

Open Space Strategy: Executive Summary

The North Norfolk Open Space Study and the accompanying database and GIS mapping provide a comprehensive assessment of the supply and demand for open space. This study is consistent with planning guidance and other supporting strategies at the national, regional and local level and takes into account new government thinking on sustainable development and the role that green space plays in the quality of life of residents.

It recognises that most open space, with good planning and management can perform multiple functions and provide a variety of benefits which cut across the Council's strategic priorities.

The study identified local needs and priorities by a survey of residents and focus groups, together with a study of existing demographics and socio-economic structure of the District

North Norfolk represents a large rural District with a settlement structure consisting of a number of relatively small towns serving a large rural hinterland consisting of small villages and hamlets.

There are 12 wards within the District which have output areas which have child densities significantly greater than the national average. These wards should be prioritised for improvement where there are inadequate opportunities for children's play for all age groups

A number of wards contain a high proportion of population 'not in good health' compared with the national average. Within all areas of the district open spaces should provide formal and informal opportunities for physical activity and a range of environments which provide spaces for relaxation and stress relief.

Other wards in North Norfolk are contained within the top 40% most deprived super output areas nationally. Given this context it is imperative that open spaces do not under perform in their potential role in regenerating rural communities. This can be achieved by providing environments that are attractive green and safe; establishing a sense of place and wellbeing and improving the image and identity of communities and providing a range of opportunities for sport and recreation.

North Norfolk has a relatively high quantity of public park provision with some 19.7ha of public parks per 1000 population. This high figure is however a reflection of the provision of country parks within the District which represents 19.0ha/1000 of the overall standard. The provision of public parks equates to 71% of overall open space provision in the District. However, the distribution of public parks provision varies significantly between wards.

The majority of open spaces are classified as having a good or very good quality and range of facilities. The overall findings of the resident's survey are consistent with this assessment.

A strategy for improving the range and condition of facilities within public parks should be developed to take into account the unique character of these parks and the potential to incorporate further facilities; whether there is a deficiency in the provision of open space in the area; the proximity of other parks which may have an oversupply of certain facilities; recommendations from the Sports Assessment recommendations to enhance the Green network; and the local social conditions.

Taking into account population projections to 2016, this study recommends a quantity standard for the main forms of open space provision. These standards and the study of quality and value of each space also allow an informed assessment of the impact of development proposals on the value of individual open spaces. Development control decisions should have regard to the analysis undertaken on current levels of provision, the identified deficiencies and the quality and value of the open spaces within or surrounding a development site.

The wider community should also be consulted on the results of this study, a view clearly expressed by the Focus Group meetings held during this study. Development of an Open Space Steering Group comprising representatives of stakeholder groups and local authority departments could guide this and future consultation on open spaces.