

Setting new standards for public open space provision in new development - July 2015



Open space standards for quantity, quality and accessibility will be set for 5 types of open space: Natural/semi-natural space, amenity space, outdoor sports, equipped play areas, allotments.

Draft Quantity Standards

Type of Public Open Space	Draft Standard (hectares per 1000 population)	Minimum Size of Facility (hectares)
Amenity	0.7	0.1
Children's and young people's provision	0.25	0.25 excluding a buffer zone but in cases where accessibility to children's and young people's provision is poor, for example outside a reasonable walking distance or where the crossing of major roads at grade is necessary, smaller areas of open space may be justified on-site. Features such as mounding or natural elements such as tree trunks and an open, level area of open space will provide opportunities for informal local play. Traffic calming measures to minimise vehicle speeds will help make streets safer in these areas and encourage use.
Outdoor sports	1.6	To meet the technical standards produced by Sport England or the relevant Governing Bodies of Sport
Allotments	0.2	0.66
Natural/semi-natural space	6.5	0.2

On site public open space provision can be combined provided the overall quantity of provision is not reduced.

Justification for the Draft Quantitative Standards

The draft standard has been set by taking into account

- the current adopted standard
- existing measured provision (the Open Space Audit 2015)
- residents' feedback (Telephone Survey Report, May 2015)
- GBI Stakeholder Workshops (May 2015)
- where applicable, national standards
- comparable standards from nearby Kent districts

An explanation for the proposed standard for each type of public open space is set out below.

Amenity Open Space

Amenity open space is defined as open space which provides informal activities and visual enhancement to residential areas.

The current adopted standard is 0.7ha for the urban area and 0.8ha for the rural area. In terms of new provision, there appears to be no justification for varying the provision of amenity open space between the urban and the rural area. The standard broadly equates with the standard set in nearby Kent districts.

Of the five typologies, amenity green space and natural and semi natural open space are the most popular in terms of claimed usage. The vast majority of residents believe the amount of open space available in the borough is either very good or good (Telephone Survey Report, May 2015). This view is supported by Parish Councils and there is a desire to protect the existing open space (Parish and Neighbourhoods GBI Workshop 20 May 2015). Current provision equates to 0.7ha/1000 in the urban area and 1.47ha/ 1000 in the rural area and existing amenity open space should be protected.

The proposed standard is 0.7ha/1000 population which aligns with the adopted urban and rural standards, the current provision in the urban area and broadly aligns with the standard set in nearby Kent districts.

Children's and young people's provision

The current adopted standard is 0.12ha for the urban area and 0.09ha for the rural area. In terms of new provision, there appears to be no justification for varying the provision of amenity open space between the urban and the rural area.

There are concerns with regard to the amount of play area provision for children and young people on which the current standard is based with 40% rating provision as fair, poor and very poor (Telephone Survey Report, May 2015). It is therefore proposed to increase the proposed standard.

The proposed standard is 0.25ha/1000 population which would equate to the Fields in Trust standard and would align more closely with the standard set in nearby Kent districts.

Outdoor sports

The current adopted standard is 1.4ha for the urban area and 2.7ha for the rural area. In terms of new provision, there appears to be no justification for varying the provision of sports pitch provision between the urban and the rural area. The standard is significantly lower (approximately half) the standard set in nearby Kent districts. The Fields in Trust standard is 1.6ha/ 1000 population.

There are concerns with regard to the amount of outdoor sports facilities with 43% rating them as fair, poor and very poor (Telephone Survey Report, May 2015). There is also information from the Football and Hockey Associations that provision for these sports in the Borough is inadequate. Nevertheless, a comprehensive Playing Pitch Needs Assessment as advocated by Sport England has not been undertaken.

An increased interim standard is therefore proposed until a detailed Playing Pitch Needs Assessment has been completed.

The proposed interim standard is 1.6ha/1000 population which would equate to the Fields in Trust standard and would align more closely with the standard set in nearby Kent districts.

Allotments

The current adopted standard is 0.21ha for the urban area and 0.18ha for the rural area. In terms of new provision, there appears to be no justification for varying the provision of amenity open space between the urban and the rural area. The standard closely equates with the standard set in nearby Kent districts.

The vast majority of residents believe the amount of open space available in the borough is either very good or good (Telephone Survey Report, May 2015). This view is supported by Parish Councils and there is a desire to protect the existing open space (Parish and Neighbourhoods GBI Workshop 20 May 2015). Current provision equates to 0.2ha/1000 in the urban area and 0.22ha/ 1000 in the rural area and existing allotments should be protected.

The proposed standard is 0.2ha/1000 population which would equate to the current adopted standard, the current provision and aligns closely with the standard set in nearby Kent districts.

Natural/semi-natural space

The current adopted standard is the ANGSt standard. This is an accessibility standard and does not contain a quantitative standard.

In terms of new provision, there appears to be no justification for varying the provision of natural and semi natural open space between the urban and the rural area.

Of the five typologies, amenity green space and natural and semi natural open space are the most popular in terms of claimed usage. 72% of residents rated the amount of natural and semi natural space as very good / good (Telephone Survey Report, May 2015). This view is supported by Parish Councils and there is a desire to protect the existing open space (Parish and Neighbourhoods GBI Workshop 20 May 2015). Current provision equates to 6.31ha/1000 in the urban area and 6.95ha/ 1000 in the rural area and existing natural and semi natural space open space should be protected.

The proposed standard for future provision is 6.5ha/1000 population which sets a quantitative standard for natural and semi natural space in Maidstone Borough for the first time. This is approximately the same as the current measured provision and represents a significant level of provision in association with new development – in part as there is no longer a park and garden standard (which would normally include an element of natural and semi natural open space). The standard would represent the highest for this typology when compared with the standard set in nearby Kent districts.

Draft quality standards

The quality standards aim to ensure open spaces are fit for purpose, sustainable over the long term, well designed, well built, appropriately managed and can adjust to changing user needs and requirements.

Quality standard for new public open space

All open spaces should be designed as part of the green infrastructure network in a locality, contributing to local landscape character, connecting with local routes and green corridors for people and wildlife as well as providing multi-functional benefits such as addressing surface water management priorities. The spatial relationship between new open spaces and built development needs to be carefully considered to ensure open spaces are conveniently and safely located to serve the local community and are sufficiently overlooked by active building frontages. The location and shape of the space should allow for meaningful and safe recreation. Small, poorly located, oddly shaped, 'left over' sites will not be acceptable. The design of new and improved open spaces should meet the needs of, and be developed in consultation with the local community wherever possible. New open spaces must include a management plan with adequate resources identified for on-going management and maintenance. All types of open space should be designed to meet the Green Flag Award standard on criteria relating to design and accessibility as set out below. Criteria should be applied proportionately to the size of the site and some criteria such as lighting will be less relevant to small, particularly natural and semi-natural sites, where creating habitats for wildlife will take priority.

- Site is easily found and accessible by road, cycleway, footpaths and public transport including by those with disabilities, with pedestrian crossings on roads where appropriate.
- Entrances are accessible for all users, are of appropriate size and inviting with a welcoming sign.
- Clearly defined, accessible footpaths and cycleways where appropriate, to and around the site.
- Waymarking signage provided where needed outside and within the site.
- Information about the site clearly displayed for visitors in various formats (noticeboards, leaflets)
- Site is well-designed to provide interest and activities for a wide range of users in particular meeting the needs of elderly and less able users as well as children, young people and families.
- Provision of well-located seats and benches.
- Equipment, structures and surfacing of high quality, safe to use and appropriate for the site.
- Clearly defined boundaries with fences or hedges where needed to ensure safety of users.
- Sufficient litter bins provided for general waste, dog waste and compost where appropriate.
- Appropriate lighting to ensure safety of users without adversely affecting wildlife.
- Emergency equipment where relevant (eg lifebelts by water) available on or near the site and clearly signposted.
- A range of planting, with appropriate mix of species, maintained to a good standard.

- Biodiversity is promoted on site through design, choice of species and management practices.
- Information for visitors on biodiversity is available on site.
- Any water bodies have clean, clear water, with appropriate marginal and other vegetation.
- Any landscape, geological features, buildings or structures of historical value are identified and conserved appropriately.

Additional requirements for specific types of space are as follows:

Outdoor Sports Space

The specific type of outdoor sports space that should be provided on-site or added to existing sporting facilities in the area is to be agreed with the Council on a site by site basis.

Outdoor sports space should be designed to meet the technical performance quality standards in Fields in Trust's, 'Design and Maintenance of Outdoor Sports Facilities', 2004 and the technical standards produced by Sport England or the relevant Governing Bodies of Sport.

Playing surfaces must be appropriately maintained and drained, serviced by appropriate built accommodation (changing rooms/pavilion), toilets, car and cycle parking space and landscaping.

It may be appropriate to consider the provision of outdoor sports space in the form of synthetic/hard surface provision. Where the views of the local sports community indicate this would be a better option than grass provision, this will be taken into account.

Natural/Semi-Natural green space

The type of natural/semi-natural green space to be provided will depend on the location of the site. The choice of plant species and the design of the planting environment must be appropriate to the context, complementing local landscape character and addressing habitat requirements identified as priorities in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The size, specification and provenance of planting stock should be suited to the environment and take into account disease resilience and the ability to adapt to climate change.

The shape and layout of the space should allow for meaningful and safe recreation. These areas should be clearly distinct from similar areas provided for the purposes of ecological mitigation, where public access will not be encouraged. Where possible, new sites should connect with the existing network of natural and semi-natural green spaces within the borough, providing movement corridors for wildlife.

Children and young people's play space

Play spaces should conform to EN1176 standards and will require regular inspection in accordance with ROSPA guidance. All areas should afford good natural surveillance from nearby streets and frontages of residential properties, whilst maintaining a minimum distance of at least 20m to the nearest dwelling (habitable room facade).

Play areas should be designed in accordance with Play England's, '*Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*', and specifically should

incorporate the 10 principles for designing successful play spaces which states that play spaces should:

- be 'bespoke'
- be well located
- make use of natural elements
- provide a wide range of play experiences
- accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- meet community needs
- allow children of different ages to play together
- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- be sustainable and appropriately maintained
- allow for change and evolution

A wide range of play experiences should be provided and include the following:

- **For young pre-school children:** Natural play features, paving that allows the use of toddler wheeled toys such as pedal cars and tricycles and items of play equipment that provide, as a minimum, for swinging, climbing, balancing, themed play and items useable by family groups e.g. basket swings. There should be seating for accompanying adults.
- **For other children up to teenage years:** Natural play features and pieces of play equipment providing for climbing, swinging, balancing, themed play, items facilitating group play, rotating equipment, physically challenging items and a small flat ball games area with multi-goals, sheltered seating and 'very low key' wheel play facility (undulating riding surface with features). There should be seating for accompanying adults.
- **For teenagers/young people:** Ball play and/or wheeled play opportunities, and covered seating to use as a meeting place.
- **Provision for those with disabilities:** Access to both disabled and non-disabled children, seating suitable for disabled children and their carers and a variety of the equipment designed to be useable by children with disabilities.

Some space with no predefined function should be incorporated into the layout to allow potential for change and evolution.

Allotments

Allotments should:

- be well related to residential properties, which enables natural surveillance.
- preferably co-located with schools or community facilities.
- sit sympathetically in the landscape.
- have well-drained soil which is capable of cultivation to a reasonable standard.
- have direct access by footpaths and cycleways and safe vehicular access to the car park from the adopted highway.
- provide car parking and cycle parking facilities on or adjacent to the site.
- have perimeter security fencing with one lockable combined vehicle and pedestrian gate as a minimum. Where it is not desirable, for security reasons, to completely screen the security fencing with hedging the choice of fencing and its appearance will need to be acceptable for the context.
- have a metered mains water supply with four water supply points for watering, one to be at the site store and all fitted with stop cocks and frost-proof housing.

- provides a lockable and secure site store of at least 3m x 4m with double doors and external sink with soak away or mains drainage and a mains connected, lockable toilet with hand washing facilities.
- have compound turf paths edged with flat-topped pre-cast concrete kerb edging between rows of plots and adjacent to the perimeter fencing.
- have permeable surfacing of crushed stone car parking.
- have concrete slab paving through entrance gates and beneath, and in front of, site store and portable toilet.
- have, where desirable, a manageable hedge, capable of providing a year-round screen and fitting the urban context is to be provided around the outside of the perimeter security fencing.
- provide for disabled access.
- provide for composting facilities.
- provide protection and enhancement for biodiversity where possible.

Quality standard for existing public open space

The aim is for all open spaces to score at least 66% or more (Good or Very Good) on the quality scale. The quality scale is based on the accessibility, design and management criteria of the national Green Flag Award and was devised for the open space quality audit (April 2015) as summarised below.

Applying the quality standard to existing open spaces identifies where investment is needed to bring spaces up to the standard. It can be used to target investment from developer contributions where off site provision is required. It can also inform management priorities for specific spaces for improvements if resources become available, and in some cases may be a long term aspiration. Criteria should be applied proportionately to the size of the site and some criteria such as car parking and lighting will be less relevant to small open spaces, particularly natural and semi-natural sites, where creating habitats for wildlife will take priority.

Sites of all typologies are scored on the following criteria on a scale of; Very Poor (0-25%), Poor (26 – 45%), Fair (46 – 65%), Good (66 – 84%), Very Good (85+%)

1. Accessibility (A Welcoming Place)

- Site is easily found and accessible by road, cycleway, footpaths and public transport including by those with disabilities, with pedestrian crossings on roads where appropriate.
- Good car parking and cycle parking facilities on or adjacent to the site.
- Entrances are accessible for all users, are of appropriate size and inviting with a welcoming sign.
- Clearly defined, accessible footpaths and cycleways where appropriate, to and around the site.
- Waymarking signage provided where needed outside and within the site.
- Information about the site clearly displayed for visitors in various formats (noticeboards, leaflets)
- Site is well-designed to provide interest and activities for a wide range of users in particular meeting the needs of elderly and less able users as well as children, young people and families.

2. Healthy, Safe, and Secure

- Equipment, structures and surfacing of high quality, safe to use and appropriate for the site.
- Clearly defined boundaries with fences or hedges where needed to ensure safety of users.
- Sufficient litter bins provided for general waste, dog waste and compost where appropriate.
- Appropriate lighting to ensure safety of users without adversely affecting wildlife.

3. Clean and Well Maintained

- Litter, dog and other waste must be adequately dealt with
- Grounds, buildings, equipment and other features must be well-maintained in good condition
- Environmental and horticultural management must be to a high standard

4. Ancillary equipment and facilities

- Toilets provided where appropriate, easy to access, signed and well-maintained.
- Provision of well-located seats and benches.
- Fresh drinking water freely available and promoted on site, clean and well-maintained installation, good pressure and with sustainable use of water.
- Emergency equipment where relevant (eg lifebelts by water) available on or near the site and clearly signposted.

5. Landscape, Wildlife and Heritage

- A range of planting, with appropriate mix of species, maintained to a good standard.
- Biodiversity is promoted on site through design, choice of species and management practices.
- Invasive or undesirable plants are well-controlled where needed.
- Information for visitors on biodiversity is available on site.
- Any water bodies have clean, clear water, appropriate marginal and other vegetation with well maintained edges and banks.
- Any landscape, geological features, buildings or structures of historical value are identified and conserved appropriately.

Methodology for assessing the quality of existing open spaces

The methodology adopted is set out in Appendix 1 of the 'Open Spaces Quality Audit', April 2015. The assessment is based on awarding scores from 1 to 5 to the relevant Green Flag criteria appropriate to the site type as set out in detail in the document. Scores are then translated into an overall percentage score for the site, resulting in an assessment of either 'Very Poor', 'Poor', 'Fair', 'Good' or 'Very Good'. The scoring system is weighted whereby the number of characteristics measured and scored differs depending on the type of site; larger, more complex sites which serve a wider audience will comprise a greater number of characteristics to be measured.

Draft Accessibility Standards

Open space should be readily accessible to residents. Some types of open space (such as amenity open space, children's and young people's provision or smaller areas of natural and semi natural open space) are for local use within a neighbourhood or village and are generally accessed on foot. The accessibility standards are based around walking time. A 10 – 12 minute walk (400m – 600m) to such local facilities is considered reasonable. Barriers such as main roads, railways or rivers should not sever the route to an open space.

Other facilities such as outdoor sports, allotments and larger areas of natural and semi natural open space can be more distant

Proposed accessibility standards:

Type of Public Open Space	Draft Accessibility Standard (radius from open space)
Amenity	400m
Children's and young people's provision	400m
Outdoor sports	1000m
Allotments	1000m
Natural/semi-natural	300m (2 Ha site) 2km (20 Ha site) 5km (100 Ha site) 10km (500 Ha site)

Using the radii from open space set out above, analysis shows that access to open space overall within the Borough is good with most areas within a 10-20 minute walk.

Three quarters of residents consider the access of open spaces on foot to be very good or good (75%). The vast majority of residents consider the access of open spaces by car to be very good or good (84%) (Telephone Survey Report, May 2015).

Of the five typologies, amenity green space, play area provision and allotments appear to be in close proximity to residents with 62%, 64% and 61% respectively indicating it takes up to 10 minutes to reach them. 53% of residents indicated it takes up to 10 minutes to reach the natural and semi natural space they use.

