for teenagers. Almost every settlement for which one or more sources of information are available demonstrates issues with the provision of this type of facility. Consultations and the review of existing evidence highlight the following area specific priorities:

- Petition for skatepark and key priority of Town Council – Dunstable
- Request for Youth Shelter on Millennium Park- Flitwick

- Requirement for skatepark / MUGA – Houghton Hall ward, Houghton Regis (Town Council)
- Demand for skatepark – Leighton Linlade Town Council
- Demand for additional spaces including adventure play (Sand Hills) and moto BMX tracks in quarry – Sandy (GI)
- Demand for skatepark, BMX track and trim trail. MUGA underused – Arlesey Parish Council
- Barton le Clay – demand for skatepark (Parish Council)
- Cranfield – skate park (Parish Plan)
- Marston Moretaine – requirement for additional facilities. Need for BMX, youth shelter (GI)
- Potton – demand for skate park extension and centrally located MUGA (Town Plan)
- Shefford – identified need for further facilities (Town Council)
- Stotfold – demand for more and improved facilities (Town Council)
- Blunham – existing poor provision (Parish Council)
- Clifton – skateboard park (GI)
- Eaton Bray – teen shelter (Parish)
- Harlington – not enough facilities (Parish)
- Haynes – identified requirement for skatepark (parish)
- Henlow – requirement for skatepark (GI and Parish)
- Houghton Conquest – requirement for ball park (Village survey). Aspirations for youth shelter (Survey)
- Lower Stondon – requirement for MUGA (Parish Plan)
- Meppershall – facilities for young people, including zip wire are key priority (GI)
- Silsoe – new facilities for young people aged 12 – 16 (Parish Plan and new MUGA)
- Slip End – Parish plan identifies unmet demand
- Upper Caldecote – Parish plan identifies need for further facilities
- Westoning – lack of activities for young people (Parish Plan)
- Brogborough – lack of facilities for young. Demand for shelter (Parish)
- Eversholt – evidence of demand but village would not expect to provide such facilities
- Flitton – identified need for facilities – potential to provide basketball on the recreation ground
- Ickwell – Parish plan identifies requirement for provision
- Kensworth – existing BMX site but working group identifying further requirements
- Northill – Parish Plan identifies need for facilities
- Old Warden – no provision, demand identified (Parish)
- Ridgmont – Parish plan sets out requirement for facilities for young people including basketball / BMX / Skatepark and youth shelter
- Totternhoe – demand identified (Parish)
- Upper Gravenhurst – demand identified.

## Household Survey

14.32 The household survey reveals that:

- overall, there is a strong perception that there are not enough facilities for young people with 70% dissatisfied with existing levels of provision. A further 6% think that there are only nearly enough; and

- just 1% of the population consider there to be more than enough and only 24% believe that the amount of facilities is about right

14.33 Headline findings therefore strongly indicate that more facilities are required. These views are consistent across all socio economic groups and there is no variation in perception according to ethnicity. Women are slightly more likely to indicate that there are not enough facilities for young people than men.

14.34 When considering the views of just those residents who have dependent children, views demonstrate even more clearly that there are perceived to be insufficient facilities. 70% of respondents with children aged between 9 and 13 and 71% with dependents aged between 14 and 18 suggest that there are not enough facilities.

### **Views on Quantity of Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area**

14.35 The household survey demonstrates that there is little variation in perception of the amount of facilities between the placemaking areas and that there is a consistent perception that more facilities are required. Between 61% and 67% of respondents in each area indicate that there is not enough provision. Interestingly, it is in Dunstable and Houghton Regis where the fewest facilities (in terms of number) are found that the highest levels of dissatisfaction exist (this is despite one of each type of facility being provided in this area).

13.1 Despite lower levels of facilities in the north, residents in the west (part of north placemaking area) are most satisfied, with 27% suggesting that the amount of facilities is about right. Despite this, only 44% of facilities for young people in the north placemaking area are located to the west of this areas suggesting that perception does not correlate directly with facilities available.

### **Views on Quantity of Facilities for Young People by Settlement Hierarchy**

14.36 Analysis of the household survey demonstrates that like between the placemaking areas, there is no difference in the perceptions of residents living in settlements of different sizes. Between 60 and 62% of residents in each settlement hierarchy believe there to be insufficient provision while between 20 and 22% consider the amount of facilities to be about right. Provision per 1000 population is lowest in the Major Service Centres although there are more (and larger) facilities overall. When taking into account the amount of young people living in each type of settlement, analysis indicates that the large villages contain the highest levels of facilities while Major Service Centres contain the lowest.

### **Views on Quantity of Facilities for Young People - Town and Parish Councils**

14.37 Reflecting the findings of the household survey, the Town and Parish Council consultation conclusively demonstrates a perception that there are insufficient facilities for young people in Central Bedfordshire. 96% of respondents indicate that there are not enough (or only nearly enough) facilities for young people. The facilities most commonly requested are skate parks and BMX tracks. Several councils indicate that a youth shelter does not represent sufficient provision.

14.38 A third of all respondents indicated that they have formal evidence of demand for additional facilities through either the Parish Plan process, informal consultation or receipt of a petition. Only Flitwick Town Council, Houghton Conquest Parish Council, Biggleswade Town Council and Aspley Guise Parish Council prioritise improvements to the quality of existing

provision over the demand for more sites, highlighting the strong perception that there is a need for more facilities.

14.39 The scale of the perceived issue is highlighted by the two thirds of responding Town and Parish Councils who indicate that addressing the needs of young people is their top priority in relation to open space. Less than 10% of Town and Parish Councils do not identify facilities for young people within their top three priorities and it is clear that the majority of Town / Parishes believe that there is a requirement for facilities within their parish. Only in a few small villages is it considered that there are not enough residents to justify the provision of facilities for young people.

### Current Provision

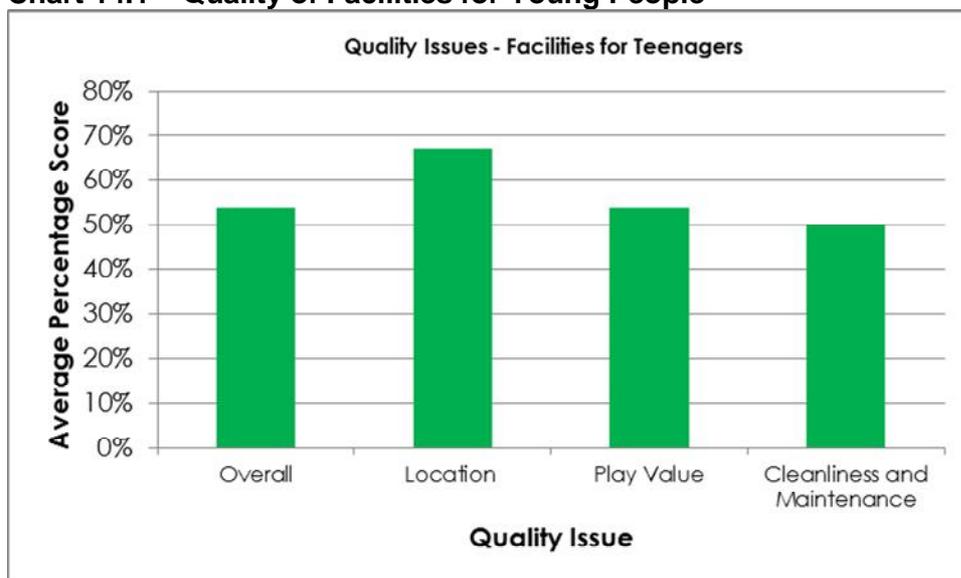
#### Quality

14.40 Quality and value of facilities for teenagers was considered using a site assessment matrix. The nature of MUGAs (multi-use games areas) which often have a dual purpose of being used for both sport and teenagers facilities) means that a different matrix was used for these sites. The assessment matrix is provided in Appendix D.

14.41 For teenage facilities (excluding MUGAs), site visits suggest that the quality of facilities is lower than most other typologies with an average score achieved of just 56%. It must be noted that while when measured against the criteria set out in the matrix sites appear poor, comments from site visits suggest that many facilities are appropriate for their target audience despite the lower scores.

14.42 Location was the most highly rated feature (67% average score) while cleanliness and maintenance was highlighted as the key area for concern (50% average score). This is illustrated in Chart 14.1. Further analysis of the site visit findings demonstrates that it is issues with litter, graffiti and empty bottles etc. that are the key contributing factor to the lower scores for cleanliness and maintenance. Even when sites have bins it does not appear that they are always used.

**Chart 14.1 – Quality of Facilities for Young People**



14.43 For MUGAs, the quality of sites is slightly higher, with an average score of 68%.

14.44 Despite the poor perceptions of quality and the low average scores achieved, there are many examples of high quality facilities. It is perhaps the variation in the quality and value of facilities that is most obviously of concern. While some residents have access to facilities that offer a wide range of equipment and / or opportunity, other sites contain just a shelter, which has limited value.

14.45 This is reflected in the scores achieved relating to specific elements, which indicate for the different elements, scores range from between 13% to 97%. With regards the quality of specific aspects of facilities for young people, the following factors scored most poorly:

- dog free areas
- opportunities for the disabled
- informal supervision
- access routes
- mobility
- personal safety and security
- maintenance

14.46 In addition, several comments made during site assessments highlight that a lack of lighting is a key issue for residents. It was also evident that while some facilities receive heavy usage (and indeed were being used when visited), others showed little evidence of any use.

### Quality of Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area

14.47 Table 14.4 summarises the quality of provision by Placemaking area. It demonstrates that there is little difference between the quality of facilities for teenagers across Central Bedfordshire. Provision in Dunstable and Houghton Regis is perhaps of slightly lower play value however in general, facilities in this area are well located. The issues raised with cleanliness and maintenance are evident in each area.

**Table 14.4 – Quality of Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area**

Placemaking Area	Average Quality Score (Location)	Average Quality Score (Play Value)	Average Quality Score (Cleanliness and Maintenance)	Overall Average Quality Score
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	72%	34%	49%	51%
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	67%	57%	47%	56%
North	61%	54%	51%	53%

Table 14.5 investigates whether the quality of facilities varies by size of the settlement according to site visits.

14.48 It reveals that there are some differences in the quality of provision, with overall residents in the Major Service Centres and Large Villages having access to the highest quality provision. The quality of facilities in the Minor Service Centres is lowest in all of the placemaking areas and the quality of facilities in Small Villages is also relatively poor (reflecting consultation) particularly in relation to cleanliness and maintenance.

**Table 14.5 – Quality of Facilities for Young People by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Average Quality Score (Location)	Average Quality Score (Play Value)	Average Quality Score (Cleanliness and Maintenance)	Overall Average Quality Score
Major Service Centres	71%	46%	49%	52%
Minor Service Centres	47%	53%	29%	34%
Large Villages	66%	64%	48%	53%
Small Villages	59%	58%	39%	43%

## Quality of Provision – Consultation Responses

### Green Infrastructure Studies and Parish Plans

14.49 Reflecting the results of other consultations, there is little reference to the improvement of the quality of facilities for young people in Green Infrastructure studies and / or Parish Plans or consultations, with emphasis for the most part placed on the provision of additional facilities. The only issues raised which directly relate to the quality of facilities are:

- Arlesey MUGA – surface quality poor (Parish)
- Greenfield – MUGA recently upgraded (Parish)
- Streatley – MUGA suffers from misuse and vandalism (Parish)
- Tilsforth – not enough facilities of appropriate quality (Parish)

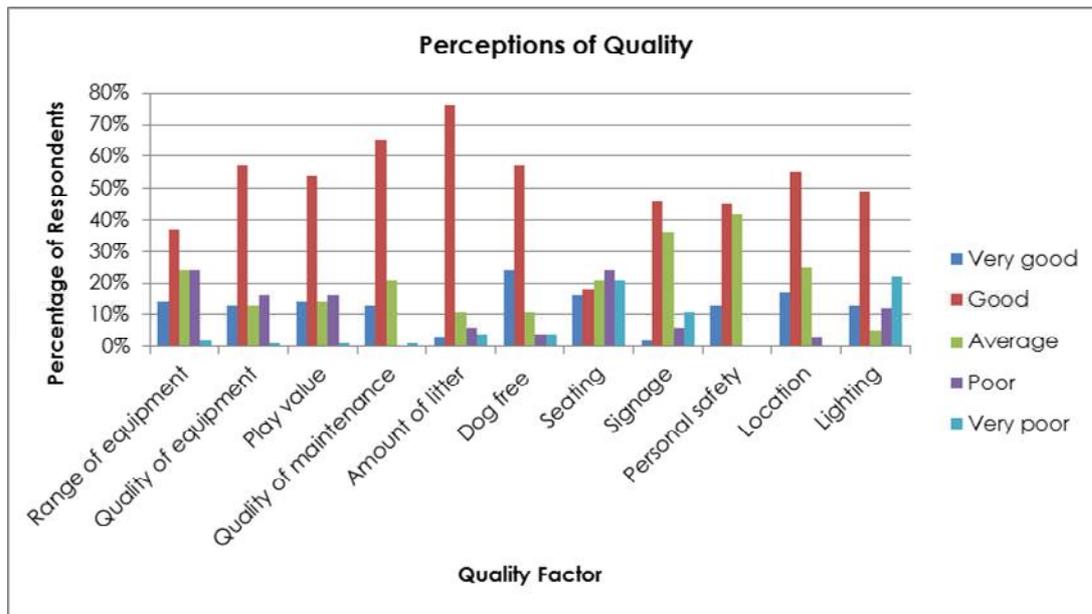
### Household Survey

14.50 Reflecting the lower scores achieved during site visits, the telephone survey reveals a perception that the quality of facilities for young people is poor. 38% rate facilities as poor or very poor compared to just 19% that consider facilities to be good or very good. 33% of respondents have no opinion. This takes into account all residents, whether or not they use these types of space.

14.51 These figures are also evident when considering only the views of those respondents with dependents in the age brackets 9 – 13 and 14 – 18. While a higher proportion rate facilities as good or very good (39% good – with children aged 9 – 13 and 21% good with children aged 14 – 18) more residents also consider facilities to be poor (between 40% and 50%) and fewer respondents have no opinion. This suggests that the perceived quality of facilities for young people is low. Interestingly, no respondents indicated that the quality of facilities prevents them from using this type of facility.

14.52 Despite the quality concerns that are evident, Chart 14.2 (which considers the views just of those that use facilities) reveals that for each individual component of facilities for young people a higher proportion of respondents consider quality to be good or very good or poor or very poor. The only exceptions to this are seating.

**Chart 14.2 – Perceptions of Quality Factors for Facilities for Young People**



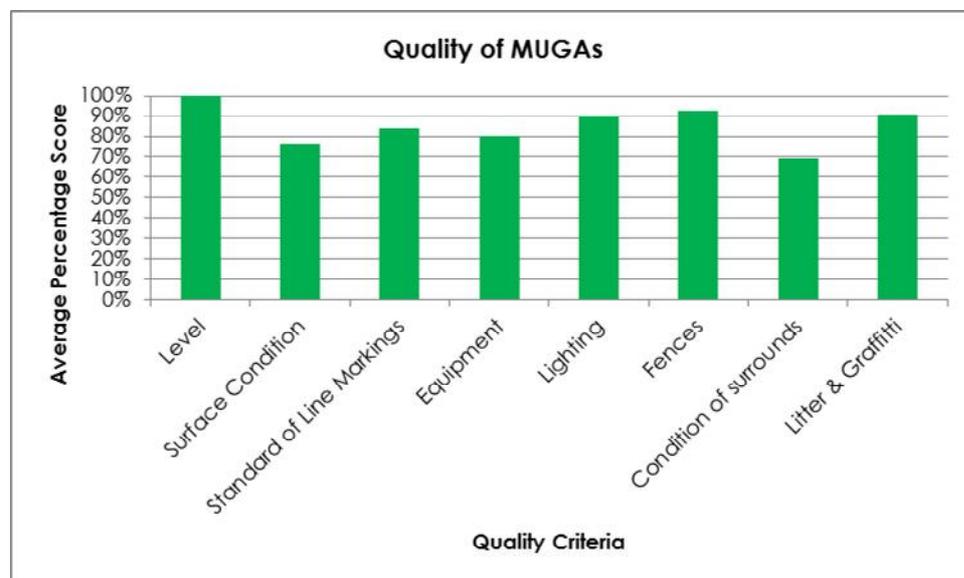
14.53 Areas where the highest levels of dissatisfaction are evident are:

- Seating (45% poor or very poor)
- Lighting (34% poor or very poor)
- Range of equipment (26% poor or very poor)
- Play value (17% poor or very poor)
- Quality of equipment (17% poor or very poor)

14.54 This suggests that although there is dissatisfaction, there is no clear reason for this and it is non users of facilities that in all likelihood hold the lower opinion. It will therefore be important to address perception in order to increase usage of facilities. As suggested earlier, perceived issues relating to the quantity of provision may also impact.

14.55 Chart 14.3 outlines the key quality issues raised relating to MUGAs, which also provide a play value for young people. It indicates that like other facilities for teenagers, the condition and maintenance of the facilities is amongst the highest issues. Issues with litter and graffiti were less evident at MUGAs.

**Chart 14.3 – Quality of MUGAs**



### **Views on Quality of Facilities for Young People by Placemaking Area**

14.56 Consultation demonstrates that there are a few noticeable differences in perception of the quality of key components of facilities for young people between residents in different Placemaking Areas, specifically;

- in general, residents in the west (part of the North placemaking area) rate each factor more positively. The only real exception to this is the adequacy of seating. Respondents are particularly positive with regards the range of provision, the quality of provision, play value and maintenance. Provision in this area overall is relatively consistent with average levels suggesting that there is no clear rationale for the improved perceptions; and
- satisfaction is evidently much lower in Dunstable and Houghton Regis than all other parts of Central Bedfordshire. This is particularly evident in perceptions relating to the quality and range of provision, seating and signage. Site visits demonstrate that the quality of facilities in this area varies significantly, therefore providing a basis for this comment

### **Views on Quality of Facilities for Young People by Settlement Hierarchy**

14.57 There is also some variation in perceptions of quality when evaluating views by settlement hierarchy. Consultation reveals that:

- for the majority of components of facilities for young people, residents in the Minor Service Centres exhibit the highest levels of dissatisfaction. This is particularly apparent in relation to the range of equipment and the quality of equipment. Analysis in Table 14.5 highlighted concerns relating particularly to maintenance and play value with facilities in the minor service centres, providing a justification for this overall perception
- the range of play equipment provided is seen to be greatest in the Major Service Centres. It is likely that this can be attributed to residents outside of Dunstable (as

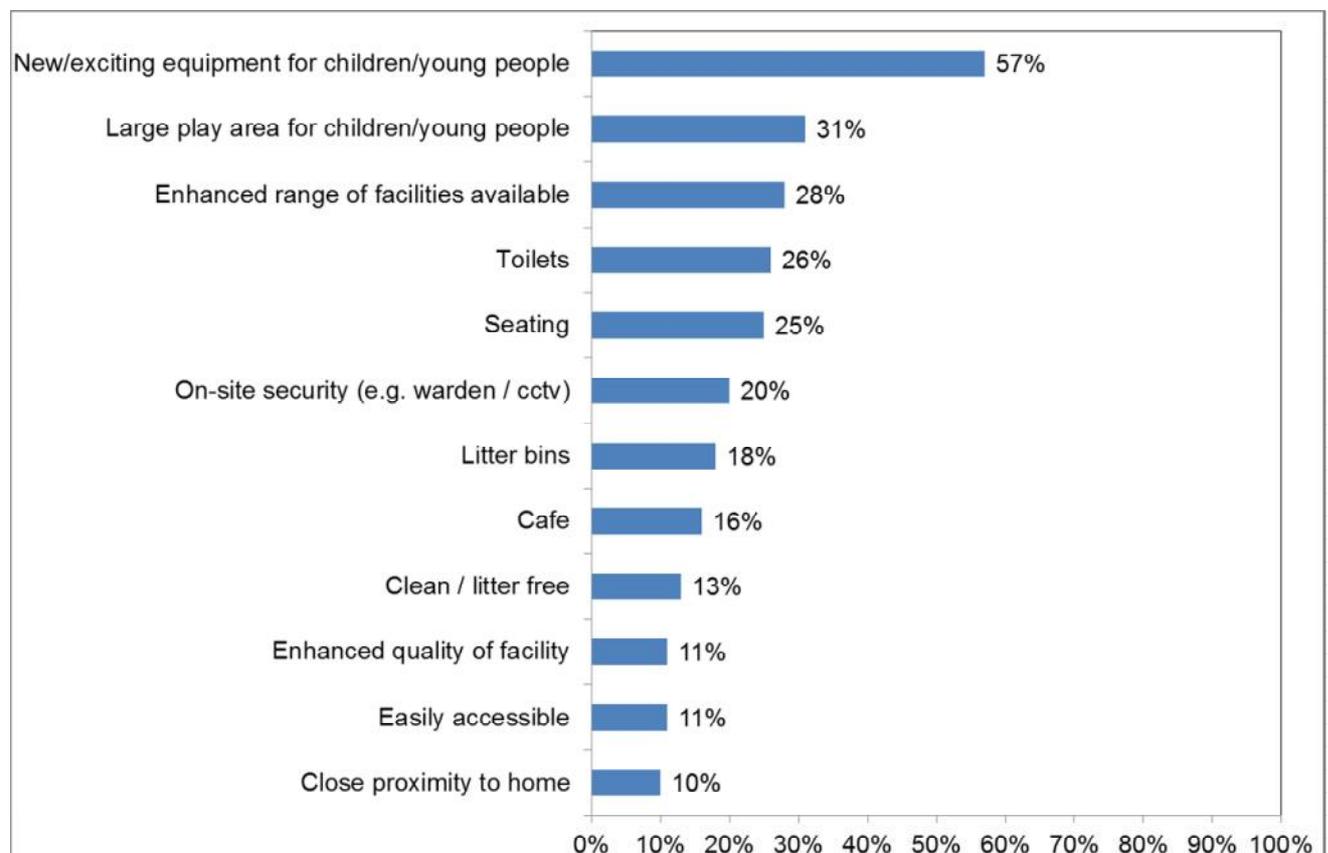
analysis of perceptions in each of the placemaking areas revealed that facilities in this area are considered poorly). Residents in the larger villages are also relatively satisfied with the range of equipment – while site visits demonstrate that overall, the average score for range of equipment is lowest in the Major Service Centres, it is clear that this is influenced by the presence of several facilities such as youth shelters achieving low scores. This area also contains the sites that achieve the highest scores and offer the greatest range of opportunities

- concerns relating to the lack of seating at facilities for young people are particularly apparent in the Major Service Centres and Minor Service Centres. This trend is also apparent in relation to signage
- the only people considering play value to be poor at any site are all located within Major Service Centres

### Quality of Facilities for Young People - Aspirations

14.58 Chart 14.4 illustrates the factors that residents of Central Bedfordshire consider most important in the provision of high quality facilities for young people. It is noticeable that particular emphasis is given to the quality and range of facilities. Seating, which is considered to be particularly poor in terms of existing provision is also considered important.

**Chart 14.4 – Aspirations for Facilities for Young People**



## Views on Quality of Facilities for Young People - Town and Parish Councils

14.59 As highlighted earlier in this section, facilities for young people emerged as the key issue for Town and Parish Councils, particularly in relation to the amount and type of facilities provided. Building on this, 68% consider the quality of the current stock of facilities for young people to be poor and a further 18% rate provision as only average. The most common issues raised are the type of facilities provided and the scale of facilities. Towns and Parishes on the whole however prioritise the provision of additional sites over qualitative improvements (and more in depth analysis suggests that comments made relating to quality and quantity are interrelated).

### Accessibility

14.60 Access to open space and recreation facilities is as important as the quality of provision, particularly for young people, many of whom it is likely wish to use facilities without parental supervision. Table 14.6 summarises the mode of transport that residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use to reach a facility for young people and the type of transport that users actually do use.

**Table 14.6 – Mode of Travel**

Expected vs Actual	Walk	Cycle	Public Transport	Car
Expected	79%	3%	4%	15%
Actual	46%	14%	7%	33%

14.61 Table 14.6 demonstrates that on the whole, facilities for young people are expected to be within walking distance of the home (79% would expect to travel on foot).

14.62 Currently, only 41% of users walk to a site (33% travel by car) suggesting that this aspiration is not achieved. This may link with the perceptions expressed previously that there are not enough facilities.

14.63 14% of current users cycle to facilities, demonstrating that this is an important mode of transport that should be taken into account during the design processes of these facilities.

14.64 There are no clear differences in the views of users and non users and expectations are broadly similar across all socio – economic and demographic groups although residents describing themselves as non white ethnicity are more likely to expect a facility to be located within walking distance.

14.65 For those with children however, it is clear that currently, access by bike takes on even greater importance. 38% of those aged 9 – 13 and 56% with dependents aged between 14 and 18 travel by bike and in contrast, the amount of respondents with dependents reaching facilities on foot is below 30%.

14.66 Mirroring the views of residents of Central Bedfordshire as a whole, facilities are expected more locally than they are currently found. 76% of respondents with dependents aged 9 – 13 and 64% with children in the older age group (14 – 18) would expect access to facilities on foot.

## **Expectations of Accessibility by Placemaking Area**

14.67 The geographical variation evident in the different size settlements is not apparent in the different placemaking areas. Residents in the West (North Placemaking area) demonstrate a slightly higher propensity to travel by car however it is the common expectation in all areas that facilities are accessible on foot (between 64% and 72%). It is however clear that when considering current travel patterns, the majority of existing users that walk or cycle are based in the west or in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. There is a reliance on the car in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south (62% of users travel by car).

## **Expectations of Accessibility by Settlement Hierarchy**

14.68 The expectation that facilities for young people are accessible on foot is particularly apparent in the Major and Minor Service Centres (72% and 70% respectively). There is a greater acceptance in the Large and Small Villages that there may be a need to travel by car or by bike with just 41% in the Smaller Villages expecting access on foot. With regards actual travel patterns, all users that are currently cycling are based within the Major Service Centres and there is a particular reliance on the car for residents in Large Villages. The proportion of users that walk to a facility varies from 11% in the large villages to 100% of users in the small villages and Minor Service Centres.

## **Steps 3 and 4 - Setting and Applying Local Standards**

14.69 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

14.70 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space.

14.71 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of large recreation areas. Existing provision can then be measured against these benchmarks to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

14.72 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for large recreation areas is outlined below.

## **Accessibility**

### **Setting Accessibility Standards**

14.73 As outlined in Section 2, standards are set using an accessibility led approach. It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to get there. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

14.74 The household survey demonstrates that residents expect to travel on foot to reach a facility for young people and as a consequence, it is anticipated that sites will be close to the home. Almost 70% of residents have this expectation. Despite this, existing travel patterns demonstrate a high reliance upon accessing facilities by car / bike.

14.75 To consider how facilities for young people fit into aspirations for the open space network in Central Bedfordshire, Table 14.7 uses the raw data collated through the telephone survey to evaluate the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach a facility for young people. To fully understand the spread of responses (and therefore the expectations of all residents), it categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach a facility. PPG17 suggests that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 14.7 – Travel Expectations – Facilities for Young People (calculated from household survey)**

Mode of Transport	Walk			
	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	10	10	15	35
Major	10	10	15	30
Minor	10	12	15	30
Large	10	15	15	35
Small	5	5	5	10

14.76 Table 14.7 reveals the following key findings in relation to access to facilities for young people;

- 25% of residents across Central Bedfordshire would be willing to walk up to 10 minutes to reach a facility for young people (quartile 1). With the exception of the smaller villages (5 minutes) this is common to all settlement hierarchies. The remaining 75% of residents would be willing to travel for 10 minutes or more, although it is notable that the majority of responses received were around 10 – 15 minutes (demonstrated by the median response); and
- the modal response (i.e. the most common response given) was that a facility for young people should be within 10 minutes of the home. The average response given was 12 minutes.

14.77 Residents therefore have similar aspirations for facilities for young people as for play spaces.

14.78 It is also important to take into account the views arising from other consultations. These clearly demonstrate the importance of ensuring a balance between the quality of provision, access to the site and the range of equipment provided.

14.79 Statistical data therefore suggests that 75% of residents will travel up to 10 minutes to reach a facility for young people and other consultation suggests that this is an appropriate distance for the local standard to be set at.

14.80 The recommended local accessibility standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

14.81 It should be noted that while the 10 minute catchment provides a theoretical indication of accessibility, practical decision making relating to the location of facilities for young people should also consider any impacting barriers, for example the presence of railway lines or significant main roads. Appropriate application of the standard should therefore be assessed on a case by case basis.

14.82 As well as informing analysis of the adequacy of existing provision, the standard will also be applied to new developments to inform requirements for facilities for young people.

## Accessibility

<b>Facilities for Young People - Accessibility Standard</b>	
<b>10 minute walk time (480m)</b>	
<b>Justification</b>	
	<p>The findings of the consultation demonstrate that facilities for young people are expected local to the home. As a result, there is an strong emphasis that such sites should be accessible on foot (70% would expect to walk) although these expectations are less evident in the more rural settlements, where higher numbers of residents indicate that they would expect to travel by car to reach such a facility. A lack of local facilities was highlighted as one of the key barriers to use of facilities for young people and there are also perceptions that there are not enough facilities. There are also concerns about the quality of some facilities for young people.</p> <p>In all areas, the average and most common responses are similar (10 and 12 minutes respectively) and analysis demonstrates that at least 75% of users are willing to travel for 10 minutes. To promote a strategic approach to the provision of facilities for young people and ensure that they can be sited adjacent to facilities for children, a standard of 10 minutes walk time has used as a benchmark. This standard takes into account the expectations of residents by promoting the provision of easily accessible, high quality space.</p>

## Application of the Accessibility Standard

14.83 The application of this standard is illustrated in maps contained in Appendix B.

14.84 Results of this analysis provide an insight as to why resident views of the amount of facilities are so negative. The application of the standard highlights that the distribution of facilities across Central Bedfordshire is relatively sporadic, with the majority of settlements having some deficiencies in provision. Gaps are evident in all placemaking areas as well as at all levels of the settlement hierarchy. It is also clear that there are particular gaps in provision in the North compared to the Leighton Buzzard and Rural South, and Dunstable and Houghton Regis placemaking areas.

14.85 It is evident that in the smaller settlements where facilities for young people are provided that accessibility is higher (although many settlements of this size do not have any facilities at all). Most large settlements require several facilities to meet accessibility targets and in general, only one or two are provided.

14.86 Areas where there is a lack of access to facilities for young people (and the accessibility standard is therefore not met) include:

## Placemaking Areas

- **Dunstable and Houghton Regis** – provision limited. Gaps in access for residents in Parkside and Houghton Hall Wards (Houghton Regis) as well as Central, Icknield and Watling wards (Dunstable)
- **Leighton Buzzard and the Rural South** – Caddington (South), Heath and Reach (South) Hockliffe (South), Eaton Bray (South) Totternhoe (South) Tilsworth, Stanbridge, Studham
- **North** – Houghton Conquest (South), Haynes, Old Warden, Northill, Broom, Biggleswade (almost all), Moggerhanger, Blunham, Sandy (almost all), Everton, Tempsford, Potton (majority of settlement), Wrestlingworth, Dunton (South), Stotfold (majority), Arlesey, Shefford, Henlow, Clifton, Meppershall, Gravenhurst, Silsoe, Campton, Barton le Clay (north), Streatley, Sundon, Harlington, Westoning (East), Toddington (West), Eversholt, Aspley Guise, Husborne Crawley, Aspley Heath, Ridgmont, Lidlington, Flitwick, Clophill, Maulden, Ampthill, Salford, Brogborough, Millbrook, Cranfield and Marston Moretaine (West).

### Settlement Hierarchy

- **Major Service Centres:** Gaps in access for residents in Parkside and Houghton Regis Wards (Houghton Regis) as well as Central, Icknield and Watling wards (Dunstable). Leighton Buzzard – gaps in Linslade ward as well as northern and southern areas of the town. Ampthill, Flitwick, Biggleswade and Sandy all have limited provision, meaning that large areas of the settlements are outside of the target catchment
- **Minor Service Centres:** Arlesey, Barton le Clay (north), Caddington (South), Cranfield, Marston Moretaine (west), Potton, Shefford, Stotfold and Toddington

14.87 Almost all large and small villages also contain deficiencies in accessibility although it should be noted that planning application has been submitted for a MUGA in Tempsford although this has not yet been delivered.

14.88 The above gaps in provision do not consider the variety of facilities provided. As alluded to earlier in this section, there are many types of facilities for young people and the provision of a skate park for example may not necessarily meet the needs and preferences of all young people and there may be residents who believe there to be insufficient provision in an area. This highlights the importance of ensuring that local consultation is undertaken and that facilities are tailored to local requirements.

### Quantity

#### Setting Quantity Standards

14.89 Consultation reveals that overall, there is a strong perception that there are insufficient facilities for young people and this is also reflected in many of the local green infrastructure documents and parish plans. 96% of responding Parishes considered there to be a requirement for additional facilities and a third have received petitions evidencing specific demand.

14.90 To inform further analysis and to support the creation of local standards, it is possible to use accessibility standards to set a guideline for the amount of provision that is required. This can also be used to support the formulation of a local standard to guide new development.

14.91 Table 14.8 sets out the minimum amount of provision required across Central Bedfordshire. It is based upon the assumption that a facility will be provided within 480m of the majority of residents based within settlements included in the settlement hierarchy and assumes that all deficiencies identified above are met with the provision of one additional facility for young people (which in the case of many larger settlements is below the level that will be required). It also assumes that new facilities are on average 0.12ha (average size of site).

**Table 14.8 – Current Requirements for Facilities for Young People**

Area	Current Provision	Required Provision to meet 10 minute catchment	Minimum Requirement
Central Bedfordshire	36 sites – 4.32ha	Additional 57 sites @ 0.12ha	11.16 ha

14.92 Table 14.8 demonstrates that the requirement for facilities for young to meet the accessibility standard means that a baseline total of 11.16ha would be required. **This equates to the need to provide the equivalent of 0.043ha of space per 1000 population.**

14.93 Projected population growth (and it must be noted that it is anticipated that the proportion of young people aged 10 to 14 will increase) will see **requirements raise to 12.49 hectares. This level of provision will still see provision equate to only one facility in each settlement and it should be therefore treated as a baseline facility requirement only, with the accessibility standards guiding the distribution of facilities.**

14.94 Many Parish Councils expressed concern over the sustainability of providing facilities at a local level. Furthermore, residents in larger and smaller settlements indicated that they would be willing to travel further to reach a facility.

14.95 If it was assumed that facilities for young people would only be required in the Major and Minor Service Centres, a minimum of 21 (2.52ha) additional sites (likely more to take into account role in meeting needs of residents in villages as well as the positioning of such sites) would be required to add to the 2.91ha of provision that is already available. This would equate to 0.03ha per 1000 population, based just upon those living in the Major and Minor Service Centres.

14.96 It should be noted that accessibility issues should take priority over the application of the quantity standard, and opportunities for new provision should be considered primarily based upon accessibility, but informed by the quantity standard.

## Quantity

Facilities for Young People - Quantity Standard
0.043ha per 1000 population
Justification
This figure represents the minimum requirement for facilities for young people in Central Bedfordshire if all residents were to be located within a 10 minute walk of such a facility (480m).

### Application of the Quantity Standard

14.97 More local analysis is more relevant, particularly when combined with analysis of accessibility as this enables analysis of real deficiencies. As highlighted, analysis of access to facilities for young people should be considered the primary means of establishing need. The application of the quantity standard however supports this application and use of the overall standard of 0.043 ha per 1000 population indicates that the biggest current deficiencies (in terms of ha per 1000 population) are currently in the following locations:

- Cranfield
- Shefford
- Ampthill
- Stotfold
- Sandy
- Flitwick
- Leighton Buzzard
- Biggleswade
- Houghton Regis
- Dunstable

14.98 All of the above settlements have both accessibility deficiencies and evidence of unmet demand as well as quantitative shortfalls. Building on this, population growth will see demand increase in many settlements. The highest shortfalls by 2022 will be in:

- Houghton Regis
- Leighton Linlade
- Biggleswade
- Dunstable
- Flitwick
- Sandy
- Ampthill
- Shefford
- Cranfield
- Barton

14.99 While all of the above have existing shortfalls, high population growth in Houghton Regis, Leighton Buzzard and Biggleswade in particular will see an increase in the shortfalls of provision. Marston Moretaine is the only settlement where there is currently sufficient provision but population growth will generate an increase.

## Quality

### Setting Quality Standards

14.100 Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents as well as their aspirations in relation to the type of spaces that they would like to see provided. Supporting this, site visits have provided an overview of both areas of current concern and aspects of play provision that are being successfully delivered. Quality of facilities for young people is as important as the amount of facilities and there are currently concerns about both elements of facility provision.

14.101 Linking with national good practice guidance, this input can then be used to identify issues that are important to measure both improvements needed to existing play spaces and to guide the design of new open spaces.

14.102 The quality standard for facilities for young people in Central Bedfordshire is therefore set out below. Further detail can be found in the Design Guidance.

#### Facilities for Young People and Teenagers - Quality Standard

Size and Location	Within appropriate distance of target catchment area Accessible via safe footpaths and roads Accessible by bike (and with areas for cycle storage) Located in an area of incidental supervision – appropriate balance between seclusion and visibility Appropriate boundaries and buffer zone
Access	Compliant with DDA – access audit in place Regular safety audit
Facilities	Bespoke design to suit location, e.g. skate parks, teenage ‘play’/sport equipment, MUGA Facilities that are inclusive and well designed – ideally in consultation with local young people Appropriate seating Fencing (where appropriate), and bins Signage Lighting (if appropriate) Age appropriate facilities using NEAP play area specification (full details in the Design Guidance Section) Any formal play equipment and safety surfacing compliant with British Standards BSEN 1176 and 1177

### Application of Quality Standards

14.103 For each type of open space, several sites fall below the level where all factors are considered to be acceptable or above on the site visits matrix (66%). Quality improvements required are included within each parish schedules.

## Summary – Issues Identified

### Usage

46% of respondents to the telephone survey with children aged between 9 and 13 use facilities for young people at least once per week, although 48% still do not use facilities. 70% of those with young people aged between 14 and 18 do not use facilities. This represents a significant decrease on the number of young people using play spaces. Just 30% of respondents with dependents in relevant age groups indicate that they are not interested in using facilities. Usage is highest in the Major Service Centres.

Location - lack of local facilities and distance from home are the main barriers to usage and there are no differences in views between residents in different parts of Central Bedfordshire or in settlements of different sizes.

### Quality , Quantity and Accessibility

There is a range of provision targeting young people across Central Bedfordshire which can primarily be subdivided into MUGAs, skateparks, BMX tracks and youth shelters.

Consultation revealed that the amount of facilities for young people is perhaps the biggest concern in Central Bedfordshire. 70% of residents are dissatisfied with the amount of facilities and 96% of Town and Parish Councils think that there are not enough facilities. Notably, 90% of Parish Councils indicate that addressing this issue is their top priority. Negative views are evident at all levels of the settlement hierarchy and in all placemaking areas although they are particularly apparent in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and in Minor Service Centres and small villages.

To an extent, issues with quantity of provision impact upon the perceptions of quality and consultation again reveals that residents consider quality to be poor. Site visits reveal that while some facilities are fit for purpose and indeed offer appropriate opportunities for young people, others are lower in quality. Some sites appeared little used while others demonstrated clear heavy usage. The cleanliness and maintenance of many sites contributed to lower scores achieved and concerns were also raised with opportunities for integration of disabled young people, seating and dog fouling. Lighting was also highlighted as a key area for improvement. Consultation mirrored many of these identified issues, with Seating (45% poor or very poor), Lighting (34% poor or very poor), Range of equipment (26% poor or very poor, Play value (17% poor or very poor) and quality of equipment (17% poor or very poor) achieving the lowest scores. Residents in the Minor Service Centres and small villages viewed provision most negatively and these thoughts were reflected through site visit scores. Many smaller Parishes highlighted the challenges that they face in providing facilities and questioned the sustainability of the provision of large scale facilities for teenagers in all settlements.

Like play areas, facilities for young people are expected in close proximity to the home. 76% of respondents with dependents aged 9 – 13 would expect facilities to be accessible on foot while 64% with children in the older age group (14 – 18) would expect access to facilities on foot. Analysis of current usage patterns demonstrates a particular reliance upon cycling. 75% of residents are willing to travel for circa 10 minutes to reach a facility for young people and this is slightly higher in the large and small villages.

Application of a 10 minute walk time standard however emphasises the messages portrayed through consultation and demonstrates extensive gaps in the network of facilities. This includes most major and Minor Service Centres, as well as the majority of small and large villages.

In order to deliver facilities in identified locations (as a minimum baseline) and retain existing sites, a minimum of 0.043ha per 1000 population is required across Central Bedfordshire as a whole.

Application of this standard, linking with accessibility criteria highlight that there are significant quantity and accessibility deficiencies in many of the larger settlements, but in particular in Cranfield, Shefford, Ampthill, Stotfold, Sandy, Flitwick, Leighton Buzzard, Biggleswade, Houghton Regis and Dunstable.

Population growth will see demand increase to a total of 12.49 hectares by 2022 and it must be noted that the proportion of young people is projected to increase, meaning that demand for this facility type may be even higher.

Several concerns were raised with regards the lack of success of some facilities. It was highlighted that there is strong need to ensure that all facilities are tailored to the needs and aspirations of the local community and are developed in conjunction with residents (See Section 4, Strategy Principles).

## **Step 5 – Identifying Priorities**

### **Key Issues to Address**

14.104 The above analysis therefore indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to facilities for young people;

- There are clear concerns relating to the amount of existing facilities and there is identified unmet demand in almost every settlement. Most residents are further than a 10 minute walk time (the level which consultation identified as being acceptable). Fewer high quality facilities will better meet the needs of residents than multiple small but dysfunctional sites but local access to facilities is important
- Use of facilities for young people is strongly influenced by location as well as the type of facilities provided. There is a need for innovative facilities that are tailored to the target group if provision is to successfully address needs
- The quality of sites is varying and consultation suggests that provision does not meet local need
- Population growth (particularly in this age group) is likely to see an increase in demand for such facilities and a consequent increase in visitor numbers

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

14.105 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- Ensure that all residents have appropriate access to facilities for young people through the provision of a comprehensive network of facilities in Major and Minor Service Centres and the provision of one facility (where this is sustainable and developed with

the local community) in Large and Small villages. Residents in Major and Minor Service Centres should be within 10 minutes walk of at least one facility

- Attract users from all sectors of the population, including residents with disabilities
- Meet user aspirations relating to quality of provision as well as local priorities and national objectives
- Provide a variety of different play/activity opportunities for young people

### **Key Priorities**

14.106 It is therefore recommended that key principles for the delivery of facilities for young people across Central Bedfordshire are set as follows:

- promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Strategy
- To promote the strategic distribution of high quality facilities for young people, seek to ensure that all residents in major and minor service centres are within a 10 minute walk time catchment of at least one facility for young people. These sites should function as strategic sites that promote a range of different skills and interests
- Support tailored provision in large and small villages where there is clear evidence of demand and long term sustainability
- Maximise access to facilities for young people in Large Villages and Small Villages through the inclusion of these facilities at strategic locations in Major and Minor Service Centres, as well as in countryside recreation sites
- Work with providers and communities to ensure that all sites meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section. This should include the creation of safe access routes to reach sites
- ensure that the impact of population growth on facilities for young people is addressed through policy requiring developers to provide appropriate on-site facilities within the accessibility, quantity and quality standards as set out above. Where new development is not within the catchment of existing facilities, new sites should be provided using figures outlined in this document
- ensure that where appropriate the impact of population growth on facilities for young people is addressed through policy requiring developers to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through CIL and developer contributions

### **Site / Area Specific Implications**

14.107 Table 14.9 below summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 14.9 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites, except where there is clear evidence of limited use
<b>New provision</b>
Key Priority – addressing gaps in provision in Major and Minor Service Centres, in particular focusing upon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cranfield</li><li>• Shefford</li><li>• Ampthill</li><li>• Stotfold</li><li>• Sandy</li><li>• Flitwick</li><li>• Leighton Buzzard</li><li>• Biggleswade</li><li>• Houghton Regis</li><li>• Dunstable</li></ul>
Longer term: all other areas of identified need, where meeting criteria of recommendations above.
There is strong need to ensure that all facilities are tailored to the needs and aspirations of the local community and are developed in conjunction with residents (See Strategy Principles).
Areas of new development where incoming residents will create a quantitative shortfall in provision or will be outside of the target accessibility catchments.
<b>Quality Enhancements</b>
All facilities against standards set. Provision of new facilities is considered to be of higher priority than improvement of existing sites.
Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where residents will use existing facilities.

## 15. Allotments

### Introduction

15.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to allotments in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Definition and Context

15.2 For the purposes of this study, allotments have been defined as;

**“Open spaces dedicated to growing produce and gardening – site where residents pay to have their own plot and grow vegetables”**

15.3 The primary purpose of allotments is to provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce. Allotments also offer much wider benefits, including;

- promotion of sustainability – the provision of allotments enables local growth of produce and can provide food at low cost
- health improvement – there are recognised physical and mental benefits of working an allotment. Some GPs now prescribe the use of an allotment as a relief from stress
- Community Cohesion – allotments can bring together people from different age groups and varying social backgrounds
- education – allotments can facilitate an understanding of where food comes from and the value of fruit and vegetables in healthy lifestyles. Many schools now have small allotments on site for this purpose; and
- biodiversity and conservation - while allotments primarily have a recreational function, they can also offer important habitats and have a significant role to play in biodiversity and conservation. The range of plants, composting and wood plants that are present on site offer a variety of habitats. Allotments also offer an opportunity for connectivity with the wider countryside via hedges or other green corridors.

15.4 The 1998 White Paper, ‘The Future for Allotments’ recognised the health benefits of allotments and recommended that allotment provision be explicitly noted in national and local public health strategies. It stated that there is a need for urgent action to protect existing allotments and that allotment legislation must be overhauled to ensure the long-term protection of these facilities. The National Society of Allotment Gardeners is the advisory group to the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). They recommend that a standard plot of 250 square metres is sufficient to provide food for an average family.

15.5 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) are responsible for national policy on allotments and consider allotments to be important in terms of bringing

together all sections of the community, as well as providing opportunities for people to grow their own produce and promote health and wellbeing.

15.6 As a consequence, Central Bedfordshire Council, Town and Parish Councils are duty bound by the law [Section 23 of the 1908 Allotments Act (as amended)] to provide allotments for their residents if they consider there to be demand. They must take into a consideration a representation in writing by any six registered parliamentary electors or rate payers.

15.7 Allotments are also uniquely protected through the legislative and planning framework within the wider context of a firm national policy to improve the quality of urban green spaces. The allotments Act (Section 8 1925) indicates that a local authority must seek permission from the Secretary of State before selling or changing the use of a 'statutory' allotment site. The local authority must satisfy the Secretary of State that adequate provision has been made for allotment holders who are displaced by the sale of the site. (Statutory allotments are parcels of land acquired or appropriated by the local authority specifically for use as allotments). Allotments transferred by a local authority to a Parish Council will automatically become statutory allotments because they will have been acquired by the Parish Council specifically for use as allotments.

15.8 The Allotments Act (1950) further strengthened the requirements on Councils to provide allotment gardens and also included issues relating to notices to quit and compensation. In addition to the provision of statutory allotments, some sites are temporary (currently dedicated to allotment use, but land is ultimately destined to be used for another purpose). The same regulations do not apply to these sites and they are not protected from disposal in the same way that statutory allotments are.

15.9 The Town and Country Planning Act (1971) also have considerable influence, advocating the need to forward plan for the provision of allotments.

## **Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision**

15.10 A household survey of 1000 residents of Central Bedfordshire was carried out to establish a baseline of views regarding current and future provision of the range of open space types detailed in this study. As well as providing an understanding of views and aspirations relating to current provision, the survey also enables evaluation of the current user profile of each type of open space.

### **Household Survey Responses**

#### **Usage Profile**

15.11 Allotments are the most infrequently used type of open space considered within this strategy with just 2% of those responding to the telephone survey using allotments. For those that do use these sites however, consultation clearly indicates that they are an important resource.

15.12 Interestingly, while just 2% currently use allotments, a further 26% of residents responding to the telephone survey indicated that they would be interested in renting an allotment. Residents aged between 35 and 54 are most likely to rent an allotment, with 45% of respondents in this category expressing an interest. Just 10% of respondents over 55 said that they were interested in renting an allotment.

15.13 Of particular note, 58% of non-white British residents indicated that they would be interested in using an allotment. This compares to just 23% of white British. 38% of people that are in employment or studying would be interested in using an allotment compared to 8% that are unemployed. The proportion of residents with a disability that would like to use an allotment is slightly higher than the proportion of those that would consider themselves to be able bodied.

### **Use of Allotments by Placemaking Area**

15.14 There is a small degree of variation between the usage patterns of allotments in different parts of Central Bedfordshire. 6% of residents in the west (North Placemaking area) currently rent an allotment compared to 2% in Dunstable and Houghton Regis Placemaking area and 1% in the other areas.

15.15 Correlating with this, latent demand is lowest in the west (12%) where usage is highest. 36% of respondents in Dunstable and Houghton Regis would be interested in using an allotment, 30% in the east and 25% in Leighton Buzzard.

### **Use of Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy**

15.16 There also variations in interest in allotments by settlement size. In the Major Service Centres, 36% of residents are interested in renting an allotment (there is potential that this may correlate with where gardens are smaller). This decreases to 16% in the Minor Service Centres and 6% in the large villages. 24% of those in the small villages would be interested.

### **Reasons for Using Allotments**

15.17 Respondents that rent allotments indicate that the main reasons for doing so are:

- to grow food and vegetables (90%)
- walk and exercise (40%)
- to relax (25%); and
- for peace and tranquillity (10%)

### **Reasons for Using Allotments by Placemaking Area**

15.18 Reasons for using allotments are consistent in each of the placemaking areas.

### **Reasons for Using Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy**

15.19 There are no differences in the reasons for using allotments between settlements of different sizes.

### **Barriers to Use**

15.20 The barriers to the use of allotments are listed as:

- a lack of interest (45%)
- lack of time (15%)
- lack of local facilities (10%)
- lack of awareness (2%)

15.21 Analysis of use across the different segments of population reveals little variation in barriers to use, with the only issues evident being:

- location and proximity of allotments to the home is more important to residents of none white British origin and to disabled users. 19% of disabled users highlighted issues with proximity to the home and 14% of non white British residents compared to 10% overall. Residents of non white British origin also indicate that they are not aware of where allotments are; and
- a significantly higher proportion of people who cite lack of time as the key barrier have dependents.

### Barriers to Use of Allotments by Placemaking Area

15.22 It is notable that in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and East Central Bedfordshire, a significantly higher proportion of residents indicate that the lack of local facilities is the key barrier to use (17% in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and 15% in the east – compared to 1% and 4% in Leighton Buzzard and the rural south and the West (part of the north placemaking area) respectively).

### Barriers to Use of Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy

15.23 The key barriers to use are similar in settlements of all sizes, with the only difference being the prominence of a perceived lack of access to sites in the main service centres.

### Current Provision and Views on Current Provision

#### Quantity

15.24 Circa 80 hectares is dedicated to allotments in Central Bedfordshire and the size of sites ranges significantly from 0.8ha (Millbrook) to 8ha (Maulden).

15.25 Table 15.1 summarises the distribution of allotments across Central Bedfordshire. It includes an estimation of the number of plots available. This is based upon the assumption that each plot is 250m<sup>2</sup> (based upon guidance in Allotments: Plot Holder’s Guide, DTLR 2001). Use of this assumption ensures that all land designated as allotments is considered, even if it is not currently used as such. It demonstrates that there are over 3200 allotment plots in Central Bedfordshire.

**Table 15.1 – Distribution of Allotments across Central Bedfordshire**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Number of Plots	Plots per 1000
Central Bedfordshire	59	80.3	0.3	0.3	1.4	3212	12.58

Table 15.2 summarises the distribution of allotments by placemaking area.

**Table 15.2 – Current Distribution of Allotments by Placemaking Area**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Pop. (Current)	Hectares per 1000 Pop. (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Total Plots	Plots per 1000 (Current)	Plots Per 1000 (Future)
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	7	6.9	0.1	0.1	1.0	276	5.3	4.73
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	14	19.8	0.4	0.3	1.4	792	14.6	12.7
North	38	53.6	0.4	0.3	1.4	2144	14.4	12.6
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	59	80.3	0.3	0.3	1.4	3212	12.6	11.05

15.26 Table 15.3 summarises the distribution of allotments by settlement hierarchy to evaluate if there are any differences in the amount of facilities provided. It highlights that there are significantly different levels of provision in settlements of different sizes.

**Table 15.3 – Current Distribution of Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy**

Area	Number of Sites	Total Provision (Ha)	Hectares per 1000 Population (current)	Hectares per 1000 population (Future)	Average Site Size (Ha)	Number of Plots	Plots Per 1000 (Current)	Plots per 1000 (Future)
Major Service Centres	16	22.5	0.16	0.14	1.4	900	6.4	5.6
Minor Service Centres	10	15.9	0.32	0.28	1.6	636	12.8	11.2
Large Villages	18	27.7	0.67	0.63	1.5	1108	27	25.1
Small Villages	13	13.3	0.51	0.49	1	532	20.4	19.6

### Quantity of Provision – Key Issues

15.27 Table 15.1 – 15.3 illustrate the following key issues regarding the number, type and distribution of allotments:

- Population growth will have a significant impact, with the number of plots per 1000 people decreasing from 12.6 across Central Bedfordshire to 11.05

- The majority of sites are located in the North Placemaking area. Provision is much lower in Dunstable and Houghton Regis
- While the majority of sites are located in the North Placemaking area, further analysis demonstrates that the distribution of these facilities is skewed to the west and just 36% of allotments are located in the east.
- Provision per 1000 population is equal in Leighton Buzzard and Rural South and north, although the average site size is larger in Leighton Buzzard. As per previously, the amount of plots available has been calculated using an estimate of average provision rather than a total of plots available as figures were not available for all sites.
- The largest villages contain both the highest number of sites and the highest levels of provision (number of hectares). Provision in the Major Service Centres is lowest in terms of hectares per 1000 population and number of plots per population
- Population growth will see both provision per 1000 population and the number of plots per 1000 population decrease

### **Quantity of Provision – Consultation Responses**

15.28 The household survey reveals that:

- overall, when excluding people that have no opinion, there is a view that there are not enough allotments. 49% consider there to not be enough facilities and a further 8% think that there are only nearly enough
- just 5% of the population consider there to be more than enough and only 38% believe that the amount of facilities is about right

15.29 The headline findings therefore suggest that more facilities are required. These views are consistent across all socio economic groups and there is no variation in perception according to ethnicity or gender.

### **Views on Quantity of Allotments by Placemaking Area**

15.30 The household survey indicates that residents in the Dunstable and Houghton Regis placemaking area are least satisfied with facilities and it is in this area where the highest levels of latent demand are evident.

15.31 The second highest levels of latent demand were evident in the East (30%) (part of the North placemaking area).

### **Views on Quantity of Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy**

15.32 Analysis of the household survey demonstrates that the size of settlement has limited impact upon perceptions of the adequacy of allotments although there are clear differences between the amount of latent demand evident, with 36% of residents in the Major Service Centres and 24% in the Small Villages keen to rent an allotment, compared to 16% in the Minor Service Centres and 6% in the Large Villages. As well as the lowest levels of latent demand, residents in the large villages also demonstrate the highest levels of satisfaction.

## **Views on Quantity of Allotments - Town and Parish Councils**

15.33 Responses to the Town and Parish Council survey reflect the high levels of demand for allotments expressed in the telephone survey. More than two thirds of respondents manage allotments and a further 15% indicate that there are private allotments in their village.

15.34 Despite the high levels of provision, 55% of respondents suggest that there is unmet demand in their village. In contrast, reflecting the localised nature of demand for allotments, some Town and Parish Councils have vacant plots. Despite this, responses clearly demonstrate that the provision of allotments (and demand for additional sites) is one of the priority challenges facing Town and Parish Councils currently.

15.35 Several councils have already identified land and are in the process of arranging for this to be converted to allotments. There are also concerns raised about the impact of new development and the potential for demand to increase as a result of this as new residents move to the area.

### **Latent Demand**

15.36 As outlined, most plots are currently full and consultation demonstrates that there is a requirement for additional plots. Furthermore, there is demand for plots in areas where there are currently no allotments.

15.37 Given that the provision of allotments is demand led (rather than supply led like play areas and parks) it is essential that potential latent demand is considered in the forward planning for current and future need.

15.38 It is possible to calculate latent demand in several ways:

- using the household survey – which indicates that overall 26% of respondents that do not currently use an allotment would like to use one. Given that only 2% of respondents currently have an allotment (3200 plots provided) it could be suggested that supply would need to increase significantly
- calculating expressed latent demand – i.e. where residents have proactively sought allotment rental through either discussions with Parish Councils, registration on a waiting list etc.

15.39 Use of figures in the telephone survey provides an indication of the potential scale of demand, while the calculation of demand using figures where residents have more directly expressed an interest provides a more conservative approach.

15.40 Table 15.4 summarises the known levels of latent demand by placemaking area, while Table 15.5 outlines unmet demand by settlement hierarchy. In total, it indicates that there is expressed demand for over 250 plots (excluding areas where there are no allotments at all).

15.41 This analysis demonstrates that geographically, waiting lists are primarily located in Dunstable and Houghton Regis and to the east of the north placemaking area – it is in these areas where provision is lowest. In Leighton Buzzard, where the number of plots per 1000 population is higher, waiting lists are much lower.

15.42 By settlement hierarchy, the majority of waiting lists are in the Major Service Centres (where provision is significantly lower) and the Large Villages. Where actual figures are unknown, it has been assumed that waiting lists / unmet demand are equivalent to 15 people or 10% of the total plots (where this is known).

15.43 Latent demand where there are no existing allotments is more evenly spread. It is notable however that demand for additional allotments is exhibited in all of the Major and Minor Service Centres (either through the use of current sites and / or waiting lists or evidence of latent demand). Clifton, Fairfield, Hockliffe and Langford are the only large villages where there is limited evidence of demand. The requirement for allotments is more sporadic in the smaller villages.

**Table 15.4 – Unmet Demand for Allotments by Placemaking Area**

Placemaking Area	Current Plots Provided	Plots Provided per 1000 Pop.	Waiting Lists (or unmet demand in settlements with existing allotments)	Settlements (waiting list)	Latent demand (settlements with identified demand and no allotments)
<b>Dunstable and Houghton Regis</b>	276	5.3	95	Dunstable / Houghton Regis – demand for at least 95 additional plots identified. This includes weighting lists at current sites and identified unmet demand.	Houghton Regis
<b>Leighton Buzzard and Rural south</b>	792	14.6	58	Leighton Buzzard, Slip End, Heath and Reach	
<b>North</b>	2144	14.4	94	Unmet demand located primarily in the East, Sandy, Henlow, Meppershall, Potton and Stotfold. Sandy Allotments shortly to close (48 plots) which will place extra pressure. Only pressures to the west are in Flitwick and Barton le Clay.	Cranfield, Shefford Blunham, Stondon Campton, Dunton, Northill. Ridgmont, Wrestlingworth

**Table 15.5 – Unmet Demand for Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Current Plots Provided	Plots Provided per 1000 Population	Waiting Lists (or unmet demand in settlements with existing allotments)	Settlements (waiting list)	Latent demand (settlements with identified demand and no allotments)
Major Service Centres	900	6.463706	166	Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Flitwick, Sandy (due to facility closing)	Houghton Regis
Minor Service Centres	636	12.93419	45	Arlesey, Potton, Stotfold, Barton le Clay, Toddington	Cranfield, Shefford
Large Villages	1108	27.60133	56	Henlow, Meppershall, Heath and Reach, Slip End	Blunham, Stondon
Small Villages	532	22.7808	15	Upper Caldecote	Campton, Dunton, Northill, Ridgmont, Wrestlingworth

15.44 It should be noted that some sites are not fully utilised although there are no sites with significant numbers of plots that are uncultivated. The majority of sites with available plots are smaller facilities that perhaps have a smaller target catchment area.

### Current Provision

#### Quality

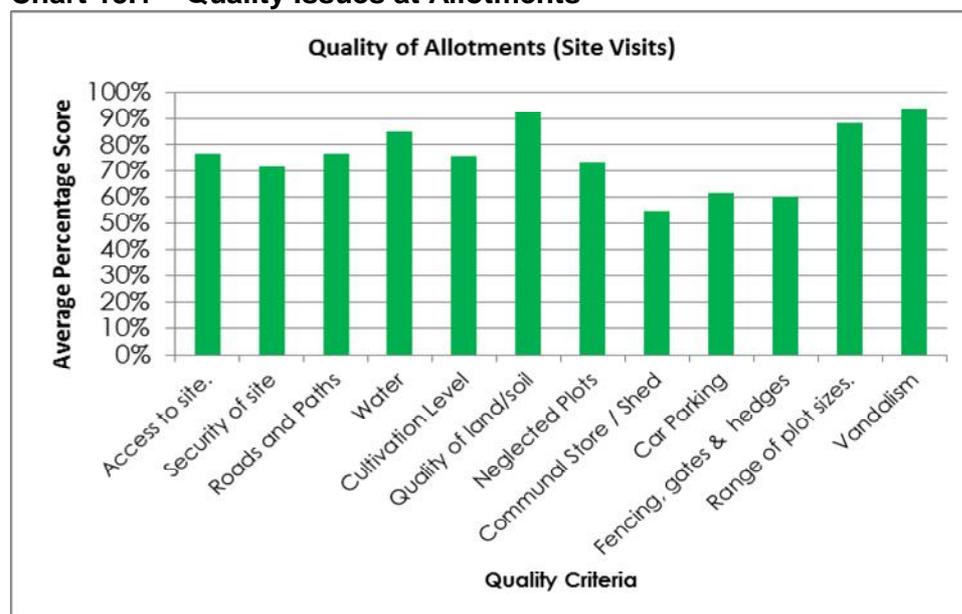
#### Existing Provision

15.45 The quality and value of allotments were assessed using a quality assessment matrix. This matrix is provided in Appendix D.

15.46 Site visits indicate that the quality of allotments varies significantly, with scores achieved between 33% and 97%. This is often influenced by the amount of plots that are left untended. Sites that are busy and well cultivated are usually more aesthetically pleasing. Most sites appeared to contain at least 60 – 70% of plots that were well tended however concerns with regards the maintenance of some plots were raised.

15.47 Figure 15.1 illustrates the average quality scores achieved for each factor rated during site assessments.

**Chart 15.1 – Quality Issues at Allotments**



15.48 As Chart 15.1 demonstrates, the key areas for improvement overall at allotments are the provision of facilities including sheds, site boundaries and the adequacy of car parking. Few issues with vandalism were identified and the quality of plots overall was considered good.

15.49 Table 15.6 summarises the quality of provision by Placemaking area. It demonstrates that there are few differences between the average scores achieved for allotments in each part of Central Bedfordshire. Scores are marginally lower in the north area (formerly east and west), but this influenced by a higher variation in quality in this area rather than overall poorer facility stock.

**Table 15.6 – Quality of Allotments by Placemaking Area**

	Average Quality Score	Access to site	Security of site	Roads and Paths	Water	Cultivation Level	Quality of land/soil	Neglected Plots	Communal Store / Shed	Car Parking	Fencing, gates & hedges	Range of plot sizes	Vandalism
<b>Dunstable and Houghton Regis</b>	82%	71 %	100 %	71 %	100 %	76%	100%	76 %	52 %	57 %	76 %	100 %	100 %
<b>Leighton Buzzard and Rural South</b>	78%	77 %	79%	74 %	92%	74%	100%	77 %	51 %	62 %	56 %	100 %	95%
<b>North</b>	67%	78 %	60%	79 %	77%	77%	86%	71 %	59 %	63 %	58 %	78%	91%

15.50 Although there are some geographical differences in the quality of provision, Table 15.7 suggests that there is very little variation in the quality of allotments according to the size of the settlement.

**Table 15.7 – Quality of Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy**

Settlement Hierarchy	Average Quality Score	Access to site.	Security of site	Roads and Paths	Water	Cultivation Level	Quality of land/soil	Neglected Plots	Communal Store / Shed	Car Parking	Fencing, gates & hedges	Range of plot sizes.	Vandalism
Major Service Centres	78 %	81 %	94%	78 %	97 %	81%	100 %	81%	50%	69 %	81%	100 %	97%
Minor Service Centres	76 %	81 %	67%	86 %	86 %	81%	90%	81%	75%	71 %	62%	76%	90%
Large Villages	68 %	77 %	65%	79 %	74 %	75%	90%	74%	61%	58 %	46%	77%	90%
Small Villages	69 %	69 %	61%	67 %	83 %	69%	89%	61%	45%	53 %	58%	97%	97%

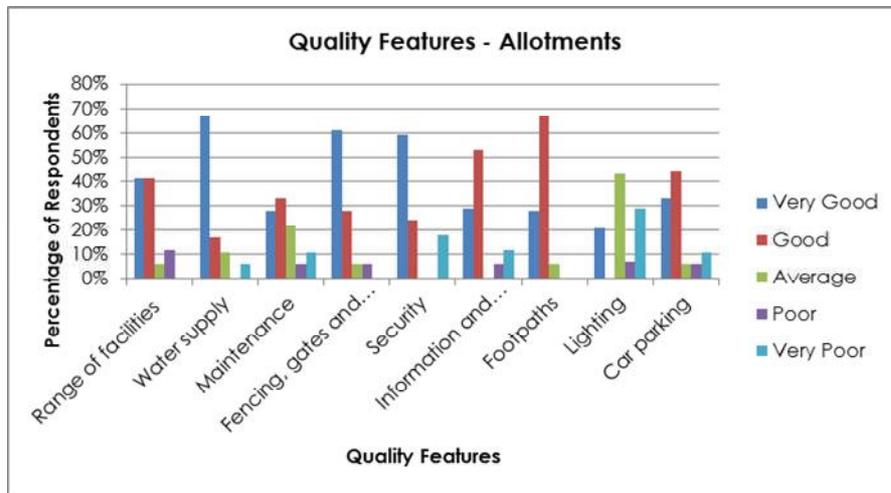
### Quality of Provision – Consultation Responses

#### Household Survey Responses

15.51 Reflecting the positive site visit scores, the quality of allotments is rated good by respondents to the telephone survey, (66% good or very good). Only 23% consider allotments to be poor. These figures include the views of both users and non users.

15.52 Building on this, Chart 15.2 considers the views of users and reveals that for each individual component of allotments, a higher proportion of respondents consider quality to be good or very good than or poor or very poor.

**Chart 15.2 – Perceptions of Quality Factors for allotments**



15.53 Areas where the highest levels of dissatisfaction are evident are:

- Lighting (36% poor or very poor)
- Security (18% poor or very poor)
- Information and signage (18% poor or very poor)
- Car parking (17% poor or very poor)
- Maintenance (17% poor or very poor)

15.54 This suggests therefore that although on the whole the quality of allotments is high, there are some opportunities for improvement. These concerns reflect some of the findings of site visits, which concerns over the maintenance of some plots and parking.

### Views on Quality of Allotments by Placemaking Area

15.55 Consultation demonstrates that there is little difference between the views of residents in different parts of Central Bedfordshire. Perceptions of quality are slightly higher in the west and Leighton Buzzard however average scores are marginally lower in these parts according to site visits.

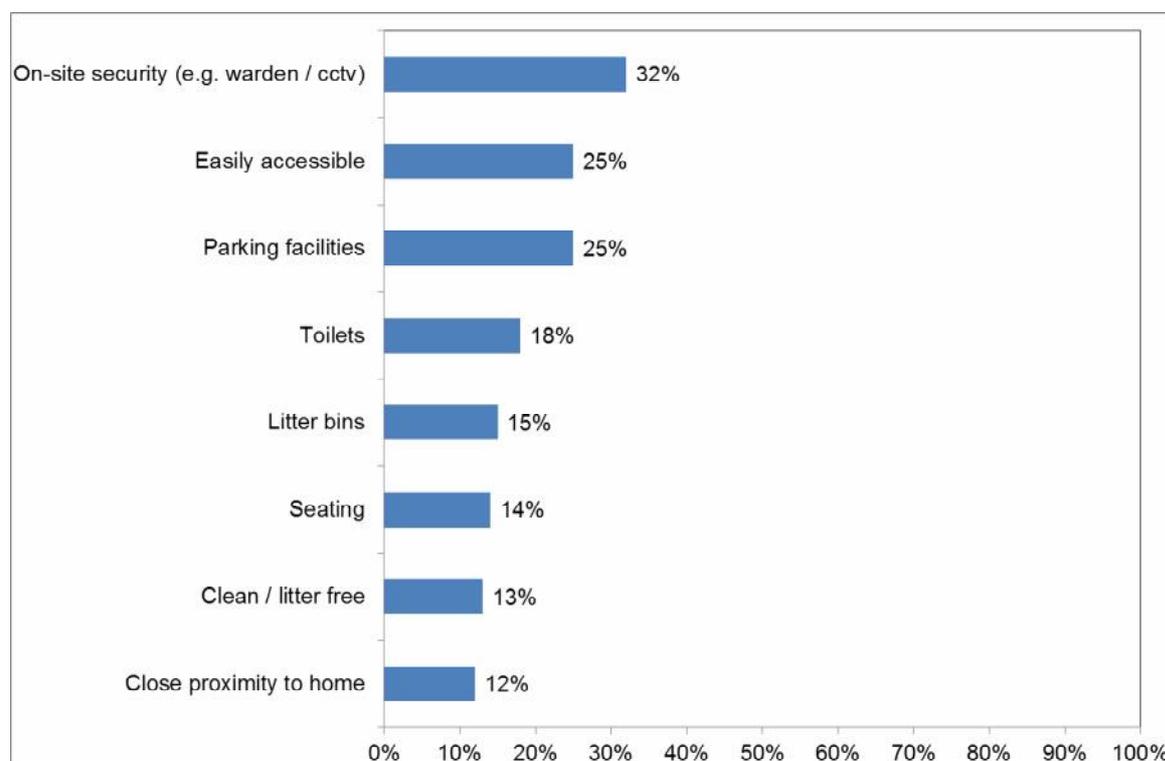
### Views on Quality of Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy

15.56 The household survey reveals that the size of settlement has relatively limited impact upon the overall perception of quality. Residents in the small villages and large villages are however slightly more positive than those in the larger settlements with a much lower proportion of residents considering allotments to be poor.

### Quality of Allotments - Aspirations

15.57 Chart 15.3 illustrates the factors that residents of Central Bedfordshire consider most important in the provision of high quality allotments. Reflecting concerns raised in relation to existing facilities with regards security and parking, these features are rated as being the most important element of high quality allotments.

**Chart 15.3 – Aspirations for Allotments**



**Accessibility**

15.58 Access to open space and recreation facilities is as important as the quality of provision and this is echoed in the review of aspirations, which rates accessibility as the second most important aspiration for an allotment.

15.59 Table 15.8 summarises the mode transport that residents in Central Bedfordshire expect to use to reach an allotment and the type of transport that users actually do use.

**Table 15.8 – Mode of Travel**

Expected vs. Actual	Walk	Cycle	Public Transport	Car
Expected	60%	0%	0%	40%
Actual	27%	0%	0%	73%

15.60 Table 15.8 indicates that there is a strong emphasis and expectation that allotments will be located in close proximity to home and 60% of users expect to travel on foot. Current user patterns indicate that in reality, the reliance upon car is much higher, with only 27% walking and 73% travelling by car. This suggests that users have to travel further to reach a facility than they would expect to.

15.61 When looking at the views of all residents of Central Bedfordshire (not just users), the expectation that allotments are located in walking distance remains, although a higher proportion of people would travel by car. It is notable that a higher proportion of residents of

non-white British origin expect allotments to be close to the home (70% would expect to walk). This is important as these residents express a particularly keen interest in renting an allotment.

### **Views on Accessibility of Allotments by Placemaking Area**

15.62 There is limited geographical variation in perception, with the only slight difference being the expectations of residents in the east of Central Bedfordshire, who have lower expectations that facilities will be provided within walking distance.

### **Views on Accessibility of Allotments by Settlement Hierarchy**

15.63 Residents in the small villages and larger villages have a higher expectation that allotments will be provided within walking distance of their home, with 69% and 70% of residents respectively indicating that would expect to travel on foot. This compares to 57% across Central Bedfordshire and is perhaps reverse to the trends for many other types of open space, where residents in the smaller settlements are more willing to travel further.

### **Steps 3 and 4 - Setting and Applying Local Standards**

15.64 In order to deliver a successful and varied network of open spaces consideration of quality, quantity and accessibility factors is required.

15.65 To develop provision requirements which are responsive to local needs, the findings of the facility audit and consultation can be used to inform the creation of quality, quantity and accessibility standards for each type of open space.

15.66 The findings of the local needs assessment, alongside the baseline audit of existing provision have therefore been used to determine local standards for the provision of large recreation areas. Existing provision can then be measured against these benchmarks to identify the requirement for new and improved facilities.

15.67 The approach taken to setting standards is explained in Section 2. The data used to set each standard for large recreation areas is outlined below.

## **Accessibility**

### **Setting Accessibility Standards**

15.68 As outlined in Section 2, standards are set using an accessibility led approach (although for allotments, which are demand led rather than supply led, there are other measures of demand that can be taken into account such as waiting lists, and this will be returned to later). It is therefore essential to understand the distance that residents expect to travel and the mode of transport that they will use to get there. The household survey provides a robust way of analysing these expectations.

15.69 Earlier analysis indicated that for allotments, accessibility and location is a key determinant of use. There is a strong emphasis and expectation that allotments will be located in relatively close proximity to home and reflecting this, the majority of users expect to travel on foot. Current user patterns indicate a greater reliance on the car to reach an allotment than residents expect.

15.70 Table 15.9 uses raw data collated through the household survey to evaluate the amount of time residents expect to travel to reach an allotment. To fully understand the spread of responses (and therefore the expectations of all residents), it categorises responses into quartiles. Each quartile represents 25% of the respondents. Quartile 1 is equivalent to the 25% of residents with the highest aspirations, or those that would be willing to travel the shortest distance to reach an allotment. PPG17 indicates that a local standard should be set using quartiles, and at a point which reflects the expectations of 75% of the population.

**Table 15.9 – Expectations from the Household Survey**

Mode of Transport	Walk				Car			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Central Bedfordshire	6	10	15	40	10	15	15	60
Major	5	6	15	30	8	10	15	30
Minor	9	10	15	40	10	15	15	60
Large	10	15	15	20	10	15	22.5	60
Small	10	10	10	15	15	15	20	25

Table 15.9 reveals that:

- 25% of residents across Central Bedfordshire would only be willing to walk up to 6 minutes to reach an allotment while residents in the smaller and larger settlements would be willing to travel a little further, up to 10 minutes. The remainder would travel between 6 and 40 minutes on foot and between 15 and 60 minutes by car
- the modal response (i.e. the most common response given) was that allotments should be within 10 minutes of the home. The average response given was 12 minutes. For those that would travel by car, the modal response was 15 minutes and the average response was 14 minutes

15.71 This suggests that a 10 minute walk time to reach an allotment is broadly acceptable to 75% of the population. It is however important to consider the views arising from other consultations. These emphasise the importance of taking into account local aspirations and demand when planning the provision of allotments, as many external factors contribute to potential requirements.

15.72 The recommended local accessibility standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

### Accessibility

Allotments - Accessibility Standard
10 minute walk time (480m)
Justification
The findings of the telephone survey demonstrate that a higher proportion of residents expect to walk to an allotment than travel by car and this is evident at all levels of the

settlement hierarchy and more so in the smaller settlements and large villages. Added to this, there are perceptions that the quantity of provision is not sufficient. A lack of local facilities is highlighted as one of the key barriers to use of allotments and proximity to the home is identified as a key determinant of use. Use of a standard requiring allotments to be within walking distance of the home is therefore justified.

The average and most common responses for the expected travel distance are similar (12 and 10 minutes respectively) and analysis demonstrates that 75% of users are willing to travel at least 10 minutes.

A standard of 10 minutes walk time therefore takes into account the expectations of residents by promoting the provision of easily accessible, high quality space.

### **Application of the Accessibility Standard**

15.73 The application of this standard is provided in Maps in Appendix B. It indicates that there are significant gaps in access in the following settlements;

#### **By Placemaking Area:**

- Dunstable and Houghton Regis – Houghton Regis, Dunstable
- Leighton Buzzard and south –Hockliffe, Stanbridge
- North – Cranfield, Shefford, Blunham, Stondon, Campton, Ridgmont, Wrestlingworth, Aspley Heath, Brogborough, Broom, Campton, Chalton, Dunton, Everton, Northill. Husborne Crawley, Ickwell, Moggerhanger, Old Warden, Ridgmont, Salford, Southill, Tempsford, Upper Gravenhurst, Wrestlingworth

#### **By Settlement Hierarchy:**

- Major Service Centres - Houghton Regis
- Minor Service Centres - Cranfield, Shefford
- Large Villages - Blunham, Stondon, Clifton, Fairfield, Hockliffe, Langford,
- Small Villages – Aspley Heath, Brogborough, Broom, Campton, Chalton, Dunton, Everton, Northill. Husborne Crawley, Ickwell, Moggerhanger, Old Warden, Ridgmont, Salford, Southill, Stanbridge, Tempsford, Upper Gravenhurst, Wrestlingworth

15.74 While the above represent the significant gaps, it is clear that there are gaps in access to allotments in parts of all of the major and Minor Service Centres.

### **Quantity**

#### **Setting Quantity Standards**

15.75 In light of the demand led nature of allotments, application of distance thresholds to identify potential areas where new allotments are required should be treated as a starting point only. Detailed research and monitoring of local demand should be undertaken prior to the development of new allotments. As outlined earlier, consideration of existing waiting lists is a particularly useful indicator of latent demand as is approaches for new allotments from local residents.

15.76 Consultation and analysis of waiting lists and key strategic documents outline that there are clear concerns with regards the amount of allotments. Coupled with the application of the accessibility standards, which highlights areas where residents are outside of a catchment to allotments, it is clear that additional facilities are required if current and future demand is to be met.

15.77 Analysis of existing provision indicated that there is expressed demand (whether it is met or unmet) in all Major Service Centres, Minor Service Centres and large villages and as a minimum, all residents in these settlements should be afforded access to allotments.

15.78 Demand is more ad hoc in smaller settlements and is perhaps dependent upon the character of settlements and the availability of gardens in residential dwellings.

15.79 Table 15.10 summarises baseline demand in Central Bedfordshire. It assumes that known unmet demand in each settlement is equivalent to 30 plots. This is below the average size of an allotment in Central Bedfordshire and therefore is likely to underestimate rather than over estimate demand.

**Table 15.10 – Baseline Unmet Demand for Allotments**

Settlement Hierarchy	Current Plots Provided	Waiting Lists (or unmet demand in settlements with existing allotments)	Minimum Requirement	Known Unmet Demand (No provision)	Minimum Total Plots Required	Minimum Hectares (Current)	Minimum Hectares per 1000 Population	Plots per 1000 Population
Major Service Centres	900	166	1066	Houghton Regis – 30 plots	1096	27.4	0.19	7.87
Minor Service Centres	636	45	681	Cranfield, Shefford – 60 plots	741	18.525	0.38	15
Large Villages	1108	56	1164	Blunham, Stondon – 60 plots	1224	30.6	0.76	30.4
Small Villages	532	15	547	Campton, Dunton, Northill, Ridgmont, Wrestlingworth – 150 plots	697	17.43	0.75	29.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3176</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>3458</b>		<b>3758</b>	<b>93.95</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>14.91</b>

15.80 Taking into account existing latent demand (waiting lists and known settlements where demand is expressed) there is therefore a minimum requirement of 3758 allotment plots in Central Bedfordshire. This assumes that all Major and Minor Service Centres and all Large Villages will have at least one allotment and that these facilities will also be provided in Smaller Villages where demand is identified.

**Based upon this calculation (and assuming that each plot is 250m<sup>2</sup>), 93.95 ha of allotment land is required to meet expressed current demand in Central Bedfordshire. This is equivalent to 0.37 hectares per 1000 population or 14.91 plots per 1000 population.**

15.81 This level of baseline demand can be compared to national standards. The 1969 Thorpe Report recommended a minimum standard of allotment provision of 0.2 hectares (0.5 acres) per 1000 population. Current levels of provision in Central Bedfordshire are therefore above this level.

15.82 The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners considers that the target for provision, based on the findings of a national survey, should be 20 allotment plots per 1000 households (i.e. 20 allotments per 2,200 people or approximately 1 allotment per 200 people. This target allows for some growth in demand as forecast in the House of Commons Select Committee report 'The Future of Allotments' (1998), and equates to a recommended spatial standard of 0.25 hectares per 1000 population. Current levels of demand are also above this standard.

15.83 In addition, it must be noted that the telephone survey revealed significant additional potential demand, particularly in areas where there is more limited provision. The use of a minimum standard of 15 plots per 1000 population (0.37ha), the Central Bedfordshire-wide average is therefore appropriate as a guideline, but it should be recognised that demand is localised and more may be required in some areas. The provision of allotment plots may be central in promoting the use of open space to residents who do not currently do so. Community orchards are becoming increasingly popular within the Central Bedfordshire area and these could be also be an appropriate alternative to allotments in some areas, however this should be determined locally.

The recommended local quantity standard and justification for this standard is set out below.

<b>Allotments - Quantity Standard</b>
0.37ha per 1000 population / 15 plots per 1000 population
<b>Justification</b>
<p>This figure represents the minimum requirement for allotments in Central Bedfordshire. It has been derived through the calculation of the amount of land dedicated to existing allotments, as well as the amount of additional space that is needed to meet known demand.</p> <p>Additional allotments are required in Central Bedfordshire based upon the current waiting lists and areas where additional demand is identified. There are few existing allotment plots that are available that are not being used.</p>

### **Application of the Quantity Standard**

15.84 Application of this standard suggests that population growth (35,200 people by 2022) across Central Bedfordshire will generate demand for an additional 529 plots.

15.85 Settlement shortfalls and deficiencies can be found in Appendix A. It is however suggested that the localised nature of demand for allotments means that this quantitative indication of demand is more appropriate for evaluating the impact of new development, while current waiting lists and expressed demand provides a greater understanding of the distribution

of current issues. For illustrative purposes however, the settlements with the largest deficiencies are set out below. It is clear that these are primarily urban areas (where provision is lower and more people live):

- Leighton Buzzard
- Dunstable
- Houghton Regis
- Sandy
- Biggleswade
- Shefford
- Cranfield
- Arlesey
- Langford
- Clifton
- Stondon
- Northill
- Potton

15.86 By 2022, the following settlements will have the largest shortfalls:

- Leighton Buzzard
- Houghton Regis
- Dunstable
- Biggleswade
- Sandy
- Shefford
- Arlesey
- Cranfield

15.87 All of the above settlements also have existing shortfalls. Population growth will see facilities in Houghton Conquest, Sundon and Stotfold become insufficient (currently achieve target standard).

## **Quality**

### **Setting Quality Standards**

15.88 Local consultations have enabled the identification of issues viewed as important to residents, as well as aspirations that they have in relation to the type of spaces that they would like to see provided. Supporting this, site visits have provided an overview of both areas of current concern and aspects of allotments that are being successfully delivered.

15.89 Consultation suggests that the quality of allotments currently is of lower concern than the amount of allotments. It is however important to ensure that the quality of both current and future allotments ensures that they are both fit for purpose and of sufficient quality to retain existing users and attract new users.

15.90 This feedback, alongside national good practice and issues emerging from site visits can be used to identify the key components of each type of open space in relation to quality and to set a quality standard that should be used as a basis for improving existing allotments as well as the creation of new sites.

15.91 The quality standard for allotments is therefore set out below. Further detail can be found in the Design Guidance.

<b>Allotments - Quality Standard</b>	
Local consultation, national guidance and best practice indicate that new and existing allotments should meet with the following criteria;	
Location	Appropriately located for local catchment (within 400m of target residents) Accessible via safe footpaths and roads Clear boundaries that are locally appropriate and promote security
Access	Clearly defined pathways within allotment site (meeting with DDA requirements) Fencing (1.8m) weldmesh or similar where appropriate, with pedestrian and vehicle gates to comply with DDA
Site Size	To ensure economies of scale and to foster community atmosphere, Sites should be at least 0.25ha (10 standard sized plots or 20 half sized plots). Plot size 250 square metres.
Facilities	<u>At least</u> one car parking space per 10 plots provided. Parking area to be hard surfaced, with tarmac entrance roadway Space for up to one shed per plot Mains water (to supplement collected rainwater) to all areas of site Toilet and washing facilities (unless public facilities are within 400m) New sites should incorporate the use of sustainable technologies where possible Communal garden to promote social interaction where space permits Clear signage to include site ownership, management and contact details. Seating and lighting at entrance/s

### **Application of Quality Standard**

15.92 The site visits provide a means of identifying poorer quality sites and highlighting those that require improvement to meet minimum standards. To achieve the above criteria (for those criteria included within the site visits undertaken), each site should achieve a minimum score of 2 out of 3 (meaning that it is adequate) and therefore a total score of 66%.

The following allotment sites fall below the target of 66%:

- Common Road (Stotfold)
- Silver End Road (Haynes)

- Sandhill Close (Millbrook)
- Shillington Allotments
- The Grove (Houghton Conquest)
- Billington Allotments
- Clophill Allotments
- Westoning Allotments
- Dunstable West Street Allotments (likely to soon be relocated)
- Front Street Allotments (Slip End)

## Summary – Issues Identified

### Usage

- Although just 2% of the population of Central Bedfordshire frequently use allotments, the telephone survey reveals that unmet demand for allotments is high. 26% of responding respondents indicated that they would be interested in renting an allotment in future years. The survey reveals that unmet demand is particularly high in Dunstable and Houghton Regis.
- While there are few variations in the views of different sectors of the population, the telephone survey revealed that 56% of residents of none white ethnicity would be interested in renting allotments (a much higher proportion than residents of none white ethnic origin) and access to the site was particularly important for these residents. The proportion of residents who have a disability and would like to use allotments was also higher than the amount of people that do not.
- Few barriers to use were identified but the range of facilities and a lack of local facilities were considered to be the key issues (excluding a lack of time). There is also some evidence of a lack of awareness of allotments.

### Quantity, Quality and Accessibility

- Consultation revealed significantly greater concerns with regards the amount of allotments than the quality of those provided. The telephone survey highlighted that more residents felt that there were not enough allotments than were satisfied, while Town and Parish Councils highlight the provision of allotments as one of the key challenges that they are facing. There is high demand for allotments and several are currently seeking to extend existing facilities or to provide new sites in response to expressed demand.
- When taking into account the size of the population in each area, existing allotments are not evenly distributed, with significantly higher levels of provision in smaller settlements and outside the main urban areas (particularly Dunstable and Houghton Regis). There is little pattern in the quality of facilities provided, with examples of poorer and higher quality sites in all areas. The key quality concerns identified (through both consultation and site visits) relate to car parking and maintenance and ten sites achieve scores of below 66%.
- Consultation reveals that residents expect to use allotments in walking distance from their home, and that the location of allotments is a key determinant of use. 75% of residents in Central Bedfordshire would be willing to walk up to 10 minutes (480m). The local nature of allotments, and the fact that they are demand driven mean that local determination of needs and aspirations is essential.

- Latent demand is perhaps the key issue for allotments – there are several settlements where there are waiting lists to use existing sites (Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Flitwick, Sandy (due to facility closing), Arlesey, Potton, Stotfold, Barton le Clay, Toddington. Henlow, Meppershall, Heath and Reach, Slip End, Upper Caldecote) and areas where demand has been formally identified but there are no existing allotments in the area (Cranfield, Shefford Blunham, Stondon, Campton, Dunton, Northill. Ridgmont, Wrestlingworth). Taking this into account, calculations suggest that demand for allotments is equivalent to a minimum of 0.37ha per 1000 population, or 15 plots per 1000 residents.

Population growth will have significant impact upon the demand for allotments, with potential demand reaching an additional 529 plots, based upon the standard of 15 plots per 1000 residents. Community orchards are becoming increasingly popular within the Central Bedfordshire area and these could be also be an appropriate alternative to allotments in some areas, however this should be determined locally.

## **Step 5 – Identifying Priorities**

### **Key Issues to Address**

15.93 The above analysis therefore indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to allotments:

- Allotments are currently well used however some sites are under threat of development and there are concerns about the long term sustainability of key sites
- There are opportunities to increase the usage of existing (and new sites) by attracting new user groups (significant interest in allotments by residents of non-white ethnic origin and those with disabilities)
- Allotments are expected to be local to the home (within 10 minutes walk). There are several small and large settlements without any allotments and all Minor and Major Service Centres have areas where residents are outside of this catchment. Many Parish Councils in areas without allotments have received requests to provide them
- Added to this, analysis of current demand highlights that there are waiting lists at numerous sites and there is a need to provide additional allotment plots to meet immediate needs
- Population growth is likely to see an increase in demand for allotments and there are concerns that the stock is already at capacity
- There are limited issues with the quality of allotments currently and on the whole, improvements to the amount of plots are considered to be more important. Some site specific improvements are however required

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

15.94 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- ensure that the existing stock of allotments is retained
- meet expressed demand in relation to both waiting lists at existing sites and latent demand

- ensure that future demand for allotments is taken into account as the population grows; and
- maintain and improve the quality of allotments to ensure that existing users continue to participate and that new allotment users are attracted

### **Key Priorities**

15.95 It is therefore recommended that key priorities for the delivery of allotments across Central Bedfordshire are as follows:

- ensure that policy protects statutory allotments from development, and supports the retention of all existing sites where demand is identified. Where existing sites are lost to development, replacements should be sought where there is evidence of ongoing demand
- seek to ensure that all residents are within a 10 minute drivetime of allotments
- investigate opportunities for new provision in areas where there are no existing allotment sites or where the amount of residents that can access a site is already maximised. This may include the provision of temporary allotments
- promote the implementation of management practices designed to maximise the number of residents that can be accommodated at each site in a bid to reduce waiting lists. These may include the provision of half plots and / or starter plots and restrictions on the number of plots that each resident can rent
- work with providers to ensure that all allotment sites meet baseline standards through the adoption of the quality criteria outlined earlier in this section; and
- ensure that the impact of population growth on demand for allotments is addressed through the inclusion of policy requiring developers to provide allotments on larger developments and to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of existing provision through CIL and developer contributions. Demand for allotments is equivalent to at least 15 plots per 1000 population / 0.37 ha per 1000 population

### **Site / Area Specific Implications**

Table 15.11 summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 15.11 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites. Sites in Dunstable and Sandy currently anticipated to be lost and should be replaced
<b>Management Practices to Reduce Waiting Lists</b>
Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Flitwick, Sandy (due to facility closing), Arlesey, Potton, Stotfold, Barton le Clay, Toddington, Henlow, Meppershall, Heath and Reach, Slip End, Upper Caldecote
<b>New provision</b>
<p>Potential options for the delivery of new allotments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identification of landowners willing to use their land to meet current demand for allotments (several landowners have approached the Council for this reason)</li> <li>• conversion of other types of open space</li> <li>• allocation of allotments within school sites which can function as community allotments as well as educational tools for pupils, or the provision of community growing gardens within public parks and open spaces</li> <li>• alternative means of providing allotments, such as the use of private gardens (through a community scheme that matches garden owners with potential allotment plot holders)</li> </ul> <p>Priority areas are: Houghton Regis. Cranfield, Shefford. Blunham, Stondon, Campton, Dunton, Northill, Ridgmont, Wrestlingworth</p> <p>Areas of new development where provision is already at capacity and where demand is sufficient to warrant new allotments.</p>
<b>Quality Enhancements</b>
<p>All sites in line with target quality criteria</p> <p>Areas of new development where provision is already sufficient in quantitative and access terms but where residents are likely to use existing facilities. This may also include the provision of additional land/plots.</p>

## 16. Cemeteries and Churchyards

### Introduction

16.1 This section sets out the assessment relating to cemeteries and churchyards in Central Bedfordshire. It is structured as follows:

- Context and Definition
- Usage Profile
- Existing Provision – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility - and Aspirations
- Summary – Issues to Address
- Implications and recommendations

### Context and Definition

16.2 This typology encompasses both churchyards contained within the walled boundary of a church and cemeteries outside the confines of a church. Cemeteries include private burial grounds, local authority burial grounds and closed churchyards. Although the primary purpose of this type of open space is burial of the dead, rest and relaxation and quiet contemplation, these sites frequently have considerable value for the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

16.3 Some churchyards contain areas of unimproved grasslands and various other habitats. They can also provide a sanctuary for wildlife in urban areas and often offer historic value in the more rural landscapes. Many churchyards and cemeteries in Central Bedfordshire are managed in a way that enhances their biodiversity and this is something that the local diocese positively encourages where it does not conflict with the formal use of the site. Totternhoe St Giles Churchyard is a particular example of this – the church is part of 'living churchyard project' run by the Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust whereby part of the churchyard is set aside for the conservation of wildlife. It is also possible to introduce significant biodiversity benefits through the sensitive management and maintenance of plots that are waiting to be used.

16.4 Table 16.1 summarises the categories of cemeteries and churchyards used by The Cemetery Research Group (Centre for Housing Policy, University of York).

**Table 16.1- Cemeteries and Churchyards Definition (extracted directly from 'Mortality'. Cemetery Research Group, 2000)**

	Physical characteristics	Ownership and purpose	Sacredness	Identity of the deceased
<b>Cemetery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• location close to/outside to settlement</li> <li>• larger size</li> <li>• gate and boundary</li> <li>• internal demarcation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• varied ownership but principally secular</li> <li>• purpose varied over time</li> <li>• burial of an entire community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presence of the recently bereaved</li> <li>• local pilgrimage over generations</li> <li>• permanence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protecting and celebrating some individual identities;</li> <li>• corpse integrity key</li> </ul>
<b>Churchyard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• location close</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church ownership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• religious ritual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• congregation more</li> </ul>

	Physical characteristics	Ownership and purpose	Sacredness	Identity of the deceased
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to/within settlement</li> <li>• smaller size</li> <li>• gate</li> <li>• limited internal demarcation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• spiritual benefits accrued from usage</li> <li>• burial of an exclusive community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local pilgrimage</li> <li>• limited pilgrimage in recent time erodes sacredness</li> <li>• lacking permanence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>important than individual;</li> <li>• corpse integrity not key</li> </ul>
<b>Burial ground</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• location close to settlement</li> <li>• size varied</li> <li>• physical characteristics differentiated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ownership by distinctive sub-group</li> <li>• purpose including ethnic, national, religious expression</li> <li>• burial of a defined sub-community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possible religious ritual</li> <li>• limited pilgrimage over time eradicates sacredness</li> <li>• lacking permanence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• distinctive group identity celebrated;</li> <li>• importance of corpse identity variable</li> </ul>

16.5 The 2001 Report on Cemeteries by the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee of the House of Commons highlights the importance of planning effectively for burial requirements. It states:

“Although the desire to bury the dead is now, and has been for some time, a minority choice, we are firmly of the opinion that this preference should be respected. Local authorities will, we suggest, wish to ensure the widest possible access to the option of burial. This means that ways have to be found to ensure that local, accessible burial space is provided. Local authorities should address this need in their Development Plans”.

16.6 The Government issued a consultation paper “Burial Law and Policy in the 21st Century” following a detailed report by a Select Committee, aiming at a widespread review of law and current practice. The conclusions to this consultation indicate a very broad support for reform to existing burial legislation, and the need to strengthen planning legislation in relation to land used for burials.

16.7 Furthermore, the consultation undertaken provided clear evidence of how burial grounds are a significant feature of local communities that should, as far as possible, be provided and run locally.

16.8 Projections relating to demand for burial space further emphasise the importance of planning for burial space in the UK:

- Death rates and the number of deaths nationally have fallen for many years, largely due to increased life expectancy, and are now at their lowest recorded levels. Projections (Office of National Statistics) indicate that numbers of deaths will begin to increase in England from 2016, with an increase of 15 per cent by 2035, rising to 28 per cent above current levels by 2060
- An average of 73% of funerals in the UK are cremations. The Cemetery Research Group indicate that while recently this proportion had demonstrated significant increases, this is now thought to have levelled off (Dr Tony Walker, Evidence to Select Committee).

## Steps 1 and 2 – Evaluation of Local Needs and Audit of Existing Provision

### Quantity

16.9 There is no statutory duty to create new cemeteries or extensions of existing cemeteries, but burial authorities are under a duty to maintain their existing cemeteries and also to dispose of those who die in the area where other funeral arrangements have not been made.

16.10 Most Town and Parish Councils in Central Bedfordshire provide and maintain burial grounds within their parishes and the majority of settlements still have some capacity within existing burial spaces (although there are also many closed churchyards).

16.11 Table 16.2 summarises the amount of space dedicated to cemeteries and churchyards across Central Bedfordshire by Placemaking area, while table 16.3 outlines the distribution of these facilities by settlement hierarchy. It should be noted that figures do not add up exactly, as some cemeteries and churchyards identified are located outside of the settlement hierarchy but are geographically located within Central Bedfordshire.

16.12 Tables 16.2 and 16.3 both outline the number of active cemeteries that are available and also highlights where there are churchyards that are either closed or now have limited roles in burials. It demonstrates that almost all settlements have an active cemetery.

**Table 16.2 – Cemeteries and Churchyards across Central Bedfordshire**

Area	Closed Churchyards	Churchyards	Cemeteries not associated with churches	Settlements with Active Cemeteries
Dunstable and Houghton Regis	2 closed	0	2	Dunstable, Houghton Regis
Leighton Buzzard and Rural South	5 closed	3 churchyards and 5 cemeteries associated with churches	5	Eaton Bray, Eggington, Heath & Reach, Hockliffe, Leighton Buzzard (2), Slip End, Studham, Tilsworth, Whipsnade
North	20 closed churchyards,	30 cemeteries associated with churches, 31 churchyards	19	Amphill, Arlesey, Aspley Guise, Aspley Heath, Astwick, Barton-le-Clay, Battlesden, Biggleswade, Blunham, Campton & Chicksands, Clifton, Clophill, Cranfield, Dunton, Edworth, Eversholt, Everton, Eyeworth, Flitton & Greenfield, Flitwick, Gravenhurst, Harlington, Haynes, Henlow, Houghton Conquest, Hulcote & Salford, Husborne Crawley, Langford, Lidlington,

				Marston Moretaine, Maulden, Meppershall, Millbrook, Milton Bryan, Moggerhanger, Northill, Old Warden, Potton, Pulloxhill, Ridgmont, Sandy, Shefford, Shillington, Silsoe, Southill, Steppingley, Stondon, Stotfold, Streatley, Sundon, Sutton, Tempsford, Tingrith, Toddington, Upper Caldecote, Westoning, Woburn Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley
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**Table 16.3 – Cemeteries and Churchyards across Central Bedfordshire by Settlement Hierarchy**

Area	Number of closed Churchyards	Number of churchyard	Number of active cemeteries not associated with churches	Settlements with Active Cemetery
Major Service Centres	8 closed churchyards	2 churchyards	8	Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Leighton Buzzard, Biggleswade, Flitwick, Ampthill, Sandy
Minor Service Centres	3 closed churchyards	4 churchyards and 4 cemeteries associated with churches	4	Arlesey, Barton-le-Clay Cranfield, Marston Moretaine, Toddington, Shefford, Stotfold, Potton
Large Villages	7 closed churchyards and 1 church with no graveyard	7 churchyards, 14 cemeteries associated with churches	7	Eaton Bray, Heath & Reach, Hockliffe, Slip End, Aspley Guise, Harlington, Henlow, Houghton Conquest, Langford, Meppershall Westoning, Clifton, Aspley Guise, Woburn, Blunham, Haynes, Langford, Houghton Conquest, Shillington, Stondon, Upper Caldecote
Small Villages	8 closed churchyards and 3 churchyards with no graveyards	13 cemeteries associated with churches, 11 churchyards	5	Studham, Tilsworth, Dunton, Eversholt, Everton, Flitton & Greenfield, Husborne Crawley, Lidlington, Moggerhanger, Northill Old Warden, Ridgmont Southill, Streatley, Sundon, Tempsford, Gravenhurst, Wrestlingworth

16.13 A much higher proportion of land is designated as cemeteries and churchyards in the North of the area than in the more densely populated urban areas of Dunstable and Houghton Regis and Leighton Linlade. Notably, the majority of

cemeteries that are not associated with a church (and therefore are open to the whole community) are also located in the Major and Minor Service Centres.

The settlements that are not known to have active cemeteries are:

- Major Service Centres – Wixams
- Minor Service Centres – Caddington (but Aley Green Cemetery in Slip End serves both Parishes)
- Large Villages – Clophill , Fairfield, Maulden, Silsoe; and
- Small Villages – Aspley Heath, Brogborough, Broom, Chalton, Greenfield, Ickwell, Kensworth, Millbrook, Salford, Stanbridge, Sutton, Totternhoe and Upper Shelton

## **Quality**

16.14 The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) published a charter for the bereaved, which provides guidance on the management and maintenance of these facilities, as well as other related issues, for example choice of monument.

16.15 Specifically in relation to quality, the charter expects ICCM subscribers to provide:

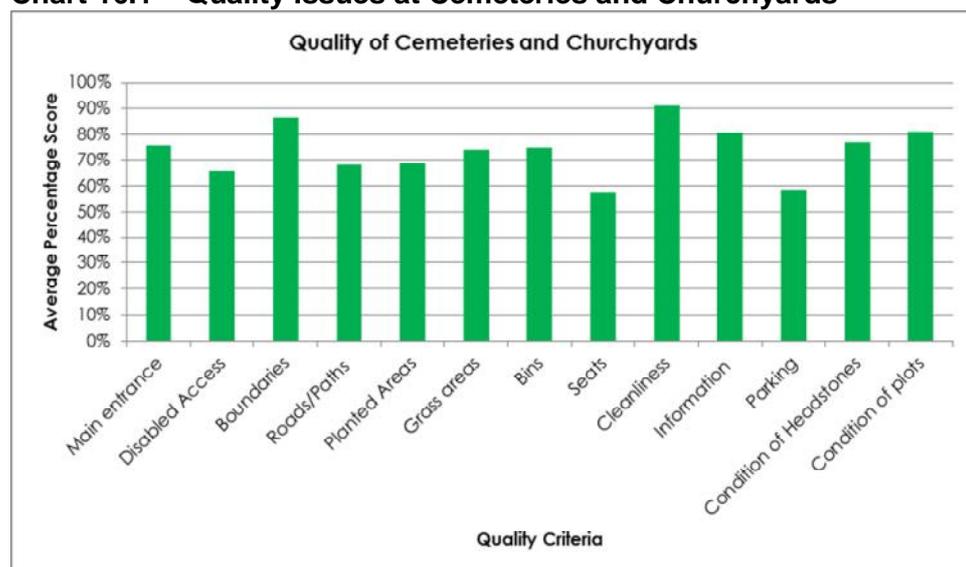
- grass cutting at least seven times a year, every four weeks from April to October (other than in cemeteries where grass is being allowed to grow freely for habitat purposes) with care taken to avoid damage to stones or tributes
- weekly removal of litter and of dead wreaths from recent funerals (though not from subsequent visits, which are the responsibility of visitors)
- accessible water supplies
- clear paths and walking surfaces that are safe for the elderly and disabled people
- minimal damage to existing graves, memorials and tributes when preparing adjacent new graves; and
- a statement of service standards.

16.16 The Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust and St Albans Dioceses promote the introduction of sensitive management practices within cemeteries and churchyards to enhance biodiversity and conservation. The key principles include;

- Management of mowing regimes and removal of cuttings
- Careful selection of wildlife friendly seed mixes
- Promoting of composting (but away from trees)
- Introduction of bird and bat boxes.

16.17 Site visits reveal that the average quality score for cemeteries and churchyards is 70%. The range of scores varies from 39% to 94%, demonstrating that there is a wide spectrum of quality. The issues identified through site visits are summarised in Chart 16.1. It is clear that most of the key principles identified above in relation to the Charter of Cemetery and Crematorium Management are delivered effectively in cemeteries and churchyards in Central Bedfordshire.

**Chart 16.1 – Quality Issues at Cemeteries and Churchyards**



16.18 Chart 16.1 indicates that seating and parking are the lowest scoring features of cemeteries and churchyards. In contrast, sites are well maintained on the whole, with sites achieving higher scores for cleanliness, condition of headstones and plots and site boundaries. Some improvements to paths would also be of benefit at some sites.

16.19 Further analysis demonstrates that the quality of cemeteries and churchyards is higher in the Major and Minor Service Centres than in the villages, with average scores as follows:

- Major Service Centres – 78%
- Minor Service Centres – 72%
- Large Villages – 69%
- Small Villages – 65%

16.20 In general, the quality of maintenance, boundaries and paths were consistent in all areas. Larger settlements however had better main entrances and improved planting, information and seating. It is also notable that many of the sites with lower scores are closed churchyards (i.e. where burials no longer take place) rather than active sites.

### **Consultations Responses - Views on Quality and Quantity**

16.21 Due the sensitive nature of these sites, the telephone survey did not include consultation on cemeteries and churchyards. Consultation with Town and Parish Councils, as well as a review of issues arising in relation to cemeteries and churchyards of green infrastructure studies and parish plans did reveal that the majority of issues and concerns relating to this type of open space relate to site capacity rather than quality. Site specific quality issues that were identified include:

- Ampthill – priority given to maintaining quality over the long term
- Stratton Way, Biggleswade – improvements to footpath cemetery, street furniture and landscaping
- Arlesey – water table issue (burials currently suspended)
- improvements at Old Clophill Church (GI) are required

- Heath and Reach Cemetery – water table prevents double depth graves
- Dunton – seeking to provide water; and
- Ridgmont – working group established to upgrade quality of Segenhoe Churchyard

### **Accessibility**

16.22 It is less appropriate to consider distance thresholds for cemeteries than for other types of space as most sites are historical sites and associated with a church.

16.23 The importance of these places to the elderly and infirm suggests strongly a need to take account of public transport when planning sites (and vice versa), and to provide sites that are reasonably easily accessed in terms of distance.

16.24 While sites are currently found in the majority of settlements, many of these are approaching capacity (to be outlined later in this section). If these are not replaced locally, then accessibility may therefore become a greater consideration in future years.

### **Setting and Applying Local Standards**

16.25 Drawing upon the contextual information provided in relation to the provision of cemeteries and churchyards in Central Bedfordshire, the remainder of this section outlines the key issues for cemeteries and churchyards that need to be considered in the future planning for these facilities.

### **Quantity**

#### **Setting Standards**

16.26 The growing population, as well as the ageing profile of residents is likely to generate an increase in the number of deaths and as a consequence, the number of burials. As set out earlier, Office of National Statistics figures project the number of deaths to increase by 15% by 2035 and this will have a knock on impact on the requirement for burial space.

16.27 The need for graves for all religious faiths can be projected from population estimates, coupled with details of the average proportion of deaths which result in a burial. This can then be used to understand the potential implications of population growth and the likely future requirements for cemeteries.

16.28 The key phases of the calculations to understand likely burial requirements are set out below:

- Across Central Bedfordshire in 2010 there were 1900 deaths (Source: Office of National Statistics)
- This equates to (based upon population of 255,220) a rate of 7.4 deaths per 1000 population
- 27% of deaths result in burial, compared to 73% cremations, based on England & Wales average (Mortality Cemetery Research Group, Housing Policy Department, University of York)
- Circa 513 burial plots were therefore required across Central Bedfordshire in 2010. This equates to 2.01 burial plots per 1000 population per annum

16.29 As the population grows, demand for burial plots will therefore increase. The ageing population means that the death rate is likely to increase and as set out earlier, National Office of Statistics estimates suggest that death rates may increase by up to 15% by 2035. Based upon the above calculations for Central Bedfordshire a 15% increase in death rate would result in 8.56 deaths per 1000 population (589 burial plots required per annum) and therefore a requirement for 2.3 burial plots per annum. **The slow increase in death rates is likely to mean that requirements fall between 2.01 and 2.3 burial plots per 1000 population over the plan period.**

#### **Application of Standard**

16.30 While the quantity standard should only be used to determine the impact of new development on the requirement for burials, it is possible to combine this information with analysis of current capacity in order to determine areas where new provision may be required.

16.31 Every individual cemetery has a finite capacity and therefore there is steady need for burial space. Nationally, many areas already face a shortage of burial grounds and in Central Bedfordshire, despite large numbers of burial grounds and high levels of provision in settlements of all sizes, many sites are at or near capacity and requirements for additional cemeteries have been identified. It is clear that for most Town and Parish Councils, there is an aspiration to provide local burial space to ensure that where a burial is desired, it can take place local to the home.

16.32 The remaining capacity of cemeteries (where known) over the plan period can be summarised by settlement hierarchy as follows:

#### **Major Service Centres**

- Ampthill – 796 plots available at new site provided by Town Council. Previous site at St Andrews now closed
- Biggleswade – new Stratton Way Cemetery replaces previous cemetery which is now closed
- Dunstable cemetery – recent extension has been provided – sufficient capacity
- Flitwick - only 2 years capacity remains
- Houghton Regis – only 8 / 9 years capacity remaining
- Leighton – Vandyke Cemetery has 173 spaces. New area for 500 burials to be provided shortly. Old Linslade – 188 spaces
- Sandy – site at Potton Road nearing capacity – extension to be provided on allotments during 2014 – allotment site will close at the end of 2013 to facilitate this. The other site in Sandy is already full.

#### **Minor Service Centres**

- Arlesey – one third capacity remaining
- Barton le Clay – capacity for 17 – 18 years
- Cranfield – cemetery requires extension but request to purchase land refused (Parish)GI plan highlights aspirations for green also
- Marston Moretaine – less than 10 plots remain. New site under construction currently
- Sandy Road, Potton – spaces available
- Shefford – Campton Road has 2 years remaining (50 plots). Land has been retained for extension (in conjunction with Campton Parish Council)
- Stotfold – 500 plots and 500 ashes only burials

- Toddington – capacity of cemetery unknown

### **Large Villages**

- Aspley Guise – cemetery extended recently and capacity now sufficient
- Blunham – capacity unknown
- Clifton – recently provided cemetery in churchyard has capacity
- Eaton Bray Bower Lane – 78 spaces available and 140 for ashes
- Harlington – 495 green burial plots, 464 burials, 300 ashes plots
- St Marys Church, Haynes – only 20 plots remaining
- Heath and Reach Cemetery – capacity for 15 years
- Henlow Cemetery – capacity unknown
- Houghton Conquest – capacity unknown
- Langford – approaching capacity - cemetery extension required (GI)
- Lower Stondon – Capacity unknown
- Meppershall – approaching capacity
- Shillington – capacity unknown
- Upper Caldecote Cemetery – circa 50% capacity remaining
- Westoning – capacity unclear

### **Small Villages**

- Dunton Cemetery – 100 spaces
- Eversholt Burial Ground- capacity unknown
- Everton – approaching capacity. Proposals for extension under discussion
- Flitton Cemetery – 80 years capacity remaining
- Husborne Crawley – capacity unknown
- Lidlington – capacity at existing site
- Moggerhanger – capacity unknown
- Northill – Cemetery has recently been extended
- Old Warden Burial Ground – capacity unknown
- Ridgmont – Segenhoe – remaining capacity (church now closed)
- Tempsford – old churchyard closed to burials but capacity at new cemetery
- Tilsworth – capacity unknown
- Upper Gravenhurst – existing burial space has significant capacity
- Wrestlingworth Burial – capacity unknown

16.33 It is clear therefore that several sites are reaching capacity and that a strategy for the provision of future burial space will need to be drawn up.

### **Quality**

#### **Setting Standards**

16.34 The quality of cemeteries and churchyards is particularly important due to the role that they are fulfilling and the value of these spaces.

16.35 Drawing upon the best practice guidance set out earlier as well as the findings of site visits, the quality standard for cemeteries and churchyards is set out below.

### Cemeteries and Churchyards - Quality Standard

Location	Appropriately located for local catchment Accessible via safe footpaths and roads as well as public transport Clear boundaries that are locally appropriate and promote security
Access	Clear entrance Clearly defined pathways within site (meeting with DDA requirements) Gates should comply with DDA
Maintenance	Regular cut (at least 7 times per year) Removal of grass cuttings from site Management of gravestones and headstones Sensitive management in line with Wildlife Trust guidelines to promote biodiversity and conservation
Facilities	Sufficient car parking Water Supply Clear signage to include site ownership, management and contact details Regular and appropriate seating

### Summary – Issues Identified

#### Context

- Cemeteries and churchyards offer important conservation and biodiversity values as well as meeting a burial function. The Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust and St Albans Dioceses promote the introduction of sensitive management practices within cemeteries and churchyards to enhance biodiversity and conservation. St Giles Churchyard, Totternhoe, part of which has been designated as a living churchyard is a particular example of this. The rear of Langford churchyard has also been designated as an area of importance for conservation

#### Quantity, Quantity and Accessibility

- Cemeteries and churchyards are spread across Central Bedfordshire in settlements of all sizes and for the most part, burials take place locally. Almost all settlements within the hierarchy have at least one burial site and many also have a closed churchyard. Several new cemeteries and churchyards have recently been provided to accommodate ongoing demand.
- Death rates and the number of deaths nationally have fallen for many years, largely due to increased life expectancy, and are now at their lowest recorded levels. Projections from the Office of National Statistics however indicate that numbers of deaths will begin to increase in England from 2016, with an increase of 15 per cent by 2035, rising to 28 per cent above current levels by 2060. Demand for burial space is therefore likely to increase.
- Across Central Bedfordshire in 2010 there were 1900 deaths (Source: Office of National Statistics) which equates to (based upon population of 255,220) a rate of 7.4 deaths per 1000 population. As 23% of deaths result in burial, compared to 77% cremations (Mortality Cemetery Research Group, Housing Policy Department, University of York), circa 513 burial plots were therefore required across Central Bedfordshire in 2010. This equates to 2 burial plots per 1000 population per annum. Anticipated increases to the death rate may see this rise to 2.3 burial plots by 2035 and these figures can be used to project future burial

## requirements

- While there is currently a good distribution of burial space, there are a few settlements with no site, several sites are already approaching capacity and many more providers indicate that there will be no remaining capacity within the plan period. Forward planning of burial space is therefore essential. Settlements where there are projected shortfalls of burial capacity over the plan period are: Flitwick (only 2 years capacity remains), Houghton Regis (only 8 / 9 years capacity remaining), Cranfield (cemetery requires extension but request to purchase land refused), Haynes (only 20 plots remaining) Heath and Reach (capacity for 15 years), Langford (approaching capacity and identified need for cemetery extension), Meppershall (approaching capacity).
- Four settlements have more immediate burial space requirements and are currently progressing new sites and / or extensions of existing sites. These include Shefford (Campton Road has 2 years remaining). Land has been retained for extension in conjunction with Campton Parish), Sandy (Potton Road nearing capacity – extension to be provided on allotments during 2014 – allotment site will close at the end of 2013 to facilitate this. The other site in Sandy is already full), Marston Moretaine (less than 10 plots remain, new site currently under construction), Everton (approaching capacity. Proposals for extension under discussion).
- The capacity of cemeteries appears to be by far the greatest challenge relating to this type of open space, however, site visits revealed a wide spectrum of quality of facilities, with some sites in need of improvement. The quality of facilities in larger settlements (Major and Minor Service Centres) was evidently higher than in smaller villages and the quality of active sites is also generally better than closed churchyards. Areas with low scores include footpaths and seating. Sites are in general well maintained and provide an essential and valuable resource to the local community.

## Step 5 – Identifying Priorities

### Key Issues to Address

16.36 The above analysis therefore indicates that the Recreation and Open Space Strategy needs to address the following issues relating to cemeteries:

- current projections indicate that death rates are likely to increase by 2035 and there will be higher requirements for burial space. The projected population growth will further see the number of burials per annum increase
- there is a strong emphasis on the provision of local burial space in Central Bedfordshire and as a consequence, almost all settlements have cemeteries and / or churchyards
- several existing sites are approaching capacity and new space will be required to accommodate ongoing and increasing demand; and

- the quality of facilities is important and while most sites are well maintained, there is a requirement to improve some sites and to retain appropriate maintenance regimes in other areas

### **Recreation and Open Space Strategy Outcomes and Key Priorities**

16.37 Building upon the above, the recommendations set out below would help to deliver the following outcomes:

- address capacity issues across Central Bedfordshire
- ensure that future demand for burial space is considered as the population grows and associated death rates increase
- ensure that the impact of population growth on demand for burial space is addressed through the inclusion of policy requiring developers to provide cemeteries on larger developments and to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of existing provision through CIL and developer contributions; and
- focus upon ongoing maintenance of existing sites and improvement of some sites to ensure that minimum standards are met

### **Key Priorities**

16.38 It is therefore recommended that key priorities for the delivery of cemeteries and churchyards across Central Bedfordshire are as follows:

- promote the protection and provision of this type of open space through policy in the Development Strategy
- address capacity issues at existing burial sites through the provision of extensions and / or new spaces where these are identified as being required and the allocation of appropriate land to facilitate this. It is anticipated that between 2 and 2.3 burial spaces will be required per annum per 1000 population
- ensure that the impact of population growth on demand for cemeteries is recognised through the inclusion of policy requiring developers to contribute towards both the quantity and quality of provision through CIL and developer contributions
- ongoing maintenance of existing sites and improvement of some sites to ensure that minimum standards are met; and
- maximise access routes to large cemeteries that serve residents in more than one settlement. This should include public transport and cycle routes as well as access by car

### **Site / Area Specific Implications**

Table 16.4 summarises the likely site / area specific implications of the above recommendations.

**Table 16.4 – Site Specific Priorities to Address Issues and Recommendations**

<b>Protect</b>
All existing sites
<b>Capacity Issues</b>
<b>Immediate Requirements:</b>
Shefford (Campton Road has 2 years remaining). Land has been retained for extension in conjunction with Campton Parish),
Sandy (Potton Road nearing capacity – extension to be provided on allotments during 2014 – allotment site will close at the end of 2013 to facilitate this. The other site in Sandy is already full),
Marston Moretaine (less than 10 plots remain. New site under construction currently),
Everton – approaching capacity. Proposals for extension under discussion.
<b>Projected Shortfalls:</b>
Flitwick (only 2 years capacity remains), Houghton Regis (only 8 / 9 years capacity remaining), Canfield – cemetery requires extension but request to purchase land refused), Haynes (only 20 plots remaining) Heath and Reach (capacity for 15 years), Langford – approaching capacity and identified need for cemetery extension, Meppershall – approaching capacity.
<b>Quality Enhancements</b>
All sites in line with target quality criteria

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