

# **CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Open Spaces Assessment Study**

### **Final Report Executive Summary**

**December 2017**



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## INTRODUCTION

Charnwood Borough Council requires an Open Space Assessment Study to assess the existing provision of open space in Charnwood, building on, and updating a previous study published in 2010, but also having regard to changes in national planning policy. The study makes an assessment of future needs within the timescale of the new Local Plan to 2036.

The findings and recommendations will:

- Provide a robust evidence base for strategy development, including for the proposed refresh of the Open Space Strategy 2013-2028.
- Support the drafting of planning policy for the Charnwood Local Plan.
- Determine future provision needs (e.g. protection, enhancement, surplus to requirements).
- Inform the determination of planning applications.
- Prioritise Charnwood Borough Council's and its partners' capital and revenue investment
- Help understanding of local priorities for open space needs to better inform the negotiation of Section 106 Agreements.

## SECTION 1: SUMMARY OF THE METHODOLOGY

1.1 The starting point for the sites list for the study was the evidence informing the Open Space Strategy 2013-2028 which was produced in 2010 and has been updated to 2017. The following criteria were agreed as the typologies to be included.

Open Space Typology	Criteria
Parks and Gardens	All sites
Natural and semi-natural green space	Only include where these have a clear recreational function, are part of public open space and are at least 0.2ha in size.
Amenity green space	Minimum size 0.2ha unless there is a clear recreational function e.g. children's play. Includes informal unequipped play and kickabout areas.
Green corridors	All sites
Children's Recreational Spaces	All sites excluding Local Areas for Play (LAPs).
Young Person's Recreational Spaces	Open access Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs), teenage shelters, skate parks, outdoor basketball etc.
Allotments	All sites
Churchyards and cemeteries	Assessment in relation to open space criteria.  Consultation questions for parishes on the stakeholder survey about the capacity of the existing churchyards and cemeteries to meet future needs.

Civic spaces	Agreed list of civic spaces including registered village greens
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### Confirming the sites pre-audit

- 1.3 The following steps were followed to update the previous sites list for auditing to bring it up to date:
- Desk based assessment of the GIS layer of all sites and typologies provided by CBC, to amend/reclassify to new typologies and amended scope.
  - Consultation with the Parish and Town Councils and Ward Councillors in Loughborough to identify any changes in their areas.
  - Updating of the sites database in response from the consultation feedback.

### Auditing

- 1.4 Each site was assessed during late July/early August 2017 against agreed templates and the majority were photographed to confirm site quality and any issues identified in the assessment.

### Assessment

- 1.4 Each open space typology has been assessed against the currently adopted standards, developed from the 2010 Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study. The assessment includes tests for quantity, quality and accessibility against the existing standards.
- 1.5 Comparisons to 'similar' authority's standards and to best practice and national guidance have been made. Further testing has then been undertaken where it appears that the existing standards require updating. The recommended standards then emerge from the testing for each of the typologies.

## SECTION 2: OPEN SPACES ACROSS CHARNWOOD

**2.1** The total area of open space identified in the 2017 audit is shown below along with the current level of provision per 1000 population.

*Figure 1: Current levels of open space by typology*

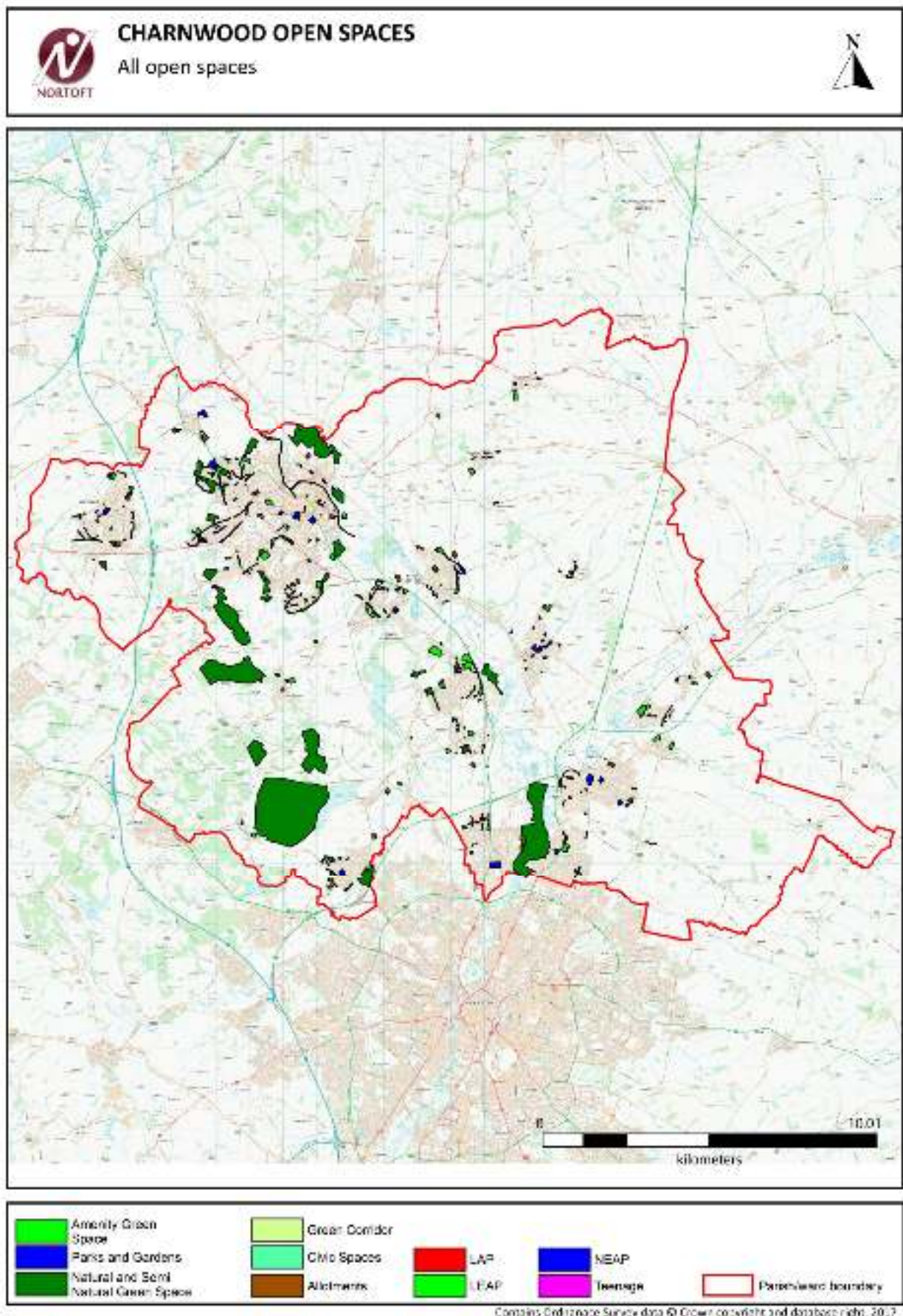
Typology	Area (hectares)	Current level of provision (Ha per 1000 population)
Parks and Gardens	47.5	0.29
Amenity Green Space	167.9	1.01
Natural and Semi Natural Green Space	937.9	5.65
Green Corridors	41.3	0.25
Allotments	36.2	0.22
Cemeteries & Churchyards	42.8	0.26
Civic Spaces	3.5	0.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,277.1</b>	<b>7.7</b>

**2.2** The current number and area of play areas and youth provision are shown below along with the provision per 1000 by both the number of sites and hectares.

*Figure 2: Current levels of children's play and youth provision*

Typology	Number of sites	Area (hectares)	Current level of provision (ha per 1000 population)
Children's Play Sites	99	9.8	0.06
Youth Provision	31	2.8	0.02

Figure 3: Open spaces in Charnwood borough – all typologies



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## SECTION 3: PARKS AND GARDENS AND AMENITY GREEN SPACE

### *Parks and Gardens*

3.1 There are 20 sites across Charnwood which meet the criteria to be included in the Parks and Gardens typology. The existing standards for Parks and Gardens do not accurately reflect the current provision for this typology. Furthermore, comparison between the existing standards and Charnwood's comparator authorities highlights a considerable variety of both the quantity and accessibility of Parks and Gardens. It is therefore appropriate to review the standards.

### *Amenity Green Space*

3.2 There are a large number of sites across Charnwood which meet the criteria to be included in the Amenity Green Space typology.

3.3 The proposed quantity standards are based on the Fields in Trust recommended standards of provision for Amenity Green Space. At 0.6 ha per 1000, this represents an increase of 0.12 ha per 1000 above the existing standard. However, as the current average provision across Charnwood is already higher at 1.05 ha per 1000, this increase is justified.

### *Combining the two typologies*

3.4 As Parks and Gardens are also Amenity Green Spaces (but not vice versa), the two have been considered together. This approach allows flexibility in how the open spaces can be planned for new developments and will help to provide better quality spaces that are appropriate to their location.

3.5 Neither the current adopted standard for Parks and Gardens or Amenity Green Space reflect the actual provision of these typologies.

3.6 The close relationship between Parks and Gardens and Amenity Green Space means that these sites are not often provided in close proximity. However, often people are likely to visit a site due to its closeness, instead of its classification.

3.7 The average district wide provision for the combined Parks and Gardens and Amenity Green Space of 1.35ha displays a close relationship with the 1.4 ha Fields in Trust combined standard. In addition, this quantity standard is also a better fit when compared to Charnwood's comparator authorities.

3.8 From a planning perspective, a combined standard offers flexibility for development management to provide open spaces that are suited to the specific needs and requirements of the site. However, it should be noted that the capital and maintenance costs of Parks and Gardens will usually be higher than Amenity Green Space provision therefore negotiation will need to be undertaken on a case by case basis for major developments.

## Proposed Standards for Parks and Gardens and Amenity Green Space

In new developments, planning policy should identify the expected proportion of the site to be developed as Parks and Gardens and as Amenity Green Space.

### Quantity

- 1.4ha per 1000

### Quality standard for Parks and Gardens

- Green Flag standard
- Adoption standard: A regularly mowed smooth surfaced grassland space with tree and shrub planting suitable for a variety of informal outdoor recreation activities. Including features such as public gardens, footpaths, play areas, young people's facilities, seating and litter bins. Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan. Clean and litter free, appropriate planting and well kept grass. It is desirable to include toilets, seating, footpaths, nature features, litter bins and safety features. They should have a clear entrance, boundaries and lighting.

### Quality standard for Amenity Green Space

- Adoption standard: A regularly mowed smooth surfaced grassland space. Including features such as tree and shrub planting and footpaths. Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan. Clean and litter free, regularly maintained and with well kept grass and appropriate planting. Where possible, sites should also contain litter bins, dog bins and seating and be safe and secure.

### Accessibility

- 1200m for Parks and Gardens in the Towns and Service Centres
- and
- 400m to an Amenity Green Space or a Park and Garden in the Towns, Service Centres and Other Settlements



## SECTION 4: NATURAL AND SEMI NATURAL GREEN SPACE

- 4.1 There are a large number of sites across Charnwood which meet the criteria to be included in the Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space typology. The total area of Natural and Semi Natural Green Space is 937.92 ha across 37 sites.

### Proposed Standards for Natural and Semi Natural Green Space

#### Quantity

- 2ha per 1000 to be applied to new developments only

#### Quality

- Adoption standard: An accessible space with wildlife habitats to improve biodiversity. These may be predominantly woodland, water, meadow or a combination. Prepared in accordance with an agreed management plan. Clean and litter free, nature features, safe footpaths and appropriate planting. It is also desirable for sites to include water features, parking, dog walking facilities, seating, information and toilets.

#### Accessibility

- 800m

## SECTION 5: CHILDREN'S PLAY AND YOUTH PROVISION

5.1 There is already a good network of children's play and youth provision in Charnwood and this should be protected and maintained. The standards of provision have been reviewed and the following standards are proposed.

### Proposed standards for Children's Play and Youth Provision

5.2 The existing network of the equipped play areas and teenage provision should be regularly reviewed, including their quality. However, in principle, the existing network of equipped LEAPs, NEAPs and teenage facilities should be retained and enhanced. The existing network of LAPs should be maintained if appropriate, despite the council no longer promoting the provision of this type of play facility.

5.3 As new developments are considered then new children's play and teenage provision should be required, unless there is sufficient capacity within an accessible site. In which case, the equivalent value of new play provision should be used to improve the existing site(s) in order to enhance their capacity to cater for the additional demand.

5.4 New sites should meet the revised standards below (once adopted), including minimum size, accessibility and design. Where provision is not appropriate on site, then the equivalent value of contributions should be made off site.

#### Quantity

- 0.25ha per 1000 for new provision
  - Of which 400 sqm active zone should be for a LEAP
  - 1000 sqm active zone should be for a NEAP

#### Accessibility

- 400m (LEAP)
- 1000m (NEAP)
- 1000m (Teenage Facility)

#### Quality

- Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan.
- Facilities should be appropriate and designed through consultation with children and young people.
- They should be clean and litter free, well maintained and should also contain seats, litter bins and be dog free (where appropriate). The site should be appropriately located and constructed to meet minimum LEAP/NEAP criteria set out in the FiT standards.

- 5.5 A full network of provision should be achieved in each of the Towns and Service Centres.
- 5.6 Each of the Other Settlements and Smaller Villages and Hamlets should have a LEAP where the population is greater than 200 people and where there is an identified local need.
- 5.7 The approach towards the delivery of children's play and youth facilities in association with new housing should be:
- Where any housing development is fully within the catchment of an existing LEAP, NEAP or teenage facility, then developers' contributions should be sought towards improvements and or extensions of the site(s). Where it is not possible or appropriate to enhance or increase the capacity at the existing facility, new provision may be required on site.
  - For development sites with any housing located more than 400m from a LEAP, or 1000 m from a NEAP or youth facility then the approach should be, *in priority order*:
    - Develop on site new LEAP or NEAP, and teenage facilities as required to meet the standard
    - If not possible on site, then to a new site(s) immediately adjacent to the housing development and with safe, lit access on foot.

## SECTION 6: ALLOTMENTS

- 6.1 There are 32 allotment sites in Charnwood and the current level of provision across the district is 0.22 ha per 1000. This is significantly lower than the existing standard of 0.33 ha per 1000. There is a high level of take up of allotment space as most allotments have very little spare capacity despite some quality issues flagged in the audit.

### Proposed standards for Allotments

- 6.2 The existing allotment sites should be retained and improved so that they are all high quality. New allotment sites should be developed in the towns and Service Centres to meet the proposed standards. Elsewhere new allotment sites should be encouraged and supported where there is sufficient justified need.

#### Quantity


- 0.33ha per 1000

## Quality

- Adoption standard: A high quality allotment site that is fit for purpose. Including the following features: Loam to a minimum depth of 400mm with few stones; no shading or root invasion by large trees; 2 metre perimeter palisade fencing and gates; water supply with taps or troughs at appropriate intervals; appropriate hard surfaced vehicle access throughout the site, waste container storage and parking; sheds provided adjacent to each plot; onsite toilet; plots laid out with plot markers with 500mm grass strips between plots. Plots ploughed to an agreed depth. Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan.
- Allotments should be clean, litter free and secure. It is desirable to provide appropriate parking, toilets, water supply and managed appropriate access routes.

## Accessibility

- 1000m

 For new developments it is proposed that:

- For all new housing developments the approach should be, *in priority order*:
  - Develop on site new allotment space of a minimum size according to the authority's allotment standards
  - If not possible on site, then:
    - site adjacent to the housing development or within 1000m of the centre of the site
    - contributions towards improvements (including extension) at the closest allotment site

## SECTION 7: CIVIC SPACES

**7.1** Civic spaces include civic and market squares, other hard surfaced community areas designed for pedestrians and a number of village greens. The primary purpose of civic spaces is the provision of a setting for civic buildings, public demonstrations and community events.

**7.2** There are 10 sites within Charnwood which meet the criteria to be included in this typology. Some of these spaces are village greens however other village greens are included either in the Parks and Gardens section or the Amenity Green Space section, as appropriate.

## Proposed standards for Civic Spaces

- 7.2 The nature of this typology means that these sites are very specific to their locality. It is important for the quality of the current sites to be maintained and enhanced. However, it is not considered appropriate to set a quantity or accessibility for Civic Spaces.

## SECTION 8: CEMETERIES AND CHURCHYARDS

- 8.1 In Charnwood there are 53 cemeteries and churchyards. There are three sites within Loughborough town, 2 within Shepshed and at least one in all of the Service Centres. The majority of sites are used solely for their main purpose as burial grounds.
- 8.2 Additional to their use as open spaces, cemeteries and churchyards primary purpose are of course as burial grounds. It has been identified that there are potentially shortfalls of burial space in Barrow, Quorn, Rothley, Shepshed, Sileby and Thurmaston.

## Proposed standards for Cemeteries and Churchyards

- 8.3 The nature of this typology means that these sites are very specific to their locality. It is important for the quality of the current site to be maintained and enhanced. However, it is not considered appropriate to set a quantity or accessibility standard for Cemeteries and Churchyards for recreational use in Charnwood.

## SECTION 9: IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1 The implementation of the strategy will be achieved through a combination of approaches by Charnwood Borough Council and its partners. There are a number of recommendations emerging from the study which require specific actions and investment, and others which are more a matter of ensuring the protection of the existing network of open space sites. The formal planning standards and policies can be used as guidance for the negotiations of developers contributions linked to new housing.
- 9.2 Where there are no specific site proposals the overriding policy objective will be to protect and enhance the existing network of green spaces and associated facilities.

## Planning standards

- 9.3 A key output from the strategy is the development of proposed standards, particularly for new developments. The justification and details behind each of these planning standards are contained within the relevant assessment sections of the report.

9.4 These standards will be used to both justify the new provision and developers' contributions under the existing s106 planning arrangements as individual planning applications come forward.

9.5 For new housing developments, sites accommodating 10 dwellings or more will be required to contribute to open spaces provision as per the proposed standards in Figure 4. However, sites under this size would still be expected to have due regard to good design principles and appropriate garden and amenity space as required.

*Figure 4: Proposed planning standards for open space*

Open space type	Proposed planning standards for new developments		
	Quantity per 1,000 population	Accessibility	Quality
Parks and gardens	1.4ha per 1000	1200m in the Towns and Service Centres	<p>Green Flag Award</p> <p>Adoption standard: A regularly mowed smooth surfaced grassland space with tree and shrub planting suitable for a variety of informal outdoor recreation activities. Including features such as public gardens, footpaths, play areas, young people's facilities, seating and litter bins.</p> <p>Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan.</p> <p>Clean and litter free, appropriate planting and well kept grass. It is desirable to include toilets, seating, footpaths, nature features, litter bins and safety features.</p> <p>They should have a clear entrance, boundaries and lighting.</p>
Amenity Green Space		400m for either Amenity Green Space or Parks and Gardens in the Towns, Service Centres and Other Settlements	<p>Adoption standard: A regularly mowed smooth surfaced grassland space. Including features such as tree and shrub planting and footpaths.</p> <p>Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan.</p> <p>Clean and litter free, regularly maintained and with well kept grass and appropriate planting. Where possible, sites should also contain litter bins, dog bins and seating and be safe and secure.</p>

<p>Natural and Semi Natural Green Space</p>	<p>2.0ha per 1000 <i>(to be applied to new development only)</i></p>	<p>800m</p>	<p>Adoption standard: An accessible space with wildlife habitats to improve biodiversity. These may be predominantly woodland, water, meadow or a combination. Prepared in accordance with an agreed management plan.</p> <p>Clean and litter free, nature features, safe footpaths and appropriate planting. It is also desirable for sites to include water features, parking, dog walking facilities, seating, information and toilets.</p>
<p>Children's Play and provision for young people</p>	<p>0.25 ha per 1,000 of Designated Equipped Playing Space including teenage provision <i>(to be applied to new development only)</i></p>	<p>400m for LEAPs</p> <p>1000m for NEAPs</p> <p>1000m for teenage facilities</p> <p>Full network of NEAPs, LEAPs and Teenage facilities in the Towns and Service Centres</p> <p>Full network of LEAPs in the Other Settlements and Smaller Villages and Hamlets where the population is greater than 200 people and there is an identified local need.</p>	<p>Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan.</p> <p>Facilities should be appropriate and designed through consultation with children and young people.</p> <p>They should be clean and litter free, well maintained and should also contain seats, litter bins and be dog free (where appropriate). The site should be appropriately located and constructed to meet minimum LEAP/NEAP criteria set out in the FiT standards.</p>

Allotments	0.33ha per 1000	1000m	<p>Adoption standard: A high quality allotment site that is fit for purpose. Including the following features: Loam to a minimum depth of 400mm with few stones; no shading or root invasion by large trees; 2 metre perimeter palisade fencing and gates; water supply with taps or troughs at appropriate intervals; appropriate hard surfaced vehicle access throughout the site, waste container storage and parking; sheds provided adjacent to each plot; onsite toilet; plots laid out with plot markers with 500mm grass strips between plots. Plots ploughed to an agreed depth. Prepared in accordance with an agreed plan.</p> <p>Allotments should be clean, litter free and secure. It is desirable to provide appropriate parking, toilets, water supply and managed appropriate access routes.</p>
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- 9.6 When considering the needs of an application which may be eligible to provide open space it will be important to assess the needs at the parish level for quantity, quality and accessibility. If the parish has a shortfall in quantity terms, then the development should provide for the typology based on the adopted standard. The quantity of provision will need to be at a level proportionate to the new development to make it CIL compliant. If when assessing the amount from a development this results in a surplus in the ward/parish, the Council should choose on a case by case basis whether all of the requirement is needed or just the amount to bring it in balance. The Council may choose to negotiate for an alternative open space, equivalent to the excess, where there is a known local need.
- 9.7 If a ward/parish has an oversupply of a particular typology and the existing supply is of a suitable quality and accessibility, then it will not normally be appropriate to seek additional provision. However, provision may still be required if the quality and/or accessibility of the existing supply is deemed deficient. This will need to be assessed on a case by case basis.
- 9.8 In the case where a typology is in surplus but another typology is in deficit, it will generally not be appropriate to seek larger provision of the typology in deficit if this is not CIL compliant. However, the Council, in negotiation with the developer, may agree to such a provision if there is an identified local need.





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