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# Parks and Open Space Strategy for Northampton



November 2009

## Parks and Open Spaces Strategy - Contents Page

	<b>Pages</b>
<b>Foreword:</b> By Portfolio Holders for Environment, Planning and Regeneration	3
Mission Statement	4
<b>Part A Introducing the Strategy</b>	
Introduction	5
Scope, Aims and Objectives of the strategy	6-7
Summary Review of legislative and policy context at a national, regional and local level	8-10
Process for developing the Strategy	12
Open Space Categories and Typology Location map	13-14
Issues facing Parks and Open Spaces	15
Conservation area influence on parks and open spaces	15
Strategic and Local Green Space Map	16
Summary of Section	17
<b>Part B Setting the Standards</b>	
Our research	18-19
Identification of standards for quantity, quality and accessibility in all open space typologies	19-22
Categorisation of Parks and Open Spaces	23-26
<b>Part C – Open space improvement and Policies</b>	
Parks and Open Space Typology improvement and policies	27-34
Strategic Green Infrastructure	35
Sustainability of our Parks and Open Spaces	36-41
Key green space and improvement opportunities for Northampton	42
<b>Part D – Delivering the Strategy</b>	
Introducing the Action Plan	43
Priorities for Action	43-44
Bibliography	45-47

(Related Documents)

**Appendices**

**Appendix A – Quality Standards Report**

**Appendix B – Detail of categorisation of Parks and Open Spaces**

**Background Papers**

- 1. A Review of national, regional and local policies affecting open space.**
- 2. Research Summary from OSSR Audit 2006 and Consultation Summary from 2009**
- 3. Report on Funding Issues for Parks and Open Spaces in Northampton**

## **Foreword**

We are extremely fortunate in Northampton to have a wealth of parks and open space throughout the town. It is now accepted that parks and open spaces contribute to the quality of life of residents within their neighbourhoods, they provide a link to history of the area, contribute towards the culture, and attract visitors and overall the local environment affects the well-being of residents.

Whether it is formal gardens or woodland areas, parks, sports facilities, recreational open space or play areas; open spaces provide the venue and opportunities for a great range of activities for all ages.

Open space stimulates community spirit, boosts the local economy and promotes biodiversity. In other words they make important contributions to the Social, Economic and Environmental well being of the Borough and its people. Their role as the 'green lungs' of the Town is of increasing importance as the need to tackle the effects of climate change intensify. There is a need to make our open spaces attractive for everybody and make sure that in any new developments residents have access to high quality open space.

Since January 2009 – Northampton Borough Council has been working with CABE Space (The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), to produce this Strategy document. The Strategy sets out the framework of how we will manage and develop our open spaces.

It is anticipated that this strategy will act as a catalyst for significant improvements to our parks and open spaces through better design, development and management. We recognise that working in partnership will be vital to the success of this Strategy and we must build upon the good relationships that we have already forged.

Cllr Paul Varnsvery  
Cllr Trini Crake  
Cllr Richard Church

## **Our Mission Statement:**

***‘In Northampton, through partnership working, we will provide attractive, enjoyable, safe and accessible open spaces, managed and maintained to meet the needs of our existing and future communities. This will contribute to everyone’s quality of life, the natural environment and social and sustainable economic prosperity.’***

(Mission Statement developed as a result of group exercises during the Parks and Open Spaces Workshops in July 2009)

## **PART A – SETTING THE SCENE**

### **Introduction**

Parks and open spaces are integral to the cultural life of Northampton – they provide breathing space and are crucial to the successful functioning of our communities. People pass by open space, walk through it on the way to work or the shops, or stop to enjoy it. Parks offer places to relax and enjoy the natural environment away from the stresses of everyday life, for children to play, and for sport and recreation. In addition they play host to a range of events, festivals and educational activities on both a small and large scale, which attract local and regional audiences.

The unique geography and historic development of Northampton has created a legacy of parks, open spaces and green areas. The natural and man-made corridors following the Nene Valley its tributaries and the Grand Union Canal are a valuable asset (ref: Fig. 6) These corridors together with the legacy of its historical landscapes of Abington Park, Delapre Park, Becketts Park, Hunsbury Hill Country Park and the Racecourse provide a diverse collection of superb green assets, which

contribute to a sense of place, ever important in a changing town.

**Northampton's open spaces include:** 20 identified Parks, 496 Amenity Green spaces, of which over 50 are larger than 1 hectare, 111 Natural or Semi Natural areas, over 100 children or young peoples equipped play spaces, 178 Outdoor Sports Facilities, 23 Allotment Sites and 45 cemeteries and churchyards.

These make up over 1,670 hectares of green space. There is significant variation in distribution, quality and accessibility of green spaces, which this Strategy begins to address. Improvements are required to provide residents across Northampton with good access to good quality parks and open spaces. There are limited finite resources to manage and maintain our open spaces to a high standard and the Strategy will provide a criteria based approach to investment and retention decisions.

### **Benefits of open space**

Open space contributes significantly towards the sustainable development of the Borough in the following ways:

- **Socially:** Provides improved quality of life, opportunities for social interaction, exercise, relaxation and community/cultural cohesion engendering a sense of community ownership and pride. They also offer a valuable educational role and can be used for lifelong learning about sustainable development and health awareness.
- **Environmentally:** They enhance sustainable transport, encourage biodiversity by providing wildlife migration corridors and ecosystems. This also provides pollution abatement and visual amenity.
- **Economically:** Quality Open space attracts investment if marketed appropriately, attracts development, attracts visitors and provides long-term local employment opportunities.

### **Why prepare a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy?**

A strategy forms the framework for service delivery and the development of a comprehensive Action plan.

The four main areas that the strategy covers are:

1. How NBC will work with partners including voluntary and community groups.

2. The development of a set of standards for the provision of accessible open space across the Borough responding to Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17).
3. A set of policies for service improvement and development and sustainability of open spaces.
4. Establishes the structure not only in the short term but also to take into account the medium and long-term management of parks and open space both physically and financially.

### Scope

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Northampton provides a framework that will help Northampton Borough Council and its partners protect, improve and sustain open space. It considers all land used formally or informally by the public.

The strategy does not consider open space that is not freely accessible to the public e.g. privately owned land and school grounds.

The Strategy builds upon the baseline data from the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment (2009),

which sets the standards and policies for our open space provision.

There is no set time frame for the Open Space Strategy but it will be reviewed on a five-year basis to keep it up to date and responsive to opportunities and circumstances.

The geographical scope conforms to the administrative boundaries of Northampton, i.e. the Strategy deals with the whole Borough.

With the agreement of partners in the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee and West Northamptonshire Development Corporation its quality and quantity standards will be applied to any new development including the proposed urban extensions around Northampton.

### Key aims of the Strategy:

1. Improve the quality, variety and accessibility of all types of open space.
2. Increase community use of all open spaces and improve community health.
3. Be aware of and take into account the effects of climate change and the effect green space can have on

climate change. Reduce the effects of climate change through biodiversity, conservation, education whilst protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the Borough

### Objectives of the Strategy

The **6** objectives of the Strategy are:

1. Justify and prioritise the improvement, management, maintenance and retention of open spaces.
2. Deliver diverse, multiple-use, high quality green spaces that reinforce the established Green Infrastructure network and contribute towards conserving and enhancing biodiversity.
3. Establish a framework for community, voluntary sector and other partner engagement in the future of our open spaces.
4. Provide the basis to secure appropriate and justified planning contributions in line with Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17); Northampton will embrace the growth agenda to enhance existing spaces and to create new and exciting areas for relaxation, recreation and play.

5. Enable the Council and partners to respond strategically and invest resources in parks and open spaces.
6. Set out how Northampton Borough Council will monitor performance in parks and open spaces so that continuous improvement can be measured and realised through an Action plan.

### **Our Approach to Sustainable Open Space**

When planning, developing and managing open space, the long-term social, environmental and economic benefits will be considered. Of these factors, one should not be improved at the expense of another. For example, social or environmental assets should not be lost in order to gain economic benefits.

In order to ensure the sustainability of open space in the Borough the following principles will be addressed in the long term:

- **Community ownership:** Achieve and maintain a sense of community 'ownership' and active involvement  
This could be through using the facility, contributing to fund raising

and helping to manage and maintain in open space sites.

- **Managing for sustainability:** Reflected in the core values of the Strategy in the day-to-day maintenance schedules and practices.
- **Sustainable finances:** Seek to ensure resources are available within limited council finances for the actions and ongoing future maintenance.

Further consideration to how Northampton Borough Council can improve the sustainability of our open spaces is given in Section C.

## Summary Review of the Legislative and policy context at a national, regional and local level

### National Context

A more detailed review of the Legislative and policy context at a national, regional and local level is included in Background Paper 1.

At a national level government has encouraged improvements to parks and green spaces with the appointment of CABE Space ([www.cabespace.org.uk](http://www.cabespace.org.uk)) who are an advisory body on green space. Four reports have specifically focused on the need for a strategic approach to be taken:

1. **Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM, 2004)**
2. **Green Spaces Taskforce ‘Green Spaces, Better Places’.** Department of Transport, Leisure and the Regions (DTLR, 2003).
3. **Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener, (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003).**
4. **Planning Policy Guidance 17 - Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, and its companion guide Assessing**

## Needs and Opportunities (Communities and Local Government, 2002).

### Other national initiatives that impact and influence the open space agenda are:

- Planning Act 2008
- Communities in control: real people, real power (Communities and Local Government, 2008)
- Healthy weight, healthy lives – a cross-government strategy for England (Department of Health, 2008)
- Fair Play – a consultation on the play strategy (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008).
- National Play Strategy (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008)
- Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and the Primary Capital Strategy (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008)
- Lifetime Homes – Lifetime Neighbourhoods (Communities and Local Government, 2008)
- Skills to Grow: Seven Priorities to improve green space skills (CABE, 2009)

## Regional Context

**The East Midlands Regional Plan (EMRP) (2009)** sets out the importance of high quality green spaces in:

**Policy 1 - Regional Core Objectives:** Outlines the role of Green infrastructure in sustainable development, the need to protect and enhance the environmental quality of urban and rural settlements. The need to achieve a step change increase in the level of the Region’s biodiversity, reduce the causes and impact of climate change and minimise adverse environmental impacts of new development and promote the provision of new optimum social and economic benefits through the promotion of sustainable design. Create infrastructure to enhance the attractiveness of the area and meet the needs of the population within the context of government requirements for Northampton to build 40,400 new homes by 2026.

**Policy 28 - Priorities for environmental and green infrastructure:** requires that those responsible for planning and delivery of growth and environmental management should work together.

**Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy (Government Offices for the South-East, East Midlands and East of England, 2005):**

MKSM states that the two key requirements of sustainable communities are safe, healthy local environment with well designed public and green space, and urban areas that relate to the surrounding landscape and contribute to maintaining and enhancing assets as a cultural and recreational resource, and as resources for biodiversity.

**Green Infrastructure – Making the Connection – Strategic Framework Study (RGRP, 2006)** Identifies green infrastructure corridors of regional and sub regional significance and considers the countrywide network of green spaces as a whole. It evaluates biodiversity and movement networks and produced maps of particular importance to decision making on future development these include.

- Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework (map 1 - appendix)
- Sustainable Movement Network (map 2 - appendix)

**Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study (Living Landscapes Consultancy, 2009)**

- Identifies areas that would be challenging for new development and identifies that development needs site-specific consideration, justification and potential mitigation.
- The majority of Northampton Borough is classified as high or high – medium sensitivity.
- It also identifies key landscape sites, which impact on overall level of sensitivity.
- Highlights the Biodiversity Network, focusing on identified areas of habitat reservoirs and the opportunities to connect these core areas, for example along river corridors for all species.
- Highlights the Sustainable Movement Network, including provision for sustainable patterns of walking cycling, and horse riding. Linking the environmental and wherever possible, cultural and leisure assets for people.

**The local planning context**

The West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit established between Northampton Borough Council,

Daventry District Council and South Northants, is preparing a Local Development Framework. This includes a Joint Core Strategy and other development plans. These will replace the current Local Plans for the three Local Authorities. The Joint Core Strategy is currently programmed to be complete by January 2011. It will set policy on all aspects of planning in Northampton.

**Emergent Joint Core Strategy (West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit, 2009)**

states that new development will be expected to contribute towards enhancing, restoring and creating new elements of the green network. The network will form part of the new growth areas, contributing to meeting West Northamptonshire's requirements for open space, sport and recreation, as well as biodiversity and accessibility. Development will not be permitted to compromise the integrity of the green infrastructure network.

**The Local Plan 1993-2006**, remains the main point of reference for policy in the transition period between the new and old planning systems.

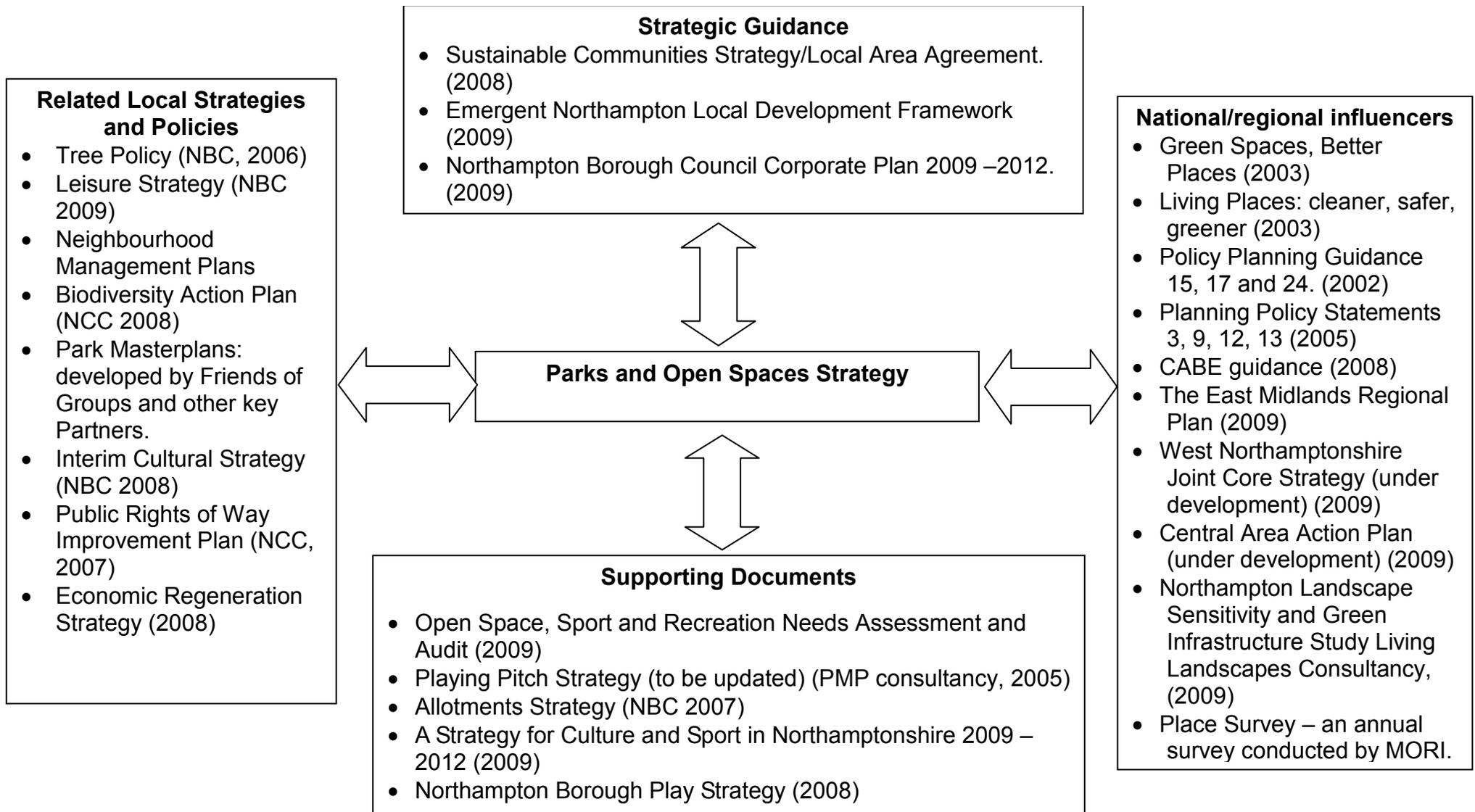
**Local Policy Context related to open space:**

- The Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment and Audit (PMP consultancy, 2009)

**Other Relevant Local Documents  
(See Diagram on page 10)**

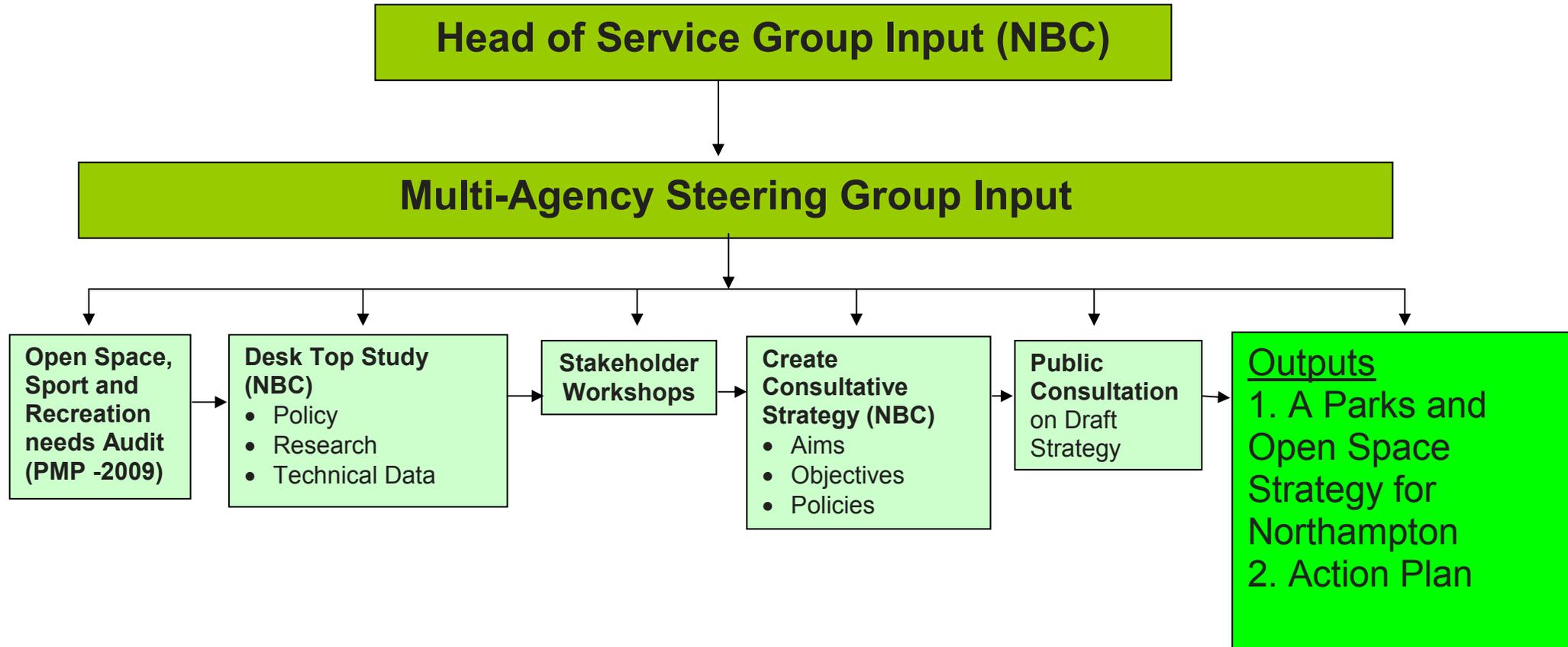
This summary review of strategic documents highlights the local importance of maintaining and improving open space sites within Northampton Borough for more detail see Background Paper 1. This strategy will contribute to achieving the wider aims of a number of local and national agencies.

**Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Northampton – Diagram Linking Strategies and Policies. (Fig.1)**



**How the strategy was developed (Fig. 2)**

*This diagram shows the process for developing the strategy:*

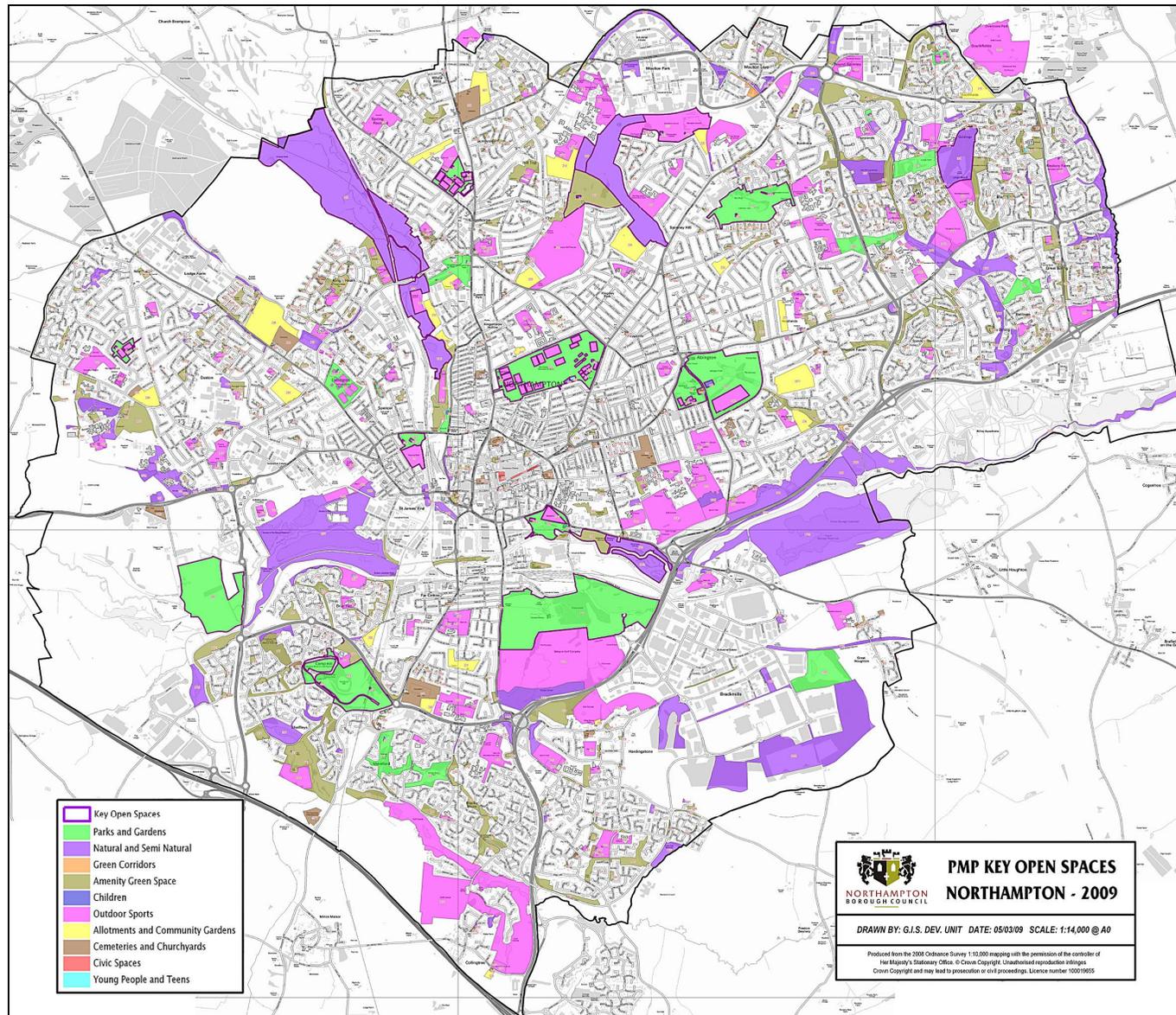


## Open Space Categories (Based on PPG17 guidance and local circumstances)

The strategy considers all open spaces for which there is legitimate public access and which provide recreational benefit. It considers 9 different types of space. The Borough owns almost all of these but there are areas where the land might be managed or owned by others. As well as setting out plans and policies for these types of space, the strategy proposes provision of standards.

Types of Space	Description
<b>Parks and Gardens</b>	Urban parks, country parks and formal gardens, open to the general public that provide opportunities for various informal recreation and community events. These have been put into four further sub groups as listed under “Categorisation of Parks and Open Space” on page 25.
<b>Natural and Semi-Natural Open Space</b>	Space includes woodlands, scrubland, orchards, grasslands (e.g. meadows and non-amenity grassland), wetlands and river corridors, nature reserves and brown field land with a primary purpose of wildlife conservation and biodiversity. These have been put into three further sub groups (Strategic, Premier and Neighbourhood) as outlined in Appendix B.
<b>Amenity Greenspace</b>	Commonly found in housing areas, they include informal recreation spaces and green spaces in and around housing, with a primary purpose of providing opportunities for informal activities close to home or work. These have been put into a further two sub groups (Premier and Neighbourhood) as outlined in Appendix B.
<b>Play Provision for Children and Young People</b>	Includes equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard areas and teenage shelters with the primary purpose of providing opportunities for play, physical activity and social interaction involving both children and young people.
<b>Outdoor Sports Facilities</b>	Is a wide ranging category of open space, which includes both natural and artificial surfaces for sport and recreation that are either publicly or privately owned, they include playing pitches, athletics tracks, bowling greens and golf courses with the primary purpose of participation in outdoor sports.
<b>Allotments and Community Gardens</b>	Includes all forms of allotments including urban farms and gardens that provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainable health and social inclusion.
<b>Cemeteries and Churchyards</b>	These include private burial grounds, local authority burial grounds and disused churchyards. The primary purpose of this type of open space is for burial and quiet contemplation but allows for the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.
<b>Green Infrastructure (GI)</b>	This includes towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines with the primary purpose to provide opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel and opportunities for wildlife migration
<b>Civic Space</b>	Includes civic and market squares and other hard surfaced community areas designed for pedestrians with the primary purpose of providing a setting for civic buildings, public gatherings and community events.

Fig 3: All Open Space Types in Northampton



### **Countrywide issues facing Parks & Open Spaces**

Many issues Northampton faces, in relation to Parks and Open Spaces, are not unusual. There are nationwide problems associated with parks and open space, including the decline in the quality of green spaces. Key issues include:

#### **Quality deficiencies in green space**

Lack of investment, site management and maintenance are significant issues for Local Authorities.

#### **Problematic site distribution**

Levels of provision differ across urban areas. As provision is often historically based, it may be poorly located and not serve the present day concentrations of population.

#### **Active community involvement**

This is essential to ensure provision reflects community need, and historically this has not been managed well.

#### **Consistency in strategic approach**

There is often a history of *ad hoc* interventions and improvements in relation to parks and open spaces. Some of these were not sufficiently planned or resourced and so were often unsustainable.

These above issues are clearly linked, demonstrating the need for a coordinated and holistic strategic response. The Parks and Open Space Strategy is designed to meet the challenge and address these issues.

#### **Heritage Conservation Areas influence parks and open spaces**

There are currently 19 Heritage Conservation Areas in the Borough of Northampton, three of which cover Northampton's main parks, namely Abington, Delapre and The Racecourse. Each has been designated, following consultation with local residents and property owners, because of the distinctive conservation value, character and appearance of the areas

The designation of conservation areas aims to preserve or enhance the quality of the area. However, conservation areas are not open-air museums but living communities, which must allow some change appropriately over time in order to reflect their historic significance to communities. Consequently the emphasis is to guide development in the historic landscape setting.

#### **Nature conservation areas**

Poor management of biodiversity in public open spaces has led to isolation of sites

across the country contributing to breaking up the wildlife movement corridors which has undoubtedly led to higher local extinction rates.

Figure 6 shows the strategic and local green space. The Northampton Landscape and Green Infrastructure Study identified: 1 proposed Special Protection Areas (pSPA) 2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); 6 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs); approx. 50 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and approx. 100 Potential Wildlife Sites (PWS).

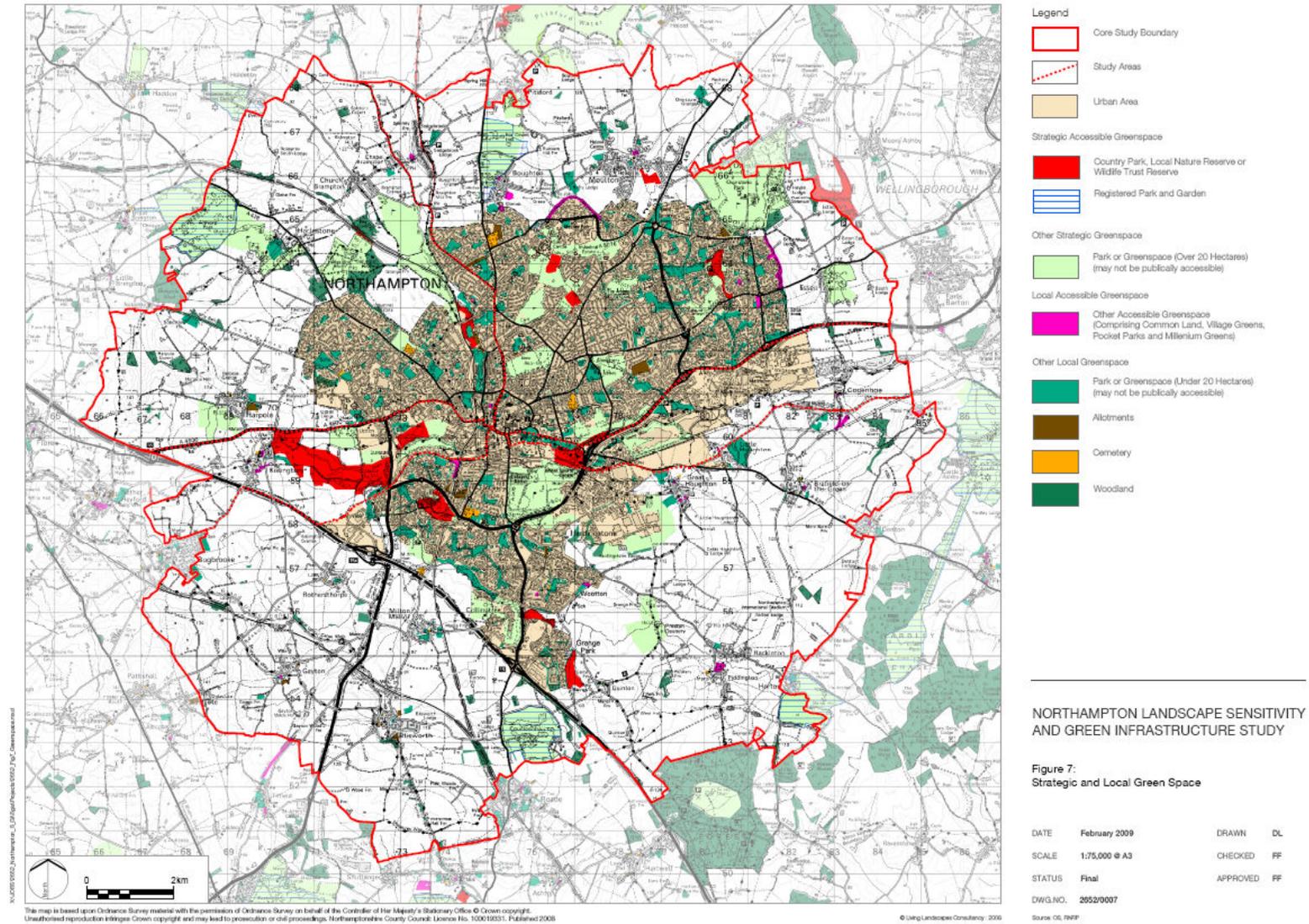
pSPA's and SSSIs are protected by European legislation, which places a duty on all public bodies to take reasonable steps, to conserve.

LNRs are nationally designated sites within the Borough chosen for special protection, from development or inappropriate change.

LWS's have no statutory protection but have been identified as being of locally significant nature conservation value.

PWS are sites that could be locally significant for nature conservation but this hasn't been confirmed yet by detailed site surveys.

FIG: 4 - Strategic and Local Green Space



(Map produced by Fiona Fyfe, Living Landscapes Consultancy Ltd, 2009)  
[http://www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/Portals/0/maps/2652\\_Fig7\\_Greenspace.pdf](http://www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/Portals/0/maps/2652_Fig7_Greenspace.pdf)

## **Summary**

- Green spaces are a key feature of Northampton with over 1,670 hectares of green space. There is significant variation in distribution, quality and accessibility of green spaces.
- Housing development driven by national planning policies and employment land allocations will have a direct impact on open space, sport and recreation provision. The expected population will place increasing demands on existing open spaces as well as generating higher needs for recreational open space provision.
- Northampton has a significant number of sites of geological or wildlife interest including two sites of special scientific interest.
- Northampton Borough Council recognises that open spaces are a distinctive resource and has ambition to improve the management of its parks and open spaces.
- Northampton Borough Council is not exceptional in having limited financial resources that have led to problems associated with park and open space management.

## **PART B – SETTING THE STANDARDS**

### **What are the Northampton Standards for?**

The standards are designed to ensure that everyone in Northampton has access to a range of good quality spaces and associated facilities. The standards will be used for planning new developments and prioritising future work for the council and partners in meeting this aim. It is intended that the key standards will be incorporated into the Local Development Framework and provide developers and the council with clarity over the future provision of green space in planning decisions.

The standards supplement planning policy protection for open spaces by ensuring that there will be adequate quantity, close enough to where people live.

### **How we set the Standards**

A number of factors have been taken into account:

- The views of the community –through consultation
- An Audit of the Open Spaces and testing of potential standards
- Existing National Policy
- Benchmarking

### **Our Research**

Local authorities are required to set standards for parks and open spaces that recognise both the present level of provision and local people's views and aspirations regarding the present and future provision.

### **Open Space, Sport and Recreation, needs assessment and audit – (PMP consultancy 2006 and 2009), (OSSR)**

The Open Space, Sport and Recreation needs assessment and audit was carried out in 2006 and updated in 2009. The OSSR identifies local needs through a series of consultations.

The OSSR reviews national, local and regional policy and recommends standards in accordance with PPG17. It provides a comprehensive audit of existing provision of all types of open space, sporting and recreational facilities and examines current provision by:

**Quality** – a level of quality, which all spaces should attain

**Accessibility** – how far should people travel to reach a particular type of space and are there communities that are not well served by existing space?

**Quantity** – how much green space of different types there should be?

### **Consultation**

Developing the audit in 2005 included an extensive consultation exercise where over 2,000 people from Northampton contributed their ideas. The outcome is a robust local assessment of provision at both a borough wide and local level. This is set out in the Open Space, Sport and Recreation needs assessment audit updated (2009).

**Your** ideas from the consultation have helped us understand:

- The needs and requirements of (local residents) the community.
- Good and bad points about existing provision
- The attitudes and expectations for open space
- How far people are willing to travel to different types of space.
- Existing open space, sport and recreation provision at a strategic level
- The key issues/problems facing different Council departments and agencies in regard to parks and open space.

**What you have told us**

**Top line results**

- The main barriers to use of parks and green spaces are issues associated with poor maintenance, fears for personal safety and anti-social behaviour, litter and dog mess.
- Quality is the overriding factor affecting satisfaction.
- Many people want a traditional multifunctional park.

**The Standards (S)**

When applying the standards they need to be considered together. However, it is clear from the consultation that **quality** is the overriding factor that affects people’s satisfaction with a place. Therefore priority will be given to meeting the quality standards. Accessibility and Quantity are of next significance so these should also be taken into account in decision-making.

**Quality**

People use parks and green spaces in different ways, seek different experiences from them and look for different facilities and features. All of these factors affect whether an individual feels that he/she is visiting a good quality green space. As a result, defining and creating good quality open space, is challenging.

Public consultation indicates that a quality experience is broadly dependent on a number of factors such as maintenance, management, feeling of safety and cleanliness.

Quality is assessed with the aim of identifying areas of high quality for benchmarking and low quality so resources can be targeted towards improvement.

The OSSR sets out local quality visions for each type of open space typology. For example the Natural and Semi Natural standard is:

*“A spacious, clean and litter free site with clear pathways and natural features including vegetation, ponds and flowers that encourage wildlife conservation, biodiversity, environmental education and awareness and act as opportunities for increased exercise and the improved mental health of residents.”*

Quality Standards for Northampton have been devised which take into account safety and security, vegetation maintenance and facilities. For more detail on quality standards please refer to Appendix A.

Quality is on a percentage scale

- Poor, below 50%,
- Average, 50-69%,
- Good to excellent, 70% - 100%

The Quality vision sets a standard for each open space typology to meet as a minimum.

Open space type	Quality Vision Percentage	Current Average
Parks and Gardens	80%	74%
Natural and semi-natural green space	75%	68%
Amenity Green space	66%	61%
Provision for Children	80%	66%
Provision for young people	74%	59%
Outdoor Sports Facilities	80%	73%
Allotments	76%	76%
Cemeteries and Churchyards	70%	70%
Civic Space	70%	70%

Figure 7 – The highest quality and lowest quality Parks in Northampton

<b>V good</b>	<b>90%and above</b>	↑	
<b>Good</b>	<b>70% to 89%</b>		Victoria Park – 86%, Upton Country Park - 86%, Abington Park – 80%, Bradlaugh Fields – 80%, Errington Park – 80%, Kingsthorpe Park (Thornton Park) – 80%, Hunsbury Hill Country Park -80%, Millers Meadow – 80%, Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground – 75%, Lodge Farm Park - 76%, Becketts Park - 75%, Dallington Park - 75%, Brackmills Country Park – 75%, Delapre Park – 71%, Grangewood Park – 71%, Eastfield Park 71%, Great Billing Park – 71% and Southfields Park - 71%.
<b>Average</b>	<b>50% to 69%</b>		The Racecourse – 66%, Penn Valley Park – 66% and Thorplands Park – 60%.
<b>Poor</b>	<b>30% to 49%</b>		
<b>Very poor</b>	<b>29% or below</b>		

**Value**

Planning Policy Guidance (PPG 17) recommends that ‘value’ is taken into account in planning and land management. The open space value of a site is a measure of its potential to best fulfil an open space function.

This is not related to its value in economic terms and is also an entirely different and separate concept from quality. For example, a high quality site is of little value if it is unused due to being in a poor location. The value of an open space site can be assessed using the following criteria:

- Context. Such as nearby population concentrations and nearby similar provision.
- Level of use. Valuable sites are highly used.
- Wider benefits. Such as biodiversity and historical value.

Value will be assessed and given full weight in prioritising management, development and planning decisions involving change of use of individual sites.

NBC will use a ‘value assessment’ of each site to establish priorities for investment as shown in the table below.

The following factors will be included in the assessment:

Community Values	Strategic Values
Level of Use	Deficits in the areas
Levels of Anti-social behaviour	Contribution towards the local economy
Community views of the space	Importance to the Green Infrastructure
Heritage values	Quality standard
Overarching Levels of deprivation	Legal Status
Level of community involvement	Sustainability significance

**Quality and value assessments will be used to:**

- Identify high value sites as a priority for quality improvements. Drawing up a short-list of important open space sites that are of low quality as a priority for improvement.
- Produce detailed management plans for appropriate sites that outline improvement targets, against the agreed criteria.
- NBC will pursue accreditation for open space quality for a selection of parks and open space sites.

**Accessibility**

Public consultation revealed how far people travelled to different types of open space and by what means. This information has been used to derive catchment distances for the categories of open space. The catchment distance is how far residents can reasonably be expected to travel to each type of open space by foot.

**Accessibility Standards for Northampton are shown in the table below:**

Open space type	Distance (metres)	Estimated Time (mins)
Parks and Gardens	480	10 mins walking
Natural and Semi-natural open space	720	15 mins walking
Amenity green space	240	5 mins walking
Play provision young children	240	5 mins walking
Play provision young people	480	10 mins walking
Outdoor Sports Facilities	720	15 mins walking
Allotments and Community Gardens	720	15 mins walking
Cemeteries and Churchyards	Not set	Not set

**Quantity**

The amount of open space varies hugely between towns and cities. Historically Northampton has significantly more open space than other towns, with some very large open spaces, which include parks such as Delapre Park and large amounts of floodplain land along the River Nene and its tributaries. Currently the Borough has 8.19 hectares of open space per 1000 population, although the amount of open space per resident varies hugely across different areas. Central areas have proportionally less whereas areas on the west have significantly more.

**Quantity standards**

These guarantee adequate provision for use and are not a method for protecting open space. The planning system incorporates a range of policies – such as Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) and those for archaeology and flood plains to ensure protection. The quantity standards supplement these, but do not replace them.

Calculations of the Quantity Standards for Northampton take into consideration the current amounts of green space as well as residents satisfaction with the quantity and

quality of current provision. In order to calculate Quantity Standards in Northampton some of the larger open space areas have been excluded due to their tendency to skew figures. This ensures that Northampton is able to achieve realistic and achievable quantity levels. Sites excluded from the calculations include:

- Brackmills Natural Semi Natural open space (NSN)
- Delapre Park
- Duston Mill reservoir
- Flood Plain NSN
- Kingsthorpe NSN
- Upton Country Park

Although these sites are excluded from the development of the quantity standards, they remain important parks and open spaces for the town.

**Minimum Quantity Standards**

Open space Type	Hectares per 1,000 population	Current Provision 2009
<b>Parks and Gardens</b>	1.05	1.63
<b>Natural and Semi-natural open space</b>	1.57	3.25

<b>Amenity green space</b>	1.37	1.37
<b>Play provision young children</b>	0.04	0.016
<b>Play provision young people</b>	0.03	0.009
<b>Outdoor Sports Facilities</b>	1.62	1.51
<b>Allotments and Community Gardens</b>	0.42	0.42
<b>Churchyards and cemeteries</b>	0.013	N/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.133</b>	<b>8.205</b>

**New Development**

If new provision is not possible on site or within close proximity, financial contributions would be expected towards investment in other open space in the local vicinity within Northampton Borough.

More detailed information on distribution of open space can be found in the updated OSSR audit (2009). This will be used to inform where there are deficits or surpluses in provision and to inform decisions on disposal, especially when new development applications are being considered.

Any proposed development of open space will be in line with PPG17 guidance which

states that, 'development may provide the opportunity to exchange the use of one site for another to substitute for any loss of open space, or sports or recreational facility. The new land and facility should be at least as accessible to current and potential new users, and at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness and quality. Wherever possible, the aim should be to achieve qualitative improvements to open spaces, sports and recreational facilities. Local authorities should use planning obligations or conditions to secure the exchange land, ensure any necessary works are undertaken and that the new facilities are capable of being maintained adequately through management and maintenance agreements'.

### **Improvement Policies**

S1 – The standards will guide

Development Control decision-making with regard to planning applications for open space sites including the securing of S106 contributions for future management and maintenance.

S2 - The standards will guide

Development Control decision-making following a local area open space assessment and will determine

- i) How much open space provision should be made as part of new development.
- ii) Access links by foot, cycle and public transport needed (In association with Improvement Policy GI1)
- iii) Any contributions that should be made towards offsite open space
- iv) What typology of open space the planning contributions will be used for.
- v) Whether after a period of consultation open space or any assets within open space can be disposed or lost to development or whether they should be retained.

S3 - The standards will be applied as part of a holistic analysis of local resource in which quality, quantity and distance are considered together (as well as other relevant considerations such as other planning policy and particularly socially based values of the land).

## **Categorisation of Parks and Open Space**

Many of our open spaces serve a variety of functions and it is useful to consider the sites by function in order to understand their differing roles. This will assist management and help understand how far residents are prepared to walk to the Borough's parks and other open spaces.

Northampton has categorised our Parks and Open Spaces into the following types:

**1. Strategic Open Space(s)** – These attract, or have the potential to attract, significant numbers of people from Northampton and its surrounding area. They are key to the Green Infrastructure (see fig. 1) and form important green linkages both for the Region and Northampton. They are an important part of the town and have significant potential for economic and developmental impact on Northampton. They offer features such as play, recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural benefits for local people and residents from across Northampton.

**2. Premier Spaces** – These are of a significant scale usually 15ha or more. A Premier space provides a broad range of

opportunities that include play, recreation, ecological, landscape, cultural and attract people from across Northampton. They have an importance on Northampton's green infrastructure network. They are easily accessible by public and private transport.

### **3. Neighbourhood Open Spaces -**

These are areas of open space that can be variable in scale. They generally do not attract large numbers of people from across the town, but are significant in ensuring open space is accessible to Northampton's communities.

Neighbourhood open spaces will generally include features offering play, recreational, ecological, landscape, and cultural benefits to local people.

**4. Town / Country Parks -** A town and country open space (or park) typically over 15ha is an area serving a significant part of the borough. They are places that have a natural, rural atmosphere where visitors can enjoy a public open space with parking and other facilities in an informal atmosphere.

### **Categorisation and Accessibility**

A significant number of residents live further than the recommended walk times

to open space. However consultation indicates that residents are willing to walk up to 30 minutes to strategic and 20 minutes to premier open space as they have more facilities to offer than a neighbourhood open space.

**Quality Standards against each categorisation of Parks and open space**

<b>Typology</b>	<b>Functional Space Type</b>	<b>Quality Percentage Expectation</b>	<b>Current Average</b>
<b>Parks and Gardens</b>		<b>80%</b>	<b>74%</b>
	Strategic	85%	71%
	Premier	80%	73%
	Neighbourhood	71%	75%
	Town / Country	75%	77%
<b>Natural and semi-natural green space</b>		<b>75%</b>	<b>68%</b>
	Premier	75%	77%
	Neighbourhood	60%	67%
<b>Amenity Green space</b>		<b>66%</b>	<b>61%</b>
	Premier	66%	69%
	Neighbourhood	60%	62%
<b>Provision for Children</b>	N/A	<b>80%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>Provision for young people</b>	N/A	<b>74%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Outdoor Sports Facilities</b>	N/A	<b>80%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Allotments</b>	N/A	<b>76%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Cemeteries and Churchyards</b>	N/A	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>Civic Space</b>	N/A	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>

**Accessibility Standards against each categorisation of Park**

<b>Open space Category</b>	<b>Functional Space Type</b>	<b>Distance (metres)</b>	<b>Estimated Time (mins)</b>
<b>Parks and Gardens</b>		480	10 mins walking
	Strategic	1440	30 mins walking
	Premier	960	20 mins walking
	Neighbourhood	480	10 mins walking
	Town / Country	960	20 mins walking

**Categorisation (of Parks)**

Northampton Typology	Park Categories	Function of Space	Parks
<b>Parks and Gardens</b>	Strategic Park	<p><b>Parks that:</b>                      Have a strategic role in town centre development                      Have a historical and or heritage value                      Are used as a venues for events that attract people from across Northampton and the wider region                      Have a strategic importance on the green infrastructure and movement network                      Fit with the emerging Central Area Action Plan and West Northamptonshire’s Emergent Joint Core Strategy                      Link with the Regional Strategy for East Midlands (RSS 8)                      Have a strong importance for other public bodies                      Offer a range of leisure, recreational and play opportunities                      Contribute to the Local Economy                      Have a high potential for increased numbers using space</p>	Beckets Park and Delapre Park.
	Premier Park	<p><b>Parks that:</b>                      Have a strategic role in town centre development                      Have a historical and or heritage value                      Are used as a venue for events that attract people from across Northampton                      Act as Key Strategic green infrastructure.                      Fit with the West Northamptonshire’s Emergent Joint Core Strategy and the Regional Strategy for East Midlands (RSS 8)                      Offer a range of leisure, recreational and play opportunities                      Contribute to the Local Economy                      Have a high potential for increased numbers using space</p>	Abington Park and the Racecourse.

	Neighbourhood Parks and Gardens	<p><b>Parks that:</b>                  Vary in Size                  Generally do not attract large numbers of people from across the town, but are Significant in ensuring parks are accessible to Northampton’s communities.                  Generally include features offering play, recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural or green infrastructure benefits to local people.                  Are well placed to serve smaller local communities around the town.                  Can have the potential to become Premier Parks.</p>	Dallington Park, Eastfield Park, Errington Park, Grangewood Park, Great Billing Park, Kingsthorpe Park (Thornton Park), Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground, Lodge Farm Park, Lumbertubs Park, Millers Meadow, Southfields Park and Victoria Park.
	Town / Country Parks	<p><b>Parks that:</b>                  Serve a significant part of the borough and are typically over 15ha.                  Are places that have a natural, rural atmosphere for visitors who do not necessarily want to or cannot go out into the wider countryside.                  Are public open spaces with parking and other facilities set in an informal parkland atmosphere.</p>	Upton Country Park, Brackmills Country Park, Bradlaugh Fields, Hunsbury Hill Country Park and Penn Valley Country Park.

**Note: This table currently categorises Parks only and is therefore not inclusive of all open space in the Borough. Appendix B details the categorisation of all Parks and Open Spaces**

## **PART C – Open space improvement and Policies**

This section outlines key policies for delivering improved open space for the following categories:

Parks and Gardens - **P&G**

Natural and Semi-Natural open space - **NSN**

Amenity green space - **AGS**

Play provision for Children and young people - **CYP**

Outdoor Sports Facilities - **OSF**

Allotments and community gardens - **ALL**

Cemeteries and Churchyards - **CC**

Green Corridors/Green Infrastructure - **GI**

Civic Spaces - **CS**

*Open Spaces defined on page 13*

### **Parks and Gardens - P&G**

Northampton has some outstanding Parks and public gardens. Parks and Gardens were seen as the key priority from consultation.

There are 319 hectares of parks and gardens in Northampton spread across

21 parks. The size of sites ranges from 0.56 hectares to 77.26 hectares. A high level of satisfaction with the quantity of parks and gardens is evident from responses to consultation, indicating sufficient quantity of provision.

The average quality score of a park or garden in Northampton is 74%.

Respondents also perceive them as being of good quality. Scores vary from 60% to 86%. 7 of the 21 parks meet the 80% local quality standard:

- Abington Park
- Bradlaugh Fields
- Errington Park
- Hunsbury Hill Country Park
- Kingsthorpe Park
- Upton Country Park
- Victoria Park.

Vandalism and graffiti have been identified as the main problems affecting quality of parks. The highest rated aspirations for parks and gardens are to be clean and litter free, well kept grass, flowers and trees.

The population of Northampton is expected to grow. In order to ensure that parks are provided to meet the

demands for the future, it is important that provision and access to parks and open space is considered as part of any development.

### **Improvement Policies**

**P&G1** - Ensure that there is a good quality park with a range of facilities within reach of homes according to the set standards.

**P&G2** - Restore, enhance and protect the historic and environmental context of Northampton's Parks and Gardens.

**P&G3** – Where appropriate development should improve access links by foot, cycle and public transport and enhance entry points into our Parks and Gardens.

**P&G4** - Maintain and manage a number of our Parks and Gardens to Green Flag standard.

**P&G5** - Park area can only be lost to development where it is inappropriately sited and poor quality.

### **Natural and Semi-Natural open space - NSN**

Natural and semi natural open spaces are one of the most frequently used

open space types in the Borough. There is a total of 660 hectares of NSN across the Borough. The sizes of sites vary from 0.06 hectares to 116 hectares.

NSN includes woodlands, scrub, grasslands, wetland, open and running water, pocket parks, orchards, wastelands and derelict land.

Natural and semi-natural open spaces generally provide the main linkages between green spaces. They are the key component in providing access to green corridors and therefore will create better access to countryside for residents and improved wildlife corridors improving biodiversity.

Northampton Borough contains many sites with particular designations in recognition of the wildlife present including 50 Local Wildlife Sites, a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 6 Local Nature Reserves (LNR).

The importance and significance of natural, semi-natural is shown within the Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study (2009). The Study recommends

key actions for all habitats found in Northampton.

Responses from residents emphasised the need to protect this type of open space.

There are a number of strategically important sites that are highly valued and well used, examples include:

Bradlaugh Fields, Lings Wood and Kingsthorpe Local Nature Reserve.

There is a larger quantity of natural and semi natural space across Northampton than any other typology, suggesting that there is more than adequate provision.

Nearly all residents are within the recommended 15 minute walking distance of natural / semi natural open space.

However the main concern for Natural / Semi Natural open space is that the quality is very varied.

#### **Improvement Policies**

**NSN1** - Protect and enhance the natural and semi-natural urban green spaces through the Planning

system and by making appropriate designations of sites to protect them.

**NSN2** - Where appropriate development should improve access links by foot, cycle and public transport between natural and semi-natural urban green spaces to enable all sections of the community to use and enjoy these areas.

**NSN3** - Work with partners and local communities to manage these sites and raise awareness about them.

**NSN4** – Manage all public spaces in our ownership, to protect and enhance their value for wildlife and habitats.

#### **Amenity Green space - AGS**

Northampton has a large amount of amenity green space with 495 designated sites. These range from the smaller amenity green spaces within housing estates, which are often less than a hectare in size, to large sites such as Ladybridge playing fields which is over 20 hectares. Amenity greenspace is generally informal with few or no facilities, but provides flexible space for recreation, play and events close to home.

Northampton has a significant amount of poor quality amenity green space perceived as unsafe and inaccessible. Consequently these have low levels of use, and detract from the local area. Spaces of this type can attract anti-social behaviour, particularly fly tipping and motorbikes. Some of the poor quality smaller spaces appear to have been left over from developments with little thought to how they fit within their neighbourhoods.

Tackling anti-social behaviour in some of these sites will be a priority in order to upgrade them to a good standard. In some cases such spaces, which offer low value, may be justified for disposal to invest in other local open space, or changed to other types of land use. When considering alternative uses, regard will be paid to standards of provision set out within this document.

The level of the existing grounds maintenance, limits the quality of Northampton's amenity open space. Focussing on improvements to basic grounds maintenance will make significant improvements. However, there are many cases where more

fundamental changes are needed to make informal spaces work to their potential.

The average quality score of amenity green space in Northampton is 61%; the quality vision standard is 66%. Of the 495 sites identified, 189 are at or above the local quality standard. The two highest rated requirements were clean, litter free and well-kept grass, reinforcing that for the space to be of value to the local community, it must be aesthetically pleasing. Considering the evidence base for amenity green space the priority focus should be improvement to the quality of existing sites.

Quantity levels of amenity green space are high throughout the Borough with only a few areas with deficiencies.

The majority of residents have access to amenity green space within the recommended 5 minute walk time.

### **Improvement Policies**

**AGS1** – Prioritise investment and agree a rolling programme to improve grounds maintenance including the basics of grass cutting, litter and dog fouling.

**AGS2** - Where there is excess amenity green space, which is inappropriately sited, consider using it for alternative purposes, such as changing its use to another type of open space or for development.

**AGS3** - Generate a more appealing and useful urban environment through better design of amenity green space.

### **Play Provision for children and young people - CYP**

This typology encompasses a vast range of provision, from small areas of green space with a single piece of equipment, to large multi purpose play areas.

Creating diversity and stimulating imaginative play are essential for children to grow and learn. Northampton has a number of exciting and challenging play spaces such as Victoria Park, Becketts Park and Abington Park. However, Northampton also suffers from small, poor quality, poorly located and poorly equipped playgrounds, often developed through localised funding or as a requirement of housing development.

Children's play has traditionally been based on the provision of equipment in designated play space. However, national play policy for children has altered substantially since PPG17 was issued and is now defined by the Government Department for Children, Schools and Families, 'as requiring more focus on delivering innovative and stimulating equipment and landscaping, providing areas for natural play or free play in the landscape not just play equipped areas'. Well-designed spaces using natural materials or a mix of natural and traditional equipment will transform children's play opportunities. Development Control Officers need to have an awareness of this new approach so they can encourage better design of play spaces on new housing developments.

If NBC were to use the PPG17 criteria - designated sites using the boundaries of solely equipped areas it would show a deficit of accessible play space in Northampton. However if informal types of play space are included in calculations, as suggested in the Northampton Borough Play Strategy, children clearly have many

more opportunities for play in Northampton. These include children playing in Lings Wood, rolling down the sides of the valley area at the Racecourse, playing in the stream that runs through Victoria Park and similar activities.

The Council will introduce more natural play opportunities within a safe environment, instead of an over-reliance on equipment. Parks also need to be able to provide good facilities for young people. Northampton has a good network of Multi-use Games Areas (MUGA) spread throughout the town and gym exercise machines in Victoria Park and Abington Park, which all contribute towards creating challenging equipment for older children and young people. Research with young people shows that somewhere which is 'their' space to meet, such as swings designed for them rather than younger children, is sometimes all that is needed.

The average quality score of children's play provision is 59% and 66% for young people's play with the quality vision percentage at 80% for children and 74% for young people.

7 of the 88 children's play area sites meet the quality benchmark vision. In addition seven of the 35 facilities for young people/teenagers meet the quality vision.

Residents have indicated that the quantity of children's and young peoples play areas is insufficient. It is also recognised from the baseline audit that there is a shortfall of play areas particularly when accessibilities standards (5 minutes for Children and 10 minutes for young people) are applied. The highest shortfalls are in Abington, Billing, East Hunsbury, Headlands and Nene Valley wards.

### **Improvement Policies**

- CYP1** - Provide a diverse range of children's play spaces from fixed equipment to natural play spaces, which are designed to be, exciting, with elements of risk and challenging using both the natural landscape and the introduction of natural play materials into the wider open space environment.
- CYP2** - Increase the area of play space, providing larger, better quality play opportunities, well distributed across the town.

**CYP3** - Ensure that the equipment in play spaces and facilities is inclusive, appropriate and stimulating for a range of age groups and abilities and wherever reasonable accessible to all.

**CYP4** - Ensure that children and young people have a continuous involvement in the design and management of play spaces and young people's facilities.

### Outdoor Sports Facilities - OSF

The Council adopted a Playing Pitch Strategy (PMP consultancy, 2005), which provides the key proposals for formally organised sport across the town. The Strategy shows that the Borough has several key sites for formal organised outdoor recreation. There are 178 outdoor sports facilities of various types including football, rugby, cricket, tennis, bowls and golf. The total provision equates to 509 hectares, of which 203 hectares is taken up by golf courses.

There are 83 senior and junior grass football pitches available for community use, with an additional 5 mini pitches, there are several Multi-Use Games Areas around the Borough

that have organised use. Voluntary and private sports clubs provide tennis, rugby, football and bowls facilities. These are supplemented by more local provision, recreation grounds, education and voluntary sector provision. These are provided within some key public sites such as:

- Parklands Park,
- The Racecourse
- Lings Park
- Abington Park
- Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground

The Playing Pitch Strategy is used as a tool for determining requirement of sports pitches. This includes standards of quantity and accessibility.

The Playing Pitch Strategy found that a substantial number of sports pitches were inadequate for the amount and type of use made of them and that there is considerable unmet demand.

Open spaces have an important role in providing opportunities for informal sports such as jogging, softball and kick about and less formally organized games of cricket and football. NBC aims to improve parks to provide simple ways to aid sports activities such as fitness trails and goal posts as

well as sport and exercise related activities.

### Improvement Policies

**OSF1** - Enhance parks and open spaces to increase informal sport opportunities.

**OSF2** - To regularly review the Playing Pitch Strategy and comply with its Policies to ensure that there is adequate provision for Outdoor Sports in Northampton.

### Allotments and Gardens - ALL

Allotments provide for leisure, recreation, relaxation, healthy exercise and social contact. Like other open spaces they can be havens for wildlife and provide a visual amenity that changes with the seasons. A revival of interest in food growing has resulted in increased demand for allotment plots, particularly in densely developed areas where gardens are small or non-existent. There are over 1,700 plots on 17 sites (owned by NBC) across Northampton.

The sites are, on the whole well used and in demand but some are tired and in need of investment to ensure that they meet the expectations of the 21st

century allotment holder. Consultation has suggested that best practice allotments would be plots accessible to disabled users with facilities such as toilets, water supplies, fencing and security.

Allotments where community groups are integral to the management of the site have been particularly successful and NBC encourages self-management of sites.

Site assessments indicate that the quality of allotments is good, with the average quality score being 76%. Allotments have a vision quality standard set at 76%; of the 23 sites identified 18 are at or above the local quality standard expectation.

Allotments are unevenly distributed across the Borough with the majority of sites being located in North and the West of Northampton.

It has been identified in the OSSR (PMP consultancy, 2009) that NBC have a surplus of allotments in Northampton as a whole. This is based on actual area of allotments rather than actual areas that are usable as allotments.

Some allotment sites have large areas that are currently unusable for cultivation and either need investment to be brought back into use, or if they are surplus to requirements of the local community, used for other purposes. From an area-to-area perspective there are some areas that have deficits in provision and new allotment sites are required.

#### **Improvement Policies**

**ALL1** - Work in partnership with local organisations to regularly review the distribution, protection and potential disposal issues.

**ALL2** – Implement a prioritised programme of works to, improve security and the range and standard of facilities available on NBC owned allotment sites.

#### **Cemeteries and Churchyards - CC**

There are 45 cemetery and churchyard sites in the Borough. The size of these varies enormously from a churchyard, to a cemetery. Kingsthorpe Cemetery is the largest site covering an area of 7.7 hectares. Cemeteries and

churchyards are an important asset they offer a range of benefits, for example they provide sanctuary for wildlife and places for people to reflect undisturbed. They are cherished for the historic value they provide and often respected for their part in creating a historic landscape.

Such values were recognised within local consultations and a number of sites were highlighted as examples of good practice including Billing Road Cemetery and Holy Sepulchre.

The cleanliness and feeling of safety in local cemeteries and churchyards emerged from consultation as being particularly important. There were worries about the standard of care and feelings of being insecure in cemeteries.

Site assessments indicate that the quality of cemeteries and churchyards is good, with the average quality score being 70%. Cemeteries and Churchyards have a vision quality standard of 76%. Of the 45 sites identified 17 are at or above the standard.

It has also been highlighted that there is a shortage of burial grounds within the Borough.

### Improvement Policies

**CC1** - The Council will produce a Cemeteries and Churchyards Strategy. The strategy will include an action plan providing an approach to meeting future needs.

**CC2** - Protect the Borough's cemeteries from inappropriate development, safeguard the nature conservation value of cemeteries and churchyards and begin to develop more awareness of ecological management of cemeteries and churchyards.

**CC3** - Work with partners and local communities to manage these areas, to maintain and enhance their value and ensure they are secure.

### Green Infrastructure - GI

Green infrastructure' (GI) is a network of multi-functional green space, provided across the sub-region. It is set within, and contributes to, a high quality natural and built environment.

GI consists of public and private assets, with and without public access and can be situated in urban and rural locations. With the exception of some outdoor sports facilities, all the PPG17 typologies, including green corridors, are considered to be GI 'assets'.

High quality and easily accessible green corridors provide free passage from one place to another for people and wildlife. Northampton has a number of strategically important green links, providing important traffic free cycling and walking routes, as well as acting as significant wildlife corridors.

The Sustrans regional Cycle Route passes north-south through Northampton, via the Brampton Valley Way, through the town centre alongside the River Nene, then south along country lanes through Great Houghton. In addition, there are proposed Sustrans Connect 2 routes and links between the Grand Union Canal and the centre of Northampton. The importance of the corridors have been highlighted in the Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework and figure 1 shows the key biodiversity, Public

Rights Of Way network and cycle routes combined.

There are 3 long distance routes / Country Walks within Northampton, including the Nene Valley Way, the Grand Union Canal Walk and the Brampton Valley Way. These offer long walks within Northampton and into neighbouring authorities. Other smaller routes can be found across the town. Northampton Borough Council will continue to support joint projects with neighbouring authorities to enhance these routes, and ensure their quality is improved and maintained to encourage an increase in cycling and walking within and through the town.

This Strategy will support Northamptonshire County Council and the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan to maintain and improve routes. There is a need to balance the importance of green infrastructure and utilise potential development of sites such as country nature trails that already exist. Development will consider both the needs of wildlife and humans.

Appropriate green infrastructure networks are set out in the Making the Connection - A Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework (2006) as well as the Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure study (2009) as shown in Figure 5.

### Improvement Policies

**G11** – New development will be required to improve linkages, open space corridors, riverside routes and cycle/walkways, bridleways through the town for recreation, biodiversity and safe commuting.

**G12** – Use opportunities to promote links such as dismantled railway lines and cross country nature trails that already exist.

### Civic Space - CS

Civic spaces are an important asset for all, in particular in the denser urban areas where provision of open space is limited.

People in Northampton value civic spaces as meeting places and suggest they provide a "sense of belonging".

Increasing access to and enhancement of, the quality of these

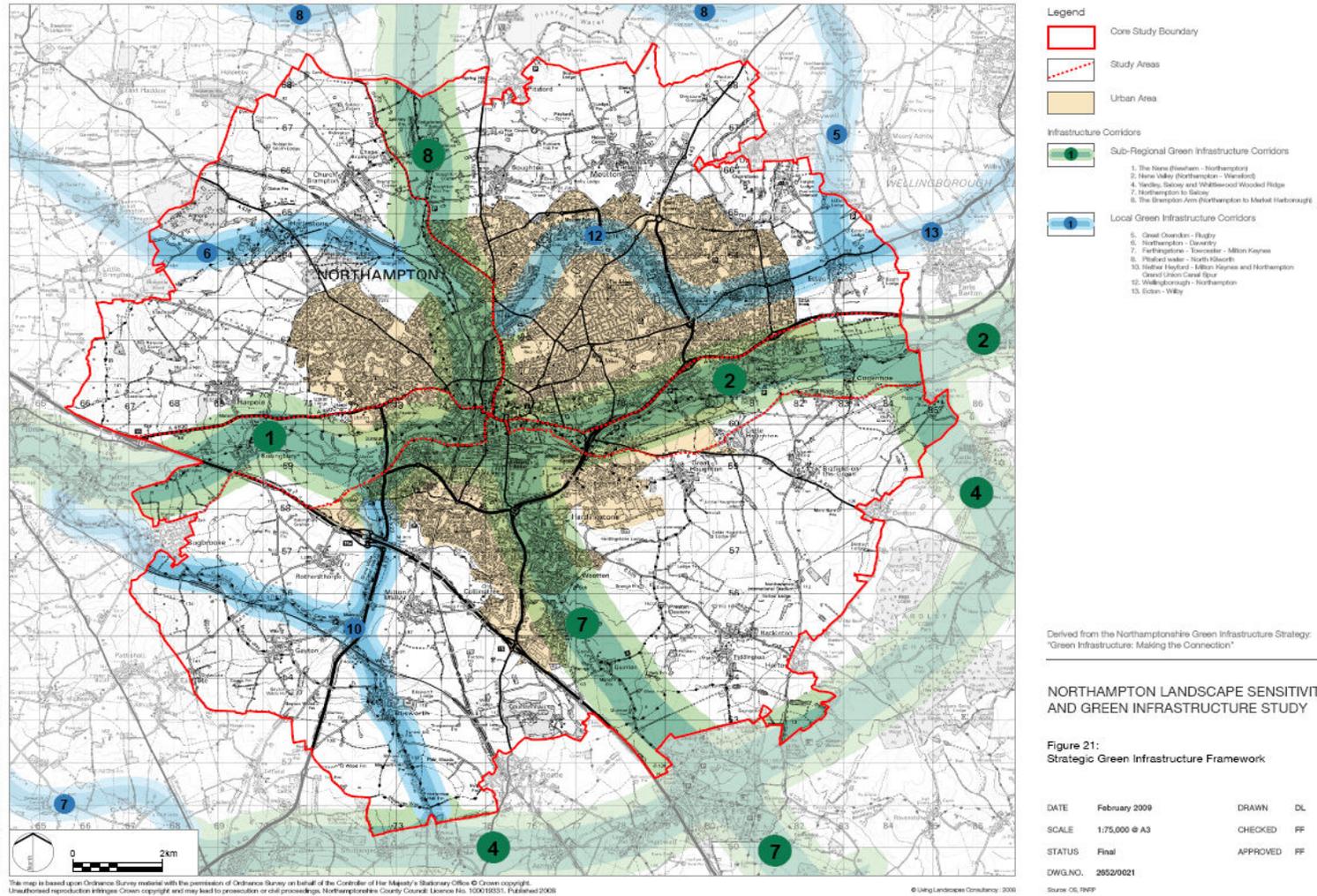
sites should be a priority. Northampton Borough Council and partner organisations are demonstrating increasing commitment to regenerating and improving civic space as can be demonstrated by recent developments in the Market Square and along Gold Street. The Northampton Public Realm Implementation Framework is a manual followed by WNDC, NCC and NBC and contains guidelines on how to improve public realm and has a commitment to the use of high quality design and materials to create a 'quality' feel for our town centre civic spaces.

### Improvement Policies

**CS1** - To raise the quality of civic spaces in Northampton by creating well designed, quality civic spaces that reflect and enhance the borough's built and landscape heritage.

**CS2** - The design and planning of new neighbourhoods in Northampton should follow national and local guidance for example the current WNDC Design Code Manual.

FIG: 5. Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework



(Map produced by Fiona Fyfe, Living Landscapes Consultancy Ltd, 2009)  
[http://www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/Portals/0/maps/2652\\_Fig21\\_GI\\_Corridors.pdf](http://www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/Portals/0/maps/2652_Fig21_GI_Corridors.pdf)

## Sustainability of our Parks and Open Spaces

### NBC Service Self Assessment

In early 2009 Northampton Borough Council undertook an internal review of its Parks and Open Spaces function using the TAES framework (Towards An Excellent Service).

TAES is a self-assessment process through which Northampton Borough Council has identified its strengths and weaknesses in relation to Parks and Open spaces. The key findings and improvement priorities identified include:

- A need to develop greater clarity of responsibility in all areas of strategic and operational activity
- Clearly linking strategy with service plans
- Effective documentation of changes in response to requests for change (A clear audit trail)
- The identification of key critical points of contact in relation to partners and stakeholders
- The identification and adoption of best practice from other authorities
- Directly linking expenditure to strategic priorities

- Developing cross service communication links
- Involving all employees in service planning
- Developing a culture of continuous improvement to encourage bottom up solutions to service improvement
- Need to develop a comprehensive set of service standards for all areas of strategic and operational delivery, and monitoring system.
- Improved systems for dealing with customer information and feedback
- Effective internal communications to ensure all employees are aware of the link between performance monitoring and service improvement.

### Community Cohesion - Cco

Community cohesion is central to what makes a safe and strong community and encourages equality, inclusion and diversity. Open spaces comprise a major part of the public realm. By being such prominent local features they help define a community's sense of place. The opportunities for community engagement in, for instance, undertaking parks improvements, can demonstrate civic

pride and shared values. Furthermore the opportunities for people to come together around open space are known to be highly rewarding, creating lasting bonds and mutual understanding.

Community cohesion promotes greater knowledge, respect and contact between various groups within the community, building a greater sense of citizenship.

Many parks and open spaces have the potential to hold public events and festivals, which can bring together people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Similarly, strong and positive relationships can be formed throughout the borough through participation in sport and other leisure activities, again bringing communities together.

### Improvement Policies

**Cco1** - Northampton Borough Council will maximise the potential of parks and open spaces to hold events that encourage social interaction between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

**Safer Parks - SP**

Anti-social behaviour reported during the consultation process in our open spaces included:

- Misuse and vandalism
- Litter and rubbish and fly tipping
- Dog fouling
- Motorbikes used illegally in specific areas

Despite there being relatively low reported crime levels, there is sometimes a perceived risk involved in visiting open space, with an escalating fear of crime amongst certain user groups. Different user groups can feel vulnerable for a variety of social and cultural reasons.

Open spaces must be safe to use and people should ‘feel safe’ when using them. NBC will seek ways to make open space sites more accessible places by addressing personal safety and the feeling of being safe. Sites in some cases are not in locations where community safety has been considered and can contribute to the likelihood of anti-social behaviour in a community area.

Northampton Borough Council in partnership with the police, Anti-social Behaviour Unit and ‘experts’ across Northampton already work together to focus on the issues of anti-social behaviour in our open spaces.

**Improvement Policies**

- SP1** - Design all aspects of open space (including its relationship with surrounding development) to minimise the opportunity for crime and anti-social behaviour.
- SP2** - Provide promotion and enforcement with appropriate facilities such as litter and dog foul bins – and empty them as required
- SP3** - Promote pride and ownership of open space sites including Friends of Park schemes.
- SP4** - Inappropriately sited open space will be considered for alternative purposes such as other open space functions or for built development following a period of public consultation.

**Working in Partnership - WP**

Northampton Borough Council owns, and has the responsibility for, maintaining the majority of the open spaces in the Borough. However it

will, wherever possible, seek to work in partnership.

There are considerable benefits to partnership working, both to the partners and the wider community. The Local Authority gains a greater understanding and connection with local people, and partners can be helped to achieve their objectives.

Partners include:

- ‘Friends of’ groups
- Environmental organisations
- Local businesses and schools
- Parish councils
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Other statutory bodies

As part of development of the Strategy, NBC have reviewed how it works with partners and how it can improve its partnership working practises.

**Community Consultation and Involvement in our Open Space**

Public consultation is essential in ensuring that decisions are influenced by the views of local people. Consultation is built into the Place Survey – an annual survey conducted

by MORI on behalf of Northampton Borough Council.

It is also a requirement that consultation is carried out for major improvements and changes proposed at specific sites. Special efforts will be made to reach children and young people and other groups.

### **Tackling Barriers to use**

Northampton Borough Council will seek to ensure equality of access to our parks and open spaces. The Council will work alongside partners to challenge anti-social behaviour such as dog fouling, motorbikes and also tackle other issues that are identified as barriers to use.

### **Developing and Supporting Community Groups**

Community groups contribute significantly to improving our Open Spaces.

Many successful groups exist across Northampton working to improve their local parks and open space, through fundraising for equipment, holding events such as fun days and days to make environmental improvements such as tree planting and litter picking.

### **Improvement Polices**

**WP1** – NBC will continue to support work with community groups to encourage a greater range of people to contribute to their local spaces and develop more opportunities for volunteering

**WP2** - NBC will use the results of public consultation to ensure it informs prioritisation and improve parks and open spaces.

**WP3** - NBC will develop structure(s) to ensure that partners are involved, including community groups to agree how parks and open spaces are improved through prioritising and targeting resources.

**WP4** – NBC and partner organisations will establish a ‘Friends of Parks’ Forum to make better use of staff resources, share best practice and pool fund raising experience to ensure objectives are shared and better understood.

### **Funding for Parks and Open Spaces - FPO**

#### **Funding and Maintenance**

An important issue is the ability to not only fund improvement projects, but to

ensure that funds maintain the quality of these improvements over time.

A key issue for the Strategy is to raise awareness of both the capital and revenue funding required to maintain and develop the Boroughs open spaces.

The traditional model for developing and maintaining open space is reliant on local authority budgets. As the provision of parks and open spaces is non-statutory, budgets are prone to be squeezed and reduced. In a changing financial climate other funding models need to be explored.

#### **Capital projects**

An array of grants are available for capital projects which could, in some circumstances, pay for refurbishments. Capital funding can be sought through planning obligations, or from external grants, and sponsorship.

Many of these grants are only available to the voluntary sector or community groups rather than Local Authorities. Many community groups have been successful in securing funding to support developments in their local areas. There is scope to

bring local groups together to ensure a more co-ordinated approach and maximise fund raising potential.

Grant aid and sponsorship will be sought in a prioritised way according to need.

### **Assets and Redundant Buildings**

Northampton Borough Council will need to comply with HM Treasury arrangements 'for whole government reporting', which will require that local authorities assess the value of their assets including parks. Parks are difficult to assess in monetary terms, however the assets contained within parks can be given a value. The Council has many assets within parks that are redundant or underused. Some of these could be developed or transferred for community purposes, sold or leased for business purposes.

### **Revenue Costs**

As landowner, the Council is responsible for the maintenance of a large proportion of the Boroughs open space. Maintenance regimes are linked to the function and type of provision. This means sometimes sites of the same type may be

subjected to different maintenance practices.

Works in parks and open space is limited by the availability of the appropriate budgets for maintenance.

The Council recognises that grounds maintenance is a critical issue, which is reinforced by responses from public consultation. Effective and efficient grounds maintenance is vital to deliver the objectives of this strategy. The council's approach to grounds maintenance is being reviewed, with the aim of improving quality and responsiveness of the service.

### **Improvement Policies**

**FPO1** - The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and Action Plan will be used to support funding applications. Partnership and third party applications will be supported by NBC if they are in accordance with the strategic priorities highlighted by the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

**FPO2** - Northampton Borough Council will promote the option of community management of some individual spaces in addition to

conventional ways of providing the service.

**FPO3** – NBC and partner organisation will work with community groups to establish a mechanism for co-ordinated sharing of information and fund raising.

**FPO4** - NBC will develop performance measurements to ensure that the Parks Service and open spaces continually improve.

**FPO5** - NBC will ensure that there is strategic management to coordinate all aspects of parks and open space management.

**FPO6** - Ensure Section 106 monies secured for parks and open spaces are used to greater effect in delivering improvement.

### **Skills and Training - ST**

The successful planning, design and management of parks and the wider network of green spaces draws upon the skills of people working in a broad range of specialist occupations from horticulture to play. The green space sector also requires management expertise including skills such as advocacy and community engagement, to encourage the public, to use and enjoy parks and open spaces, and have the motivation and

confidence to influence local authority decision-making.

NBC and partners need to ensure that there continue to be the skills and expertise both within the Local Authority and within the wider community within the open space workforce.

The following are in line with the recommendations of 'Skill to Grow' (CABE, 2009)

### **Improvement Policies**

**ST1** - Ensure that annual training objectives include specialist training in green space skills

**ST2** - Work with training providers to provide skills for workforce and volunteers (community groups)

**ST3** - Work with partners to improve joined up working to ensure that there are cross-professional training opportunities.

### **Climate Change**

Climate change is already occurring and further changes appear inevitable. In general it is predicted that summers will be warmer and drier, and winters milder and wetter, but there will also be more extreme weather events such as heat waves, intense downpours of rain

and storms. Unless habitats are large enough and sufficiently well connected to allow species to migrate and adapt, biodiversity will not be able to realise its full potential to lessen the impact of climate change. Greater weight should therefore be given to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, particularly through open space and the design of new development.

Parks and open spaces will be directly affected by the changing climate and also have a vital role to play in reducing the effects of climate change on Northampton's people and its wildlife.

Increasing temperatures are likely to result in greater, more intense use of public open spaces for longer periods of the year. An extended thermal growing season will require changes in management, such as more grass cutting and potentially increased costs. Decisions need to be taken in designing parks and open spaces for the future, for example in the choice of trees to withstand more extreme weather conditions and in water storage, recycling and efficiency measures.

Green spaces have a central role to play in reducing the effects of climate change, which includes their role in reducing the 'heat island' effect, capturing and storing water after heavy rainfall reducing localised flooding.

Among potential new uses for open space are their re-use as allotments, food production or woodland planting for both amenity and timber/biomass production.

### **Sustainability practices in the management of spaces – SM**

The Borough Council and partners are obliged to include policies and proposals in their development plans, strategies and investment programmes to help reduce the Northampton's greenhouse gas emissions. This could include mitigation through green space provision. Northampton Borough Council already has developed sustainable approaches to its own management practices such as recycling materials (ensuring the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill is reduced) and energy efficient transport. This could be supported further by actively recycling

through maintenance practices and provision of recycling facilities in parks.

Green space can also reduce the carbon footprint through carbon capture and increasing opportunities to cycle or walk.

By combining the use of open space to increase carbon capture, increase habitat enhancement and connectivity, with other goals such as providing accessible natural green space, pedestrian links and landscape mitigation, it will provide multi-functional landscapes and, as such, deliver the broader principles that are inherent in mitigation against climate change.

### **Trees**

Trees, in particular, are important because they assist in the management of 'urban heat islands' by remove pollutants from the air, casting shade and creating cooler microclimates. Trees also reduce

noise, and provide shelter for wildlife. However they also require large quantities of water and many are already showing signs of stress in the increasingly hot, dry summers.

To improve our environment we need to conserve and plant more trees where space allows especially where there is a deficit.

### **Improvement Policies**

These will all exploit opportunities to both mitigate and adapt to the worst impacts of climate change:

**SM1** - Reduce the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill from the management practices in parks and open spaces.

**SM2** - Support the development of green infrastructure to act as carbon sinks.

**SM3** - Require all new development to minimise resource demand and encourage the efficient use of

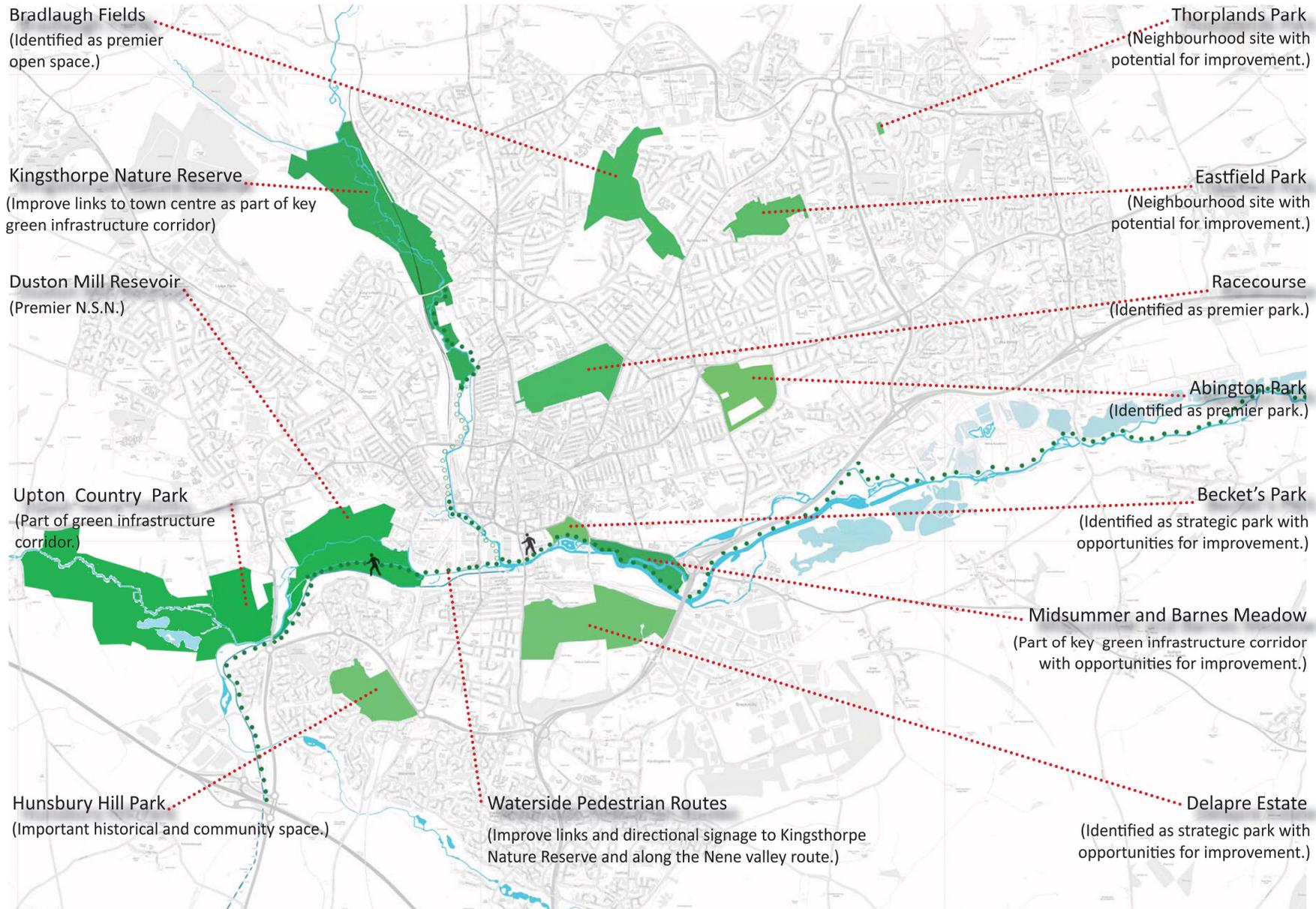
resources, especially water, energy and materials.

**SM4** - Planting should be chosen with consideration to the climate change, therefore species resistant to water deprivation and higher average temperatures might be chosen. (This will be outlined in further work in an NBC Tree Strategy)

**SM5** - Ensure that there is more proactive use of alternative and new technologies in the development, management and maintenance of parks and open spaces.

**SM6** – Promote education and understanding about how parks and open spaces can help us manage climate change.

KEY GREEN SPACE AND IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR NORTHAMPTON



**PART D – Delivering the Strategy**

The Action Plan is the key delivery agent for this strategy. It will be updated annually to take account of work completed and new works coming on-stream. It aims to document what is happening to deliver the Parks and Open Space Strategy, with partners and across the Council in the coming years. Projects and actions identified in the Plan will contribute to addressing the agreed priorities. Each project will have a timescale, and the programme will be used to help monitor performance.

**Further Work/ research required**

There are areas of work and issues raised in the Strategy where further work or research is required before some actions can be taken forward in the Action Plan. The list below identifies other work, which needs to be progressed:

- Tree Strategy including Street Trees
- Playing Pitch Strategy update
- Cemeteries and Churchyards Strategy
- Allotments Strategy update

**Delivery and Monitoring**

Leisure and Environmental Services will bring forward the delivery of the Action

Plan. A Parks and Open Spaces Core management group, envisaged to be made up of relevant owners, managers and partners, will provide steering and monitoring of progress on action plans, targets and outcomes on a regular basis.

Council officers will also continue to keep a close working relationship with other organisations that own, manage and maintain open space to champion the public’s priorities for open space improvements where these fall outside the control of the Borough Council.

Strategic policies will be reviewed on a 5 year basis and updated accordingly.

**Resources**

Funding will come from a number of sources including contributions from developers, external funding sources such as the lottery, the council’s core budget as well as expertise and additional technical support from council and partner organisations officers.

**Priorities for Action**

Delivering the vision for Northampton’s Open Spaces is a long-term objective. It is not feasible, especially in the current economic climate, for all the Strategy’s

outcomes to be achieved within short timescales.

There is a need to approach the development of our Parks and Open Spaces in a planned and systematic way.

Assessment of priorities for open space improvement must take into account both resident and user views together with council and regional policy and priorities.

The following themes have been identified as priorities for action from the consultation and a review of Parks and Open Spaces to be taken forward into delivery.

1. Improve the quality of our Parks and Open Spaces. With partners develop a prioritised rolling programme for Parks and Open Space improvements.
2. Encourage greater use of our Parks and Open Spaces to promote community cohesion, education, safety, health and activity
3. Increase opportunities for community empowerment and involvement with open space management
4. Develop methods of monitoring performance in parks and open spaces. (To inform future prioritisation of works)

5. Work towards overcoming deficiencies in open space, play space and wildlife provision
6. Consider the disposal / reallocation of open space sites; for other uses and development
7. Improve the biodiversity of key sites.
8. Make the most of the way in which our open spaces can help reduce climate change.

### **Prioritising Action in our Parks and Open Spaces Action Plan**

There is a lot of enthusiasm and interest from all our partners in bringing forward options for improving our open spaces. In order to make sure that there are resources and funding to support the proposals there is a need to prioritise how to achieve these changes.

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