

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL OPEN SPACES SURVEY REPORT

Prepared by Lake Market Research for Maidstone Borough Council

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This report complies with ISO: 20252 standards and other relevant forms of conduct



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1. RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Maidstone Borough Council commissioned Lake Market Research to undertake a telephone survey with residents of the Borough to identify and assess views on open space provision. This will assist the Council to assess views on the amounts of open space in the borough and the characteristics of open spaces that are important. This in turn will assist with the setting of open spaces standards and action plan priorities.

This research therefore explored:

- Claimed use of open space at an overall level and by specific typologies of open space
- Reasons for using open spaces and the most important aspects of open spaces
- Opinions on the amount, quality and accessibility of open spaces provided
- Opinion on the importance of the specific typologies of open space
- The most important aspects in terms of open spaces

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted by Lake Market Research via a telephone survey. The fieldwork was conducted during the evenings and weekends to ensure that we interviewed a representative proportion of the working population. Fieldwork was carried out over a two week period between 29th April and 17th May 2015. Target quotas were set in terms of age and gender in accordance with 2011 Census data. The respondent profile is as follows:

Respondent Profile						
The profile of residents interviewed for this survey incorporate a range of demographics:						
Gender	48% Female	52% Male				
Age	3% 18-24	20% 25-34	14% 35-44	23% 45-54	21% 55-64	17% 65+
Ethnicity	96% White		4% BME			
Disability	11% Yes		89% No			
Ward within Maidstone	4% Allington			3% High Street		
	2% Barming			2% Leeds		
	5% Bearsted			3% Loose		
	3% Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton			5% Marden & Yalding		
	3% Boxley			2% North Downs		
	3% Bridge			2% North		
	4% Coxheath & Hunton			2% Park Wood		
	3% Detling & Thurnham			5% Shepway North		
	3% Downswood & Otham			2% Shepway South		
	5% East			5% South		
	5% Fant			6% Staplehurst		
	5% Harrietsham & Lenham			3% Sutton Valence & Langley		
	5% Headcorn			4% Prefer not to answer		
	3% Heath					

1.3 ANALYSIS, WEIGHTING AND INTERPRETING THE DATA

It should be noted that a sample of visitors and residents participated in this survey rather than all residents of the Maidstone Borough Council area. Results are therefore subject to sampling error, which means that not all differences are statistically significant.

Overall results for the resident survey are accurate to a confidence interval (also called margin of error) of +/- 4.89% at the 95% confidence level. There are three factors that determine the size of the confidence interval for a given confidence level: sample size; percentage; and population size. In calculating the general level of accuracy for reporting purposes, we have used:

- The sample size of 401 achieved
- The worst case percentage (50%);
- 2011 Census data estimate of 122,000 residents across all wards of the Maidstone Borough Council area aged 18+.

Confidence interval calculations assume you have a genuine random sample of the relevant population (in practice, margins of error may be slightly higher).

Quotas were set in line with the gender and age profiles of Maidstone residents. These were achieved so no weighting has been applied to this dataset.

1.4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the team at Maidstone Borough Council for all their help and advice in developing the project. We would also like to thank all 401 residents who agreed to take part and whose views made this research possible.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 USAGE PATTERNS

The vast majority of the residents surveyed have visited an open space in the borough of Maidstone in the last 12 months. The most popular reasons for using open spaces are to walk, to take exercise, for fresh air, to use children's play equipment and to walk the dog.

Of the five typologies, amenity green space and natural and semi natural open space are the most popular in terms of claimed usage. 51% use amenity green space once a week or more, 66% use it at least once a fortnight. 49% use natural and semi natural space once a week or more, 59% use it at least once a fortnight. 33% of residents use play area provision for children and young people and 15% use outdoor sports facilities at least once a fortnight.

Amenity green space is typically accessed by foot and by car (48% for each respectively). There is a slight skew towards access on foot for both natural and semi natural space and play areas provision (58% and 54% respectively). In comparison, the majority travel to outdoor sports facilities by car.

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. 41% of residents indicated it takes up to 10 minutes to reach the outdoor sports facilities they use.

When asked to choose the type of open space they use most often, a number of users referenced a place as opposed to a type of space. As a number of open spaces contain a mixture of open space typologies, multiple responses have been accepted. We would also advise some caution surrounding comparison of the amenity green space and natural and semi natural space figures as we recognise that despite explanation there may be some overlap between the two because residents see these as the same type of space.

54% of residents indicated they use natural and semi natural space most often. 41% of residents indicated they use amenity green space most often. 26% of residents indicated they use play area provisions most often.

2.2 CURRENT PROVISION

The vast majority of residents believe the amount of open space available in the borough is either very good or good. This is significantly higher to the proportion indicating very good or good in the survey conducted by Maidstone Borough Council in 2005.

Encouraging responses are observed in relation to the amount of amenity green space and natural and semi natural space available (78% and 72% rating them as very good / good respectively).

There are however some concerns with regard to the amount of play area provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities with 40% and 43% rating them as fair, poor and very poor respectively. When the don't know ratings are removed, the concerns expressed with regard to play area provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities are more apparent. It is however unclear whether residents are responding to these categories as a whole when expressing concerns or whether there are sub categories within these areas that are concerns.

Three quarters of residents (75%) rate the overall quality of open spaces in the borough of Maidstone as very good or good. This is significantly higher compared to the proportion indicating very good or good in the survey conducted by Maidstone in 2005 (57%).

The vast majority consider the access of open spaces by car to be very good or good (84%). Three quarters consider the access of open spaces on foot to be very good or good (75%). Perceptions with regards to access by bicycle and public transport are more varied, with lower opinion ratings and uncertainty expressed.

2.3 IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF OPEN SPACES

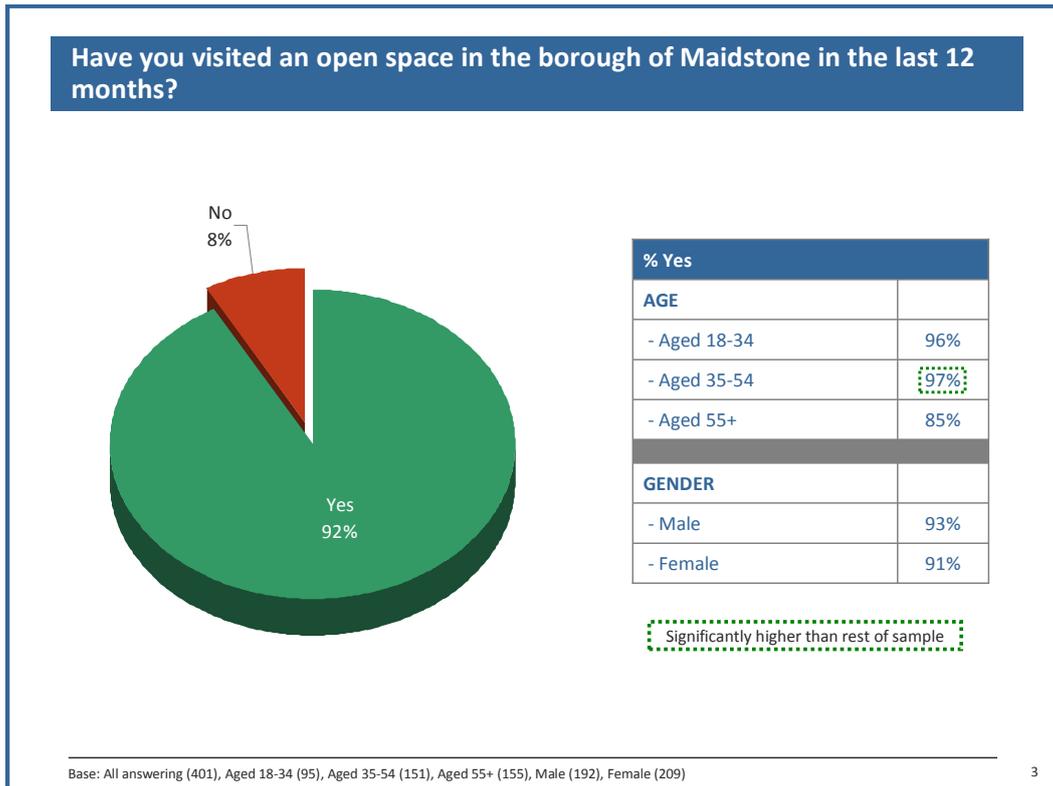
Consistent with usage patterns, the importance of the open space typologies varies. At an overall level, natural and semi natural space and amenity green space are considered important by the majority surveyed (94% and 91% rate them as very important or important respectively). Just under three quarters (72%) rate play areas provision for children and young people as very important or important. Just over half (51%) rate outdoor sports facilities as very important or important and a third (33%) rate allotments as very important or important.

Cleanliness / tidiness are considered the most important aspect of open spaces at an overall level with 39% of residents selecting this aspect. Nature features (e.g. wildlife, ponds, woodland) and equipment (e.g. play areas / recreation) are considered the next most important with 33% and 27% of residents selecting these aspects respectively. Maintenance and management is selected by 22% of residents. Other areas are considered important features to smaller proportions and are often considered as secondary factors of importance compared to those mentioned above.

3. USAGE PATTERNS

3.1 PROPORTION USING OPEN SPACES AND REASONS FOR DOING SO

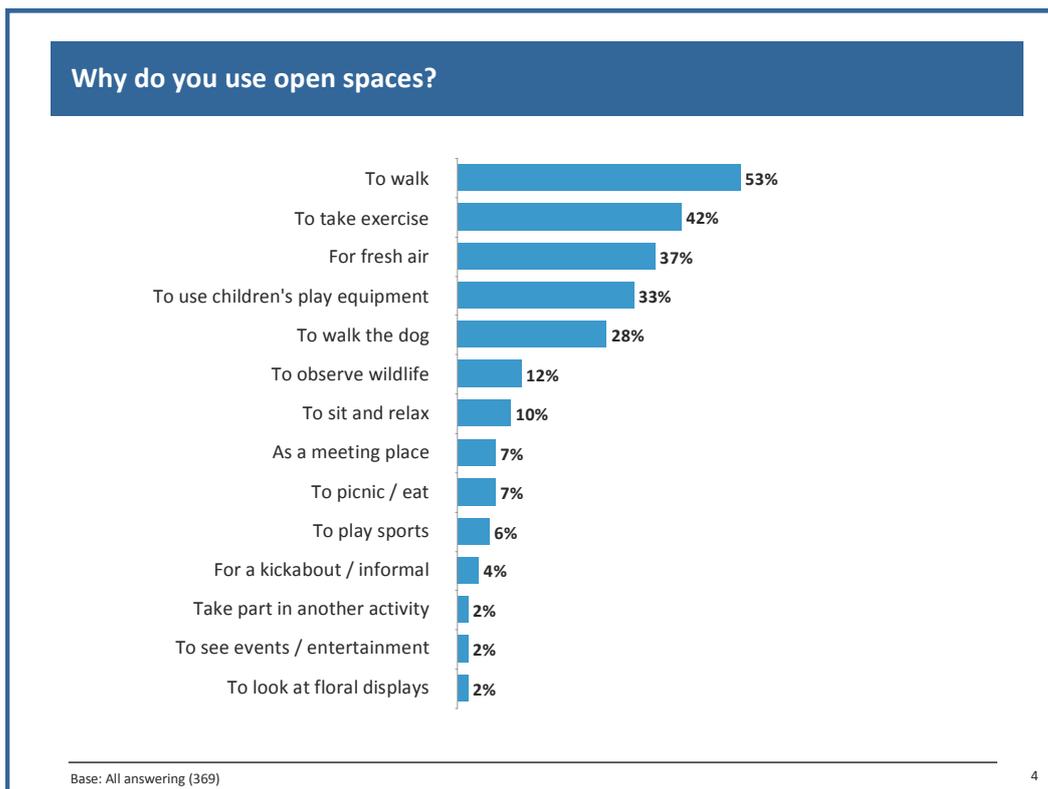
The vast majority of residents (92%) indicated that they had visited an open space in the borough of Maidstone in the last 12 months. Usage is high amongst male and female residents as well as the three age groups sampled, ranging from 85% to 97% – claimed usage is highest amongst residents aged 35-54 years old (97%).



32 residents indicated they hadn't used an open space in the borough of Maidstone in the last 12 months. The reasons for not visiting were largely due to personal circumstances such as a disability / not being physically able to visit (7 residents), being too busy / not having the time (9 residents). The remaining residents referenced that they were content with their property's surroundings.

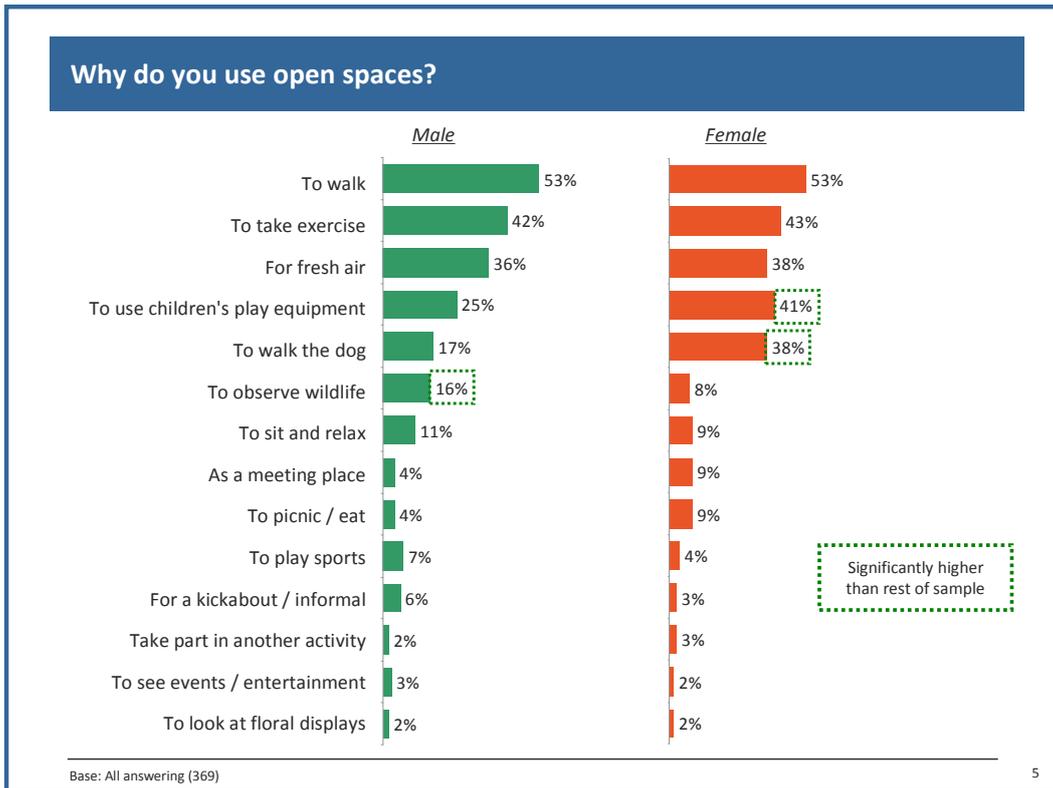
Residents were asked to indicate their reasons for using open spaces. Please note that the responses to this question were not prompted and residents' answers were coded against a pre-coded list accordingly or recorded separately. Residents were able to give as few or as many responses as they chose.

The most popular reasons for using open spaces are to walk (53%), to take exercise (42%), for fresh air (37%), to use children's play equipment (33%) and to walk the dog (28%). These patterns are consistent with those observed in the 2005 survey conducted by Maidstone Borough Council.

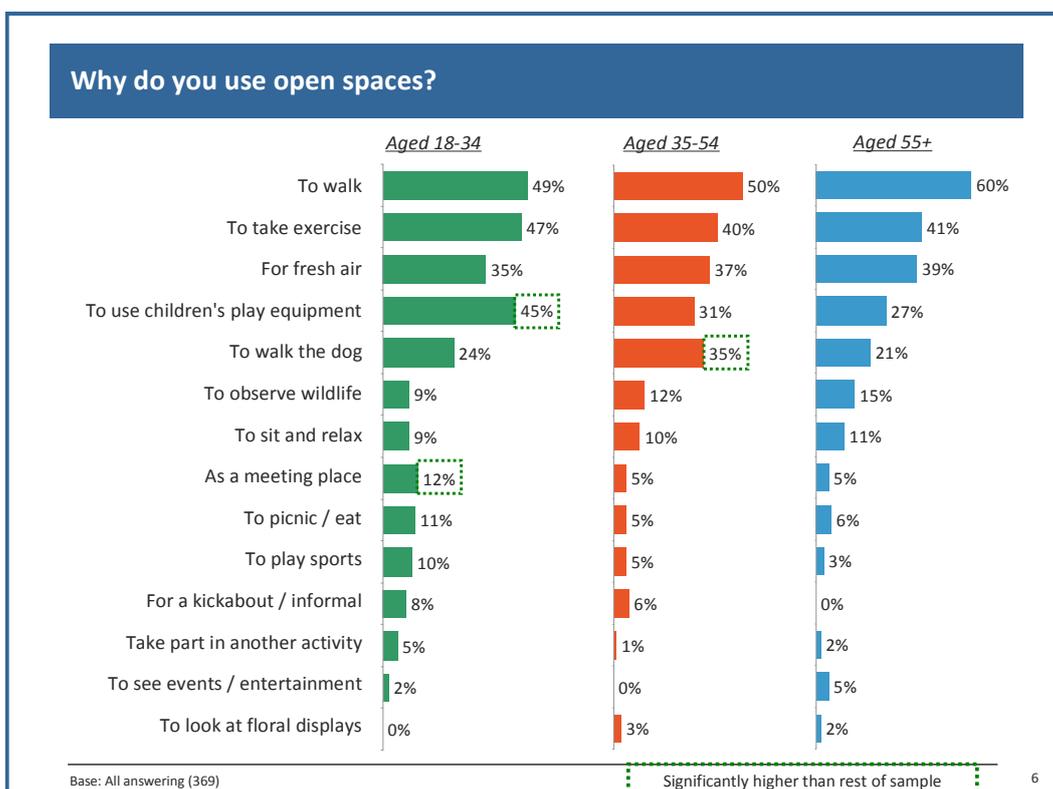


There are significant differences when looking at the responses of male and female residents. Whilst the most frequent responses are common amongst both male and female residents, a significantly higher proportion of female residents mentioned using children's play equipment (41% compared to 25% of male residents) and to walk the dog (38% compared to 17% of male residents).

A significantly higher proportion of male residents mentioned to observe wildlife (16% compared to 8% of female residents).



There are also significant differences when looking at the responses of the different age groups surveyed. A significantly higher proportion of residents aged 18-34 years old mentioned to use children’s play equipment (45%) and as a meeting place (12%). A significantly higher proportion of residents aged 35-54 years old mentioned to walk the dog (35%).

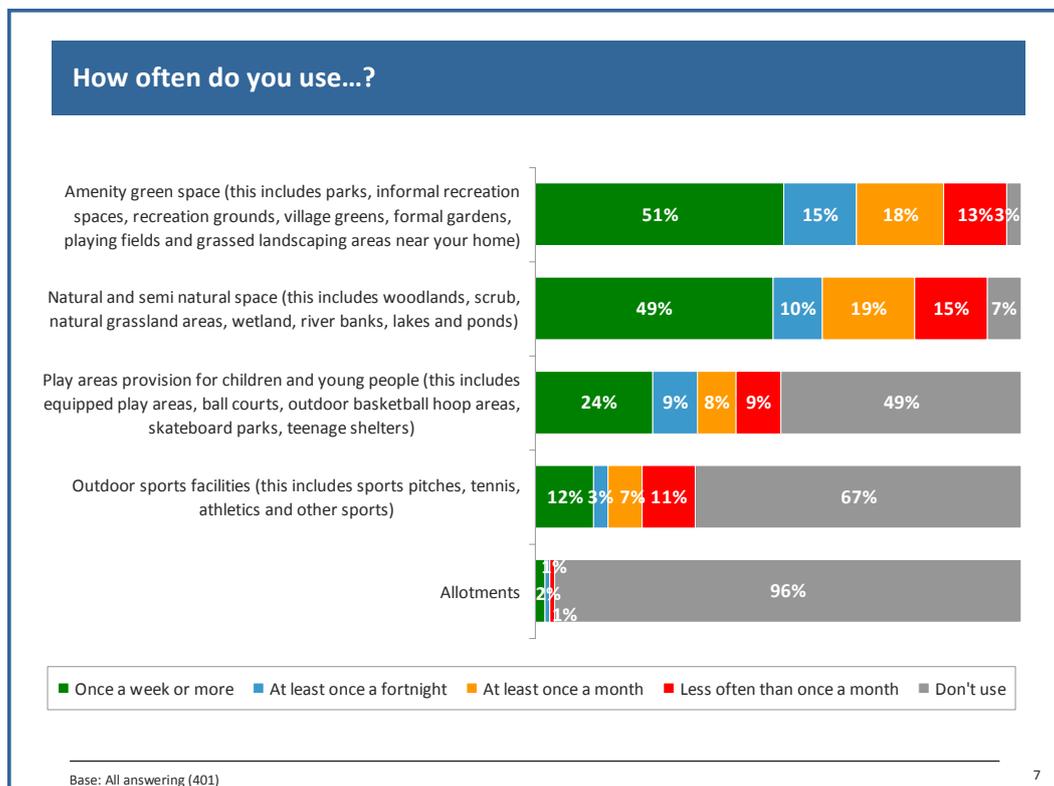


3.2 USE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF OPEN SPACE

Residents were asked to indicate how often they use each of the following types of open space. The following introductions were read out in full to residents to aid understanding of the typology titles:

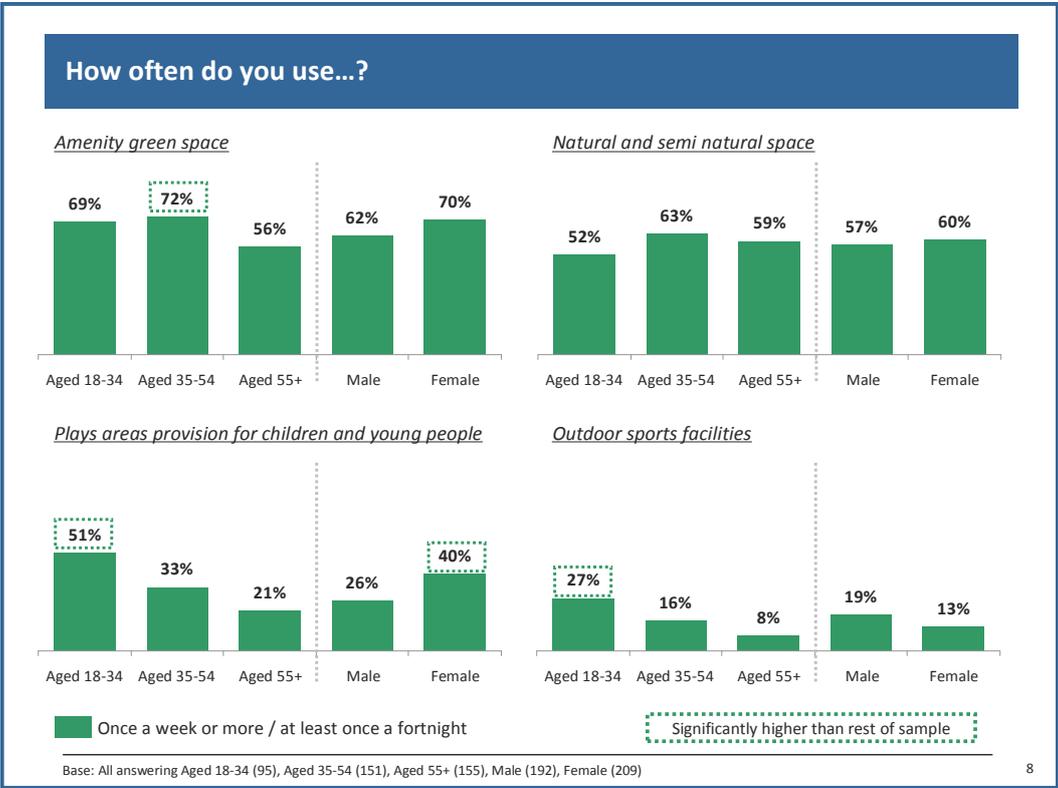
1. Amenity green space – including parks, informal recreation spaces, recreation grounds, village greens, formal gardens, playing fields and grassed landscaping areas near your home. Please note this does not include natural spaces also found in some parks such as woodland, lakes or natural grassland areas).
2. Outdoor sports facilities – including sports pitches, tennis, athletics and other sports.
3. Natural and semi natural space – including woodlands, scrub, natural grassland areas, wetland, river banks, lakes and ponds.
4. Play areas provision for children and young people – including equipped play areas, ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateboard parks, teenage shelters
5. Allotments

Of the five typologies, amenity green space is used most often by the residents surveyed – 66% indicated they use it at least once a fortnight. Usage of natural and semi natural space ranked second with 59% indicating they use it at least once a fortnight. A third of residents (33%) indicated they use play area provision for children and young people and 15% indicated they use outdoor sports facilities at least once a fortnight.



There are significant differences in terms of use of amenity green space, play area provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities:

- Amenity green space – a significantly higher proportion of 35-54 year olds indicated they use it more than once a fortnight (72%)
- Play area provision for children and young people – a significantly higher proportion of 18-34 year olds and female residents indicated they use it more than once a fortnight (51% and 40% respectively)
- Outdoor sports facilities – a significantly higher proportion of 18-34 year olds indicated they use it more than once a fortnight (27%)

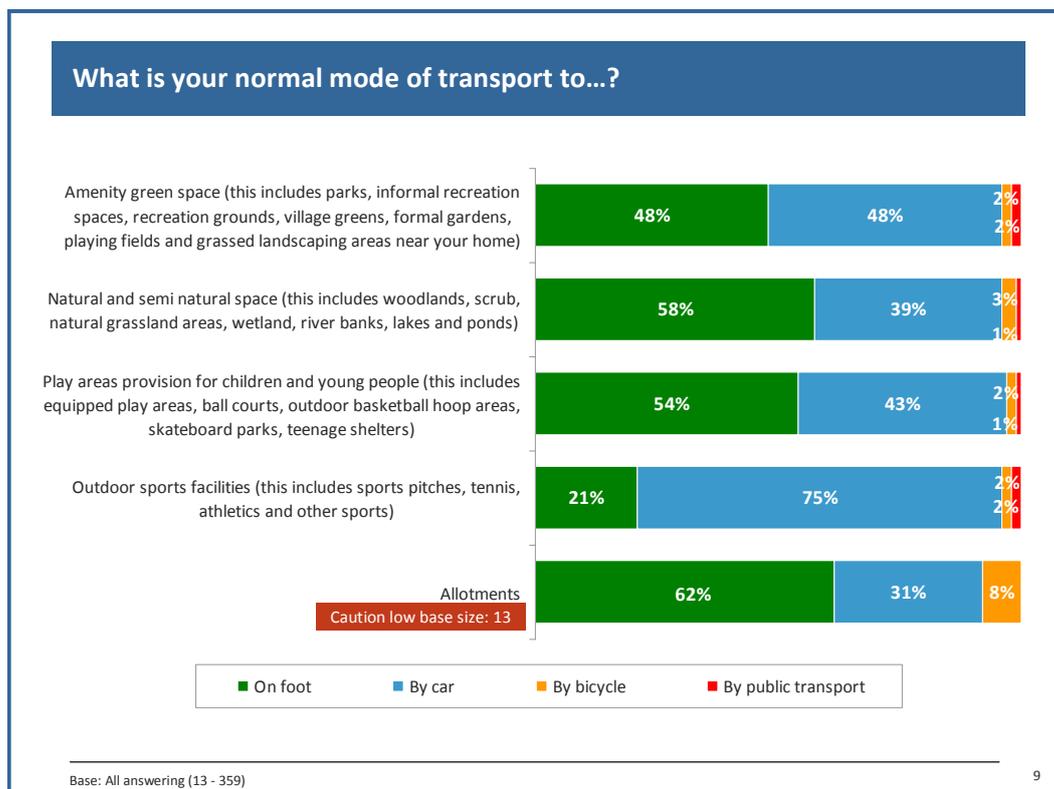


3.3 MODE OF TRANSPORT AND LENGTH OF TIME TO GET TO

Residents were asked to indicate their normal mode of transport to each of the open space typologies they visit. The most common modes of transport across all typologies are by foot or by car.

Even proportions are observed in terms of amenity green space (48% on foot and by car). There is a slight skew towards access on foot for both natural and semi natural space and play areas provision (58% and 54% respectively).

In comparison, the majority travel to outdoor sports facilities by car (75%).

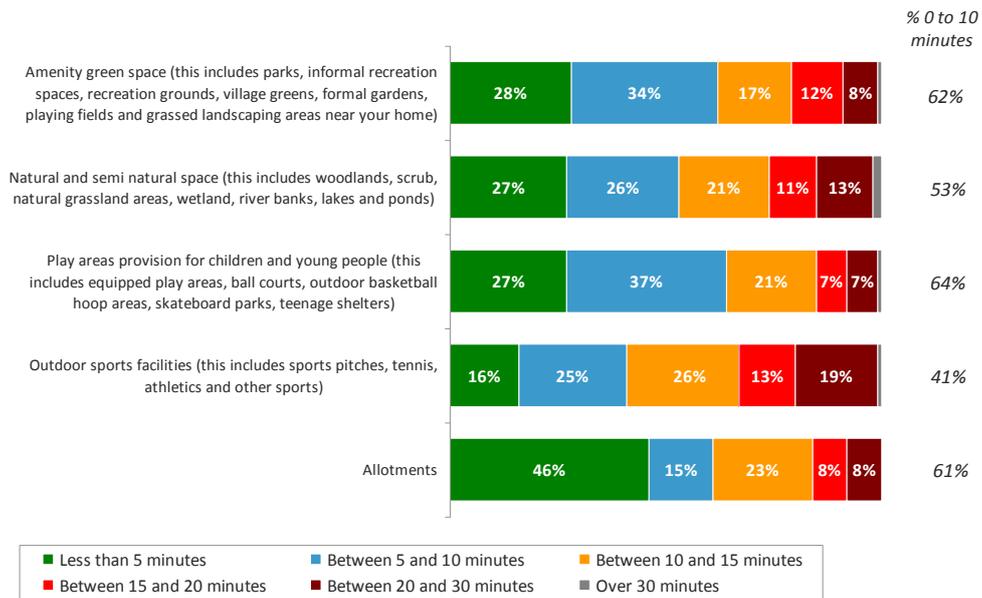


Residents were also asked to indicate the length of time it takes to get to each of the open space typologies they use. Of the typologies, amenity green space, play area provision and allotments appear to be in close proximity to residents with 62%, 64% and 61% respectively indicating it takes up to 10 minutes to reach them.

53% of residents indicated it takes up to 10 minutes to reach the natural and semi natural space they visit, with a further 21% indicating it takes between 10 and 15 minutes.

As perhaps expected, residents indicate it takes longer to get to the outdoor sports facilities they use, with 41% indicating it takes up to 10 minutes and 26% indicating it takes between 10 and 15 minutes.

How long does it take you to get to...?



Base: All answering (13 - 359)

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3.4 TYPE OF OPEN SPACE USED MOST OFTEN

Residents were asked to describe the open space they use most often in their own words. The main purpose of this question was to identify the typology that residents use most often.

This question posed some challenges as the majority of users referenced a place as opposed to a type of space when describing what they use most often. In reality, a number of open spaces across the borough of Maidstone contain a mixture of space typologies, for example a mix of amenity green space and natural and semi natural space.

This is particularly apparent in the case of Mote Park – a frequently used open space that contains four of the open space typologies – amenity green space, sports pitches, natural and semi natural space and play areas. 142 residents referenced Mote Park at this question (39%) of the sample answering.

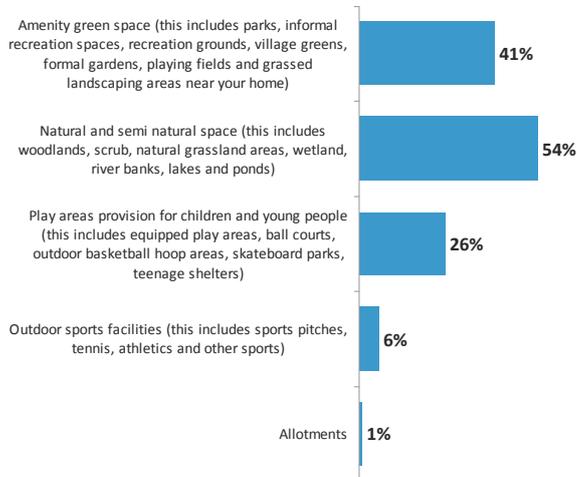
As a result we have accepted multiple responses to this question as some residents believe they use more than one typology in their visit, e.g. the amenity green space and natural and semi natural space at Mote Park.

We would also advise some caution surrounding the comparison of the amenity green space and natural and semi natural space figures as we recognise that despite explanation there may be some overlap between the two because residents see these as the same type of space (as they often exist in the same place).

54% of residents indicated they use natural and semi natural space most often. 41% of residents indicated they use amenity green space most often. As perhaps expected, a higher proportion of residents aged 55 and over use natural and semi natural space most often.

26% of residents indicated they use play area provisions most often. This is significantly higher amongst residents aged 18-34 and female residents.

Can you please briefly describe the open space you use most often?



	Amenity green space	Natural and semi natural space	Play areas provision
AGE			
- Aged 18-34	43%	45%	36%
- Aged 35-54	43%	53%	24%
- Aged 55+	38%	60%	21%
GENDER			
- Male	39%	56%	19%
- Female	43%	51%	32%

Significantly higher than rest of sample

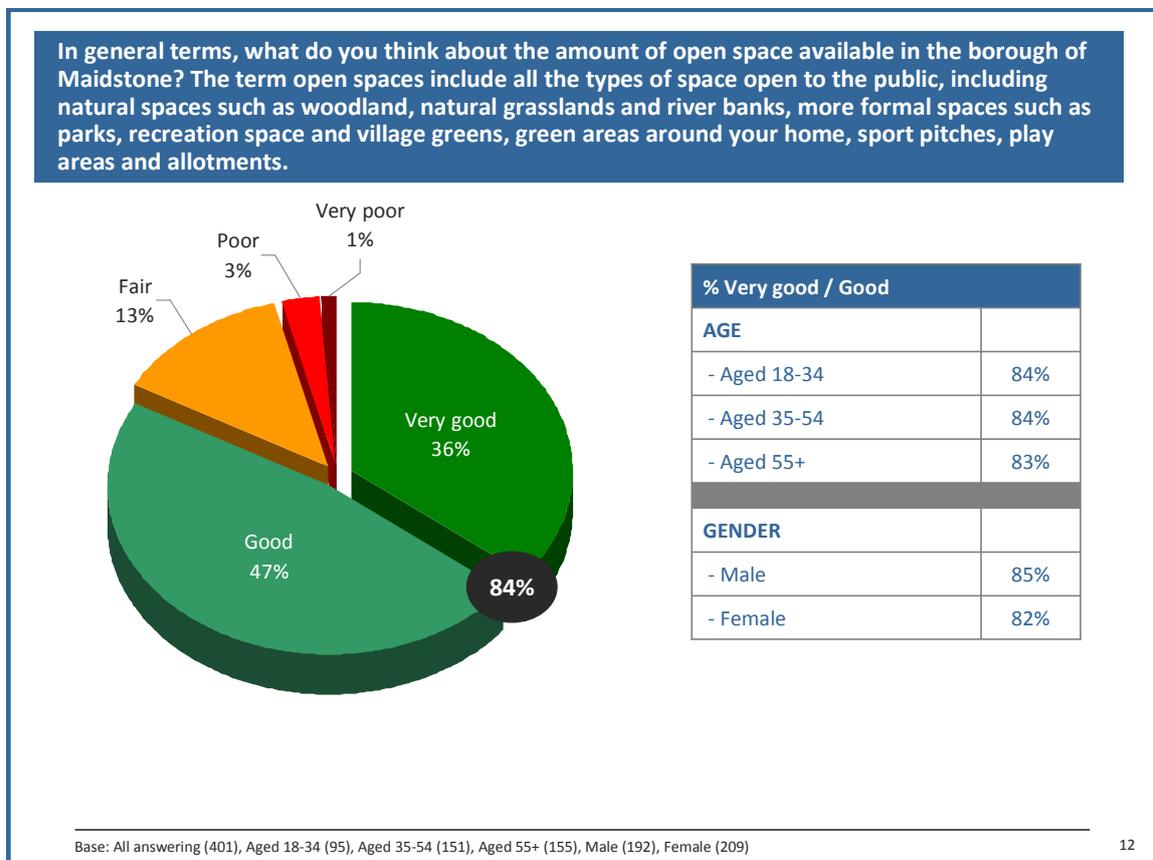
Base: All answering (369), Aged 18-34 (91), Aged 35-54 (147), Aged 55+ (131), Male (178), Female (191)

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4. CURRENT PROVISION

4.1 AMOUNT OF OPEN SPACE AVAILABLE IN THE BOROUGH

The vast majority of residents believe the amount of open space available in the borough of Maidstone is either very good or good (84%). This is significantly higher than the proportion indicating very good or good in the survey conducted in 2005 (53%). This year, 13% of residents rated the amount of open space available as fair and 4% rated it as poor or very poor. Proportions are consistent across both male and female residents and the age groups surveyed, ranging from 82% to 85% rating the amount of open space available as very good / good.

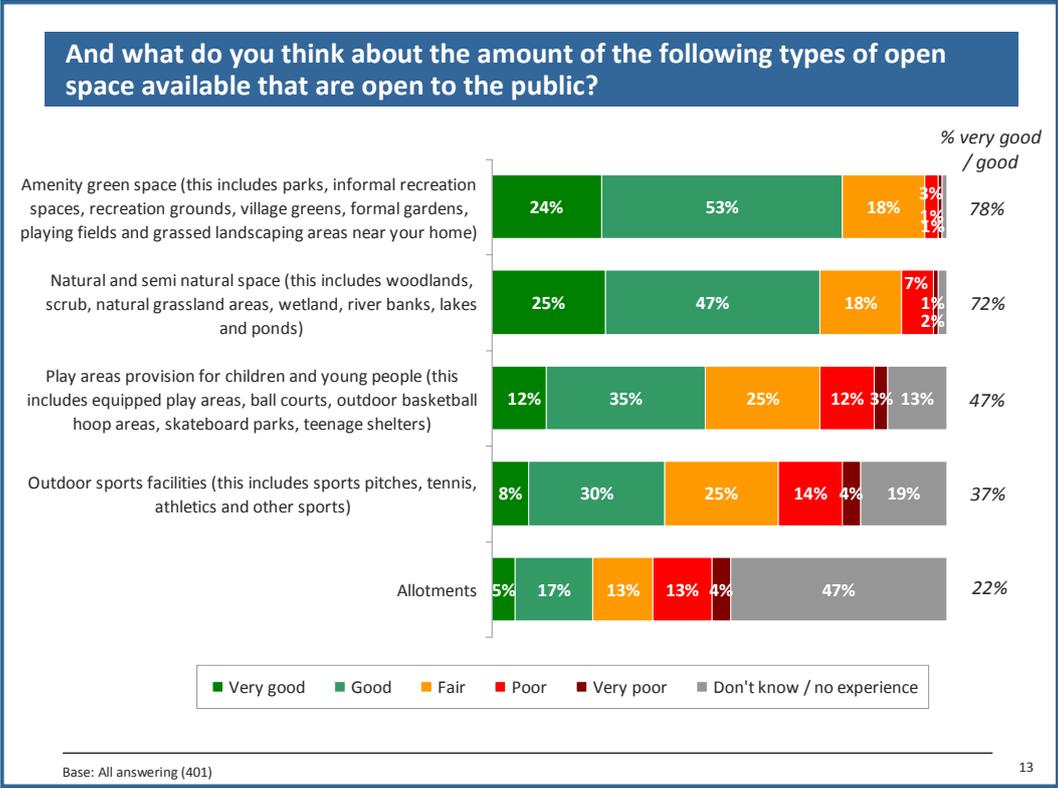


Residents were also asked to indicate what they think about the amount of the open space typologies available that are open to the public.

Response to the amount of amenity green space and natural and semi natural space is encouraging with 78% and 72% rating it as very good or good respectively.

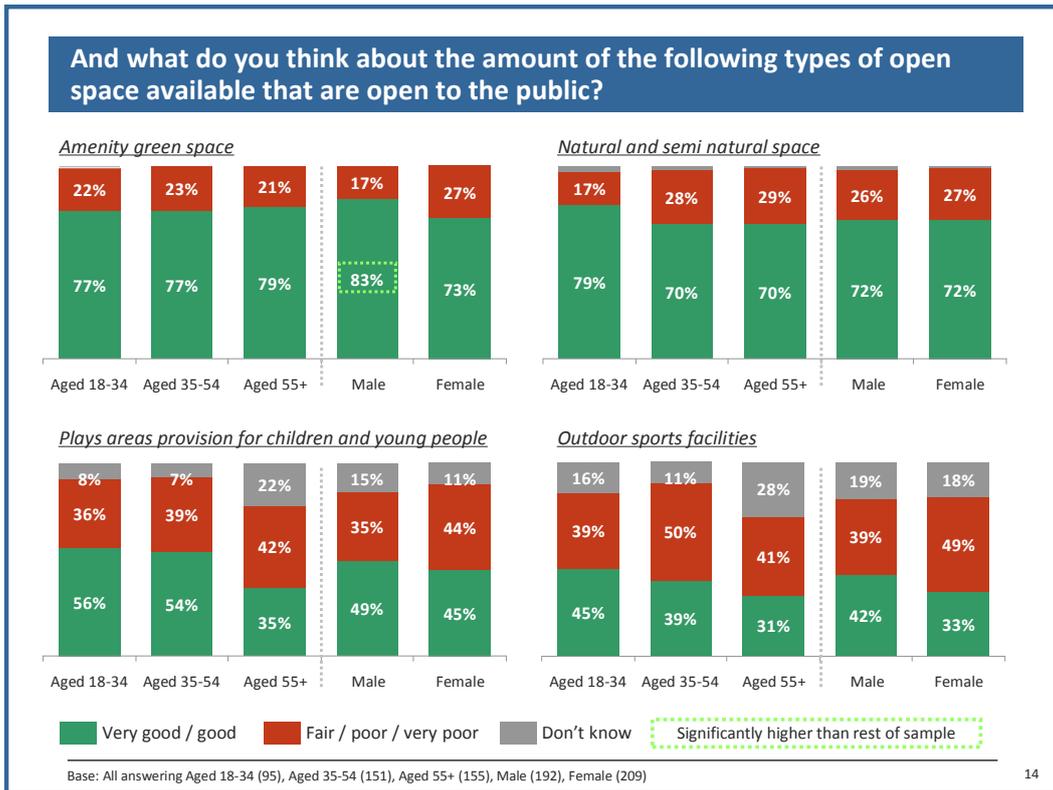
There are some concerns expressed with regard to play area provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities with 40% and 43% rating them as fair, poor or very poor respectively.

There is however also some uncertainty with regard to the provision of play areas and outdoor sports facilities with 13% and 19% indicating they were not sure / did not have any experience on which to make a judgement. 47% indicated they were not sure about the amount of allotments available that are open to the public.



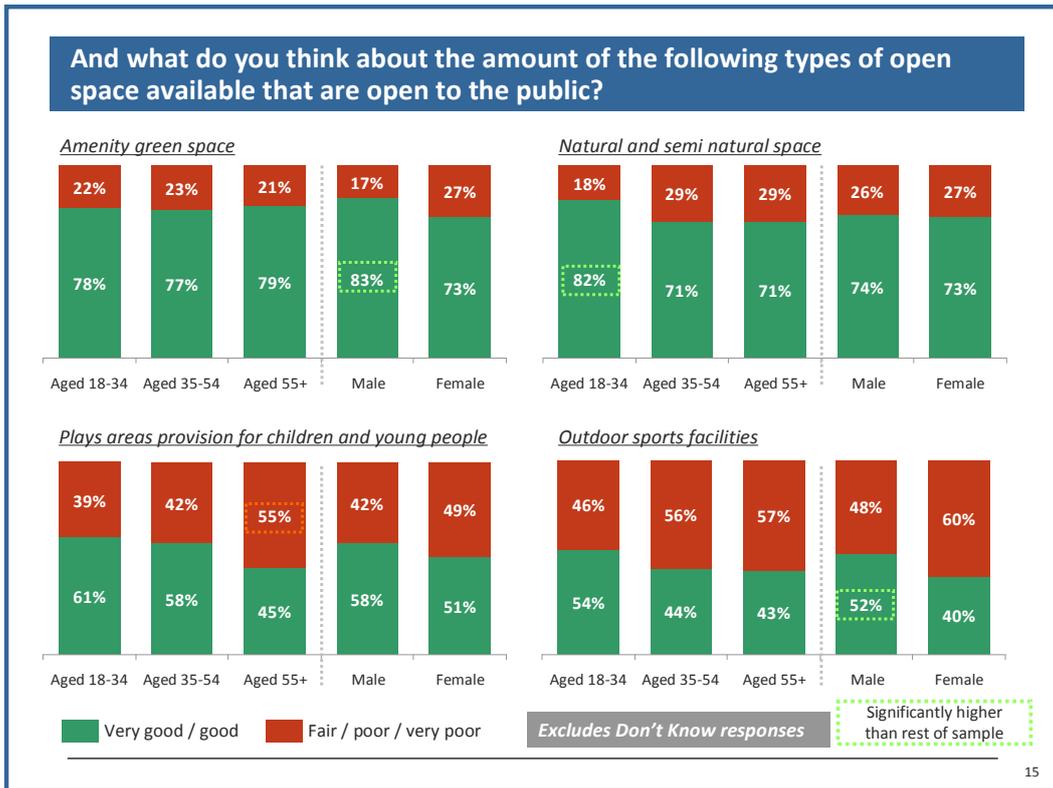
There are some significant differences when looking at results by demographic group. A significantly higher proportion of male residents rate amenity green space as very good or good (83% compared to 73% of female residents).

As perhaps expected, uncertainty with regard to play area provision and outdoor sports facilities is highest amongst residents aged 55 and over.

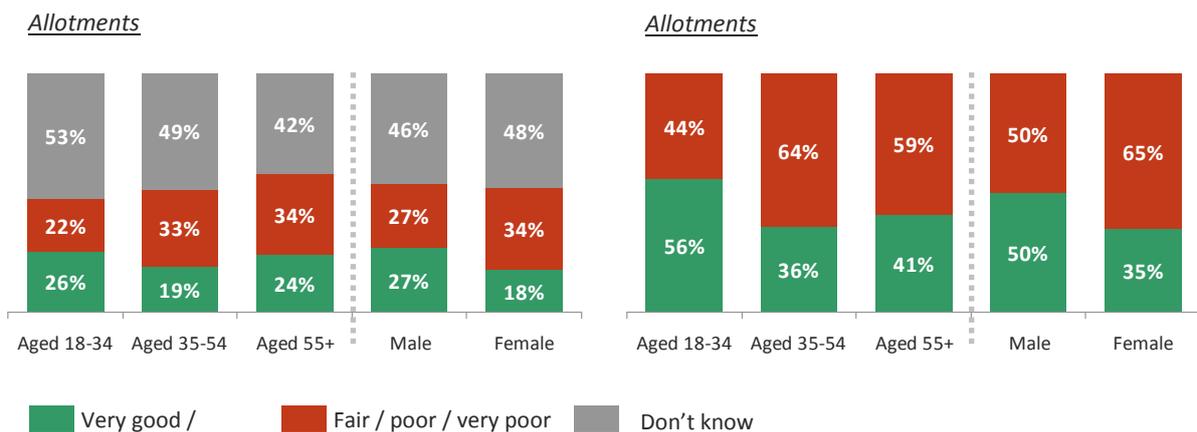


With don't know ratings removed, the concerns expressed with regard to play area provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities are more apparent across all of the demographic groups surveyed.

Perceptions of natural and semi natural space, amenity green space and outdoor sports facility amounts are highest amongst residents aged 18-34 (82%, 78% and 61% respectively). A significantly higher proportion of residents aged 55 and over rated the play area provision for children and young people as fair, poor or very poor (55%, once don't know ratings were removed).

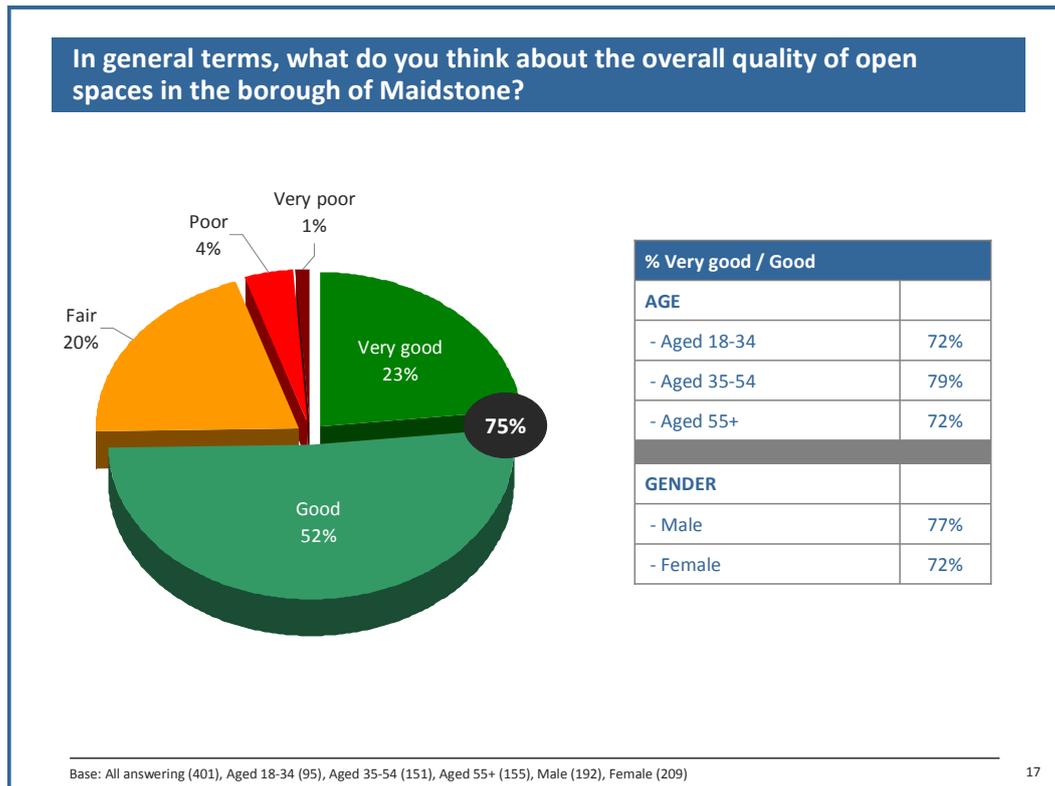


Uncertainty with regard to allotment provision is high amongst all demographic groups. With don't know ratings removed (on the far right chart below), there is some concern expressed for the amount of allotment space provided across the borough of Maidstone.



4.2 QUALITY OF OPEN SPACE AVAILABLE IN THE BOROUGH

Three quarters of residents (75%) rate the overall quality of open spaces in the borough of Maidstone as very good or good. This is significantly higher to the proportion indicating very good or good in the survey conducted in 2005 (57%). This year, 20% of residents rated the quality of open space available as fair and 5% rated it as poor or very poor. Proportions are consistent across both male and female residents and the age groups surveyed, ranging from 72% to 79% rating the quality of open space available as very good / good.

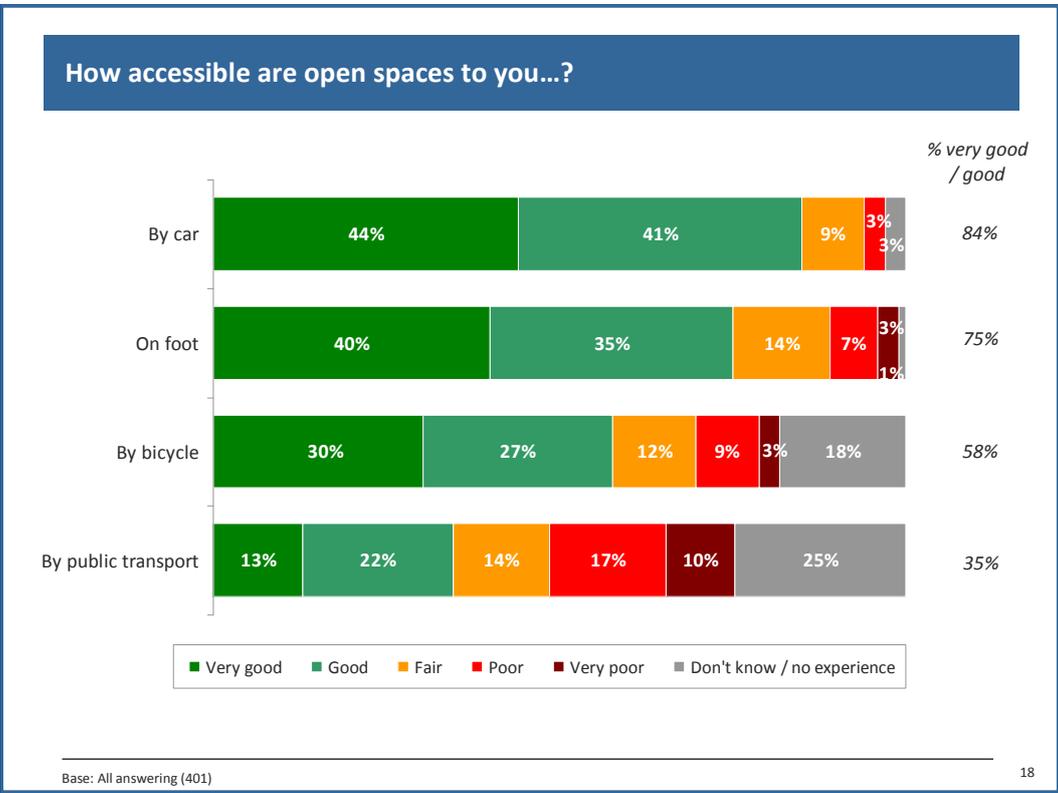


4.3 ACCESSIBILITY OF OPEN SPACES

Residents were asked to indicate how accessible open spaces are to them at an overall level by the varying means of transport: by car, on foot, by bicycle and by public transport.

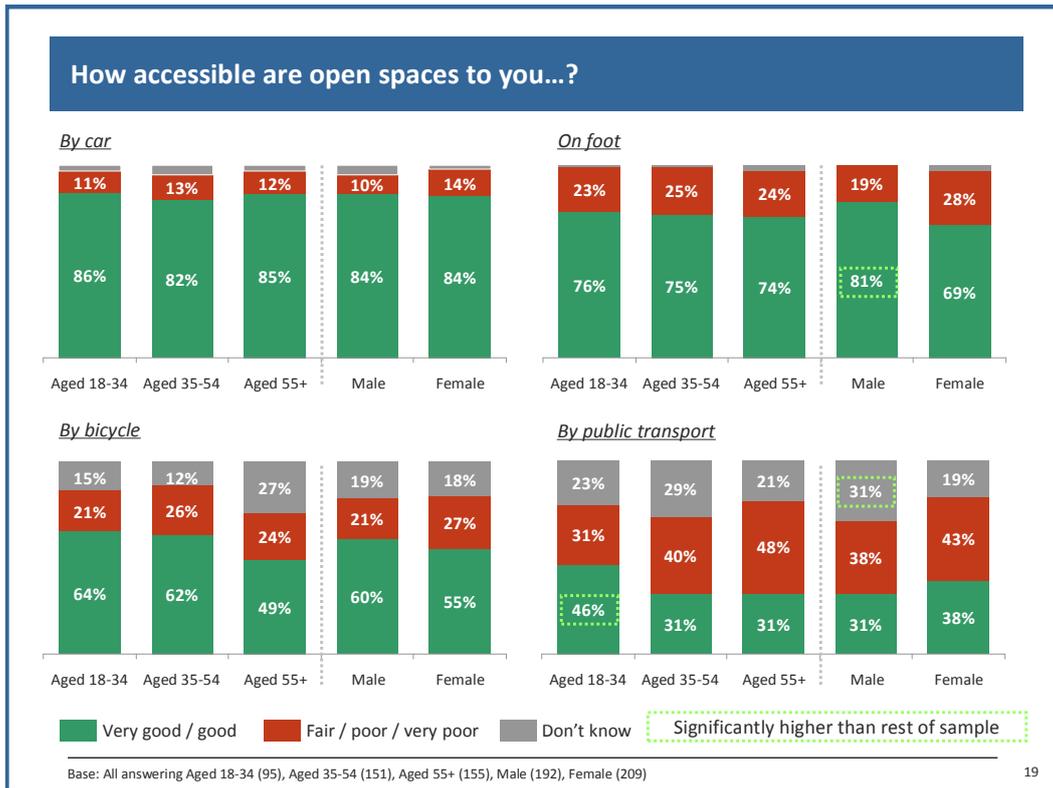
The vast majority consider the access of open spaces by car to be very good or good (84%). Three quarters consider the access of open spaces on foot to be very good or good (75%).

Perceptions with regards to access by bicycle and public transport are more varied, with lower opinion ratings and uncertainty expressed. Only 57% rate access by bicycle as very good or good and 35% rate access by public transport as very good or good. 18% and 25% of residents are not sure / have no experience with regard to bicycle access and public transport access respectively.

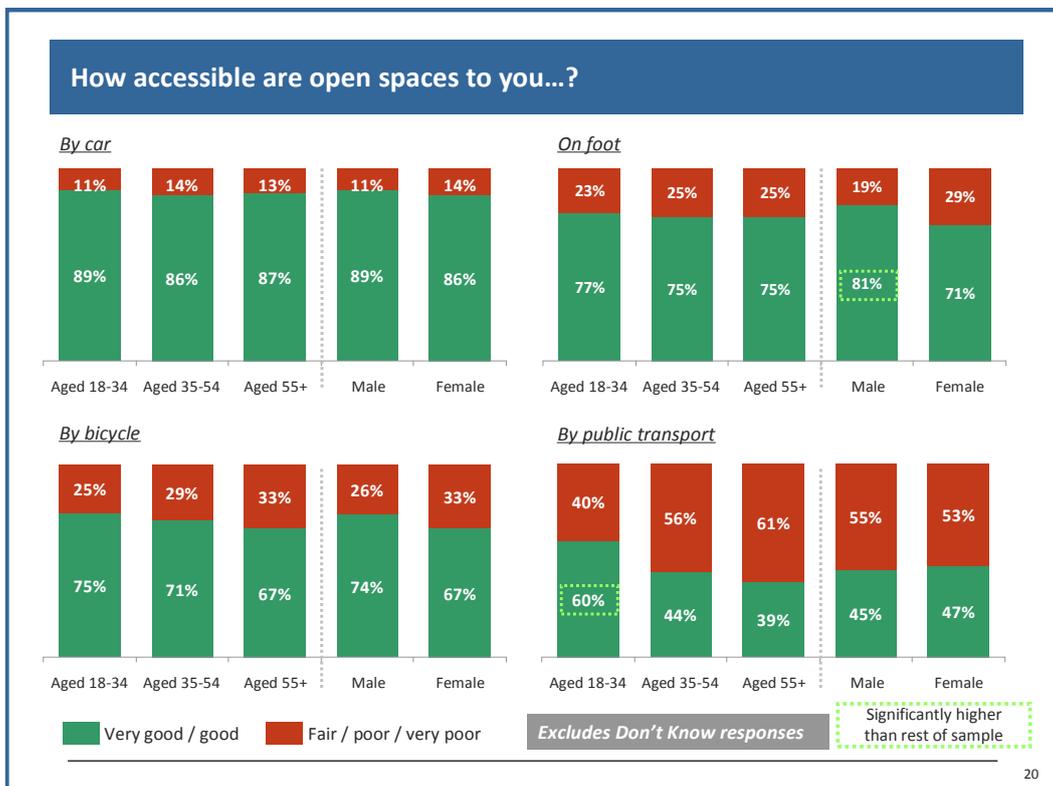


There are some significant differences when looking at results by demographic group. A significantly higher proportion of male residents rate access on foot as very good or good (81% compared to 69% of female residents).

As perhaps expected, uncertainty with regard to access by bicycle is highest amongst residents aged 55 and over. Uncertainty with regard to access by public transport is higher across all demographic groups.



With don't know ratings removed, there are concerns expressed with regard to access by public transport across all of the demographic groups surveyed. A significantly higher proportion of 18-34 year old residents rate access by public transport as very good or good (60%) compared to the rest of the sample interviewed.



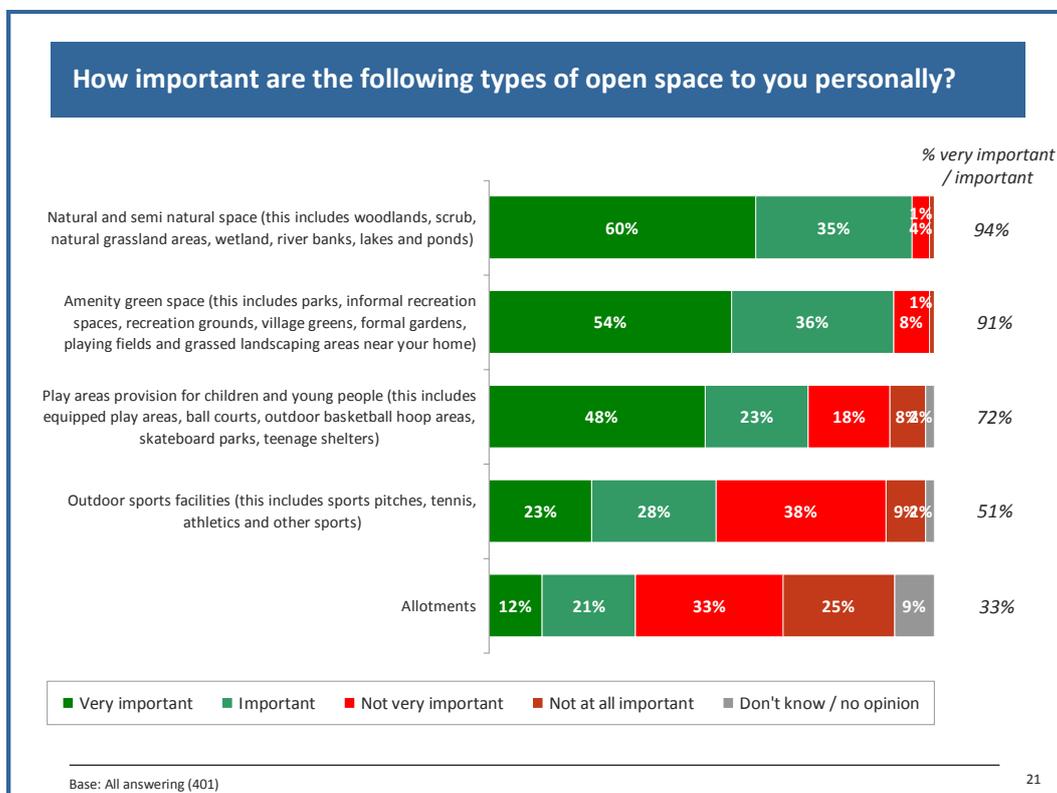
5. IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF OPEN SPACE

5.1 IMPORTANCE OF OPEN SPACE TYPOLOGIES

As evidenced in terms of usage patterns, the importance of the open space typologies varies. At an overall level, natural and semi natural space and amenity green space are considered important by the majority surveyed (94% and 91% rate them as very important or important respectively).

Just under three quarters (72%) rate play areas provision for children and young people as very important or important.

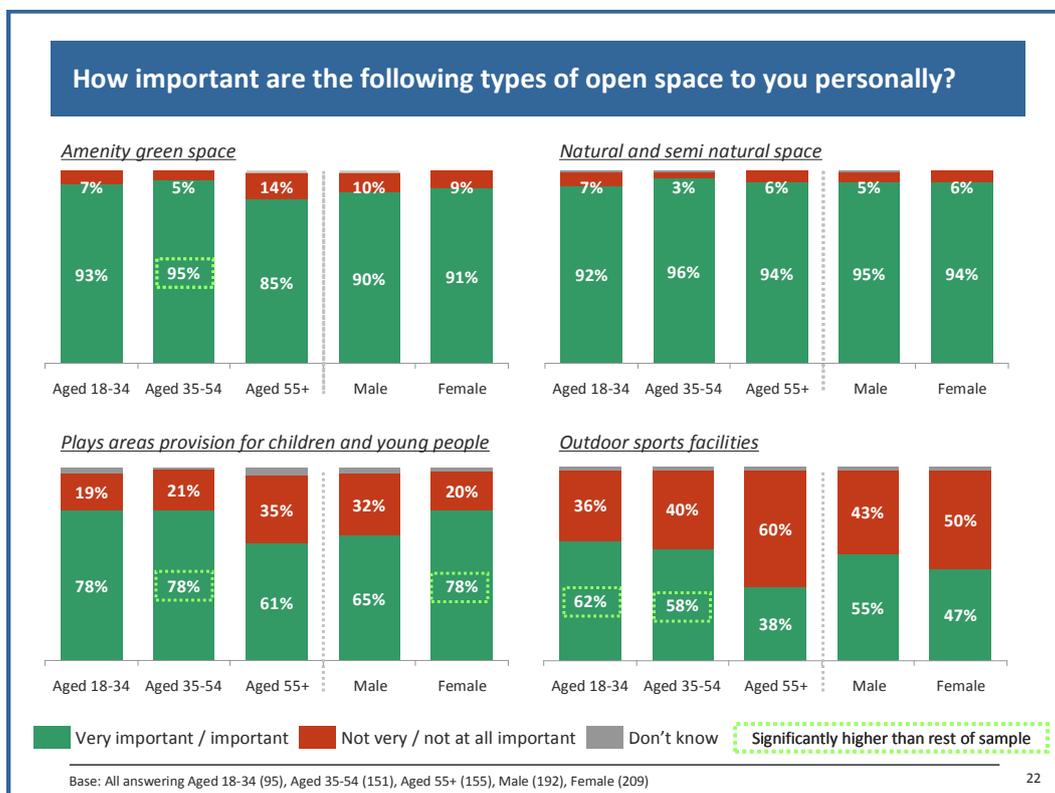
Just over half (51%) rate outdoor sports facilities as very important or important and a third (33%) rate allotments as very important or important.



Both natural and semi natural space and amenity green space are considered important to all the demographic groups surveyed with:

- 92% - 96% of the demographic groups rating natural and semi natural space as very important or important
- 85% - 96% of the demographic groups rating amenity green space as very important or important
- 85% - 95% of the demographic groups rating amenity green space as very important or important. Amenity green space is particularly important to residents aged 35-54.

As observed in usage patterns, there are significant differences when assessing the importance of play area provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities. Play area provision is particularly important to residents aged 35-54 and female residents (78% rating very important or important). Outdoor sports facilities are particularly important to residents aged 18-54 (62% of 18-34 year olds and 58% of 35-54 year olds rating very important or important).

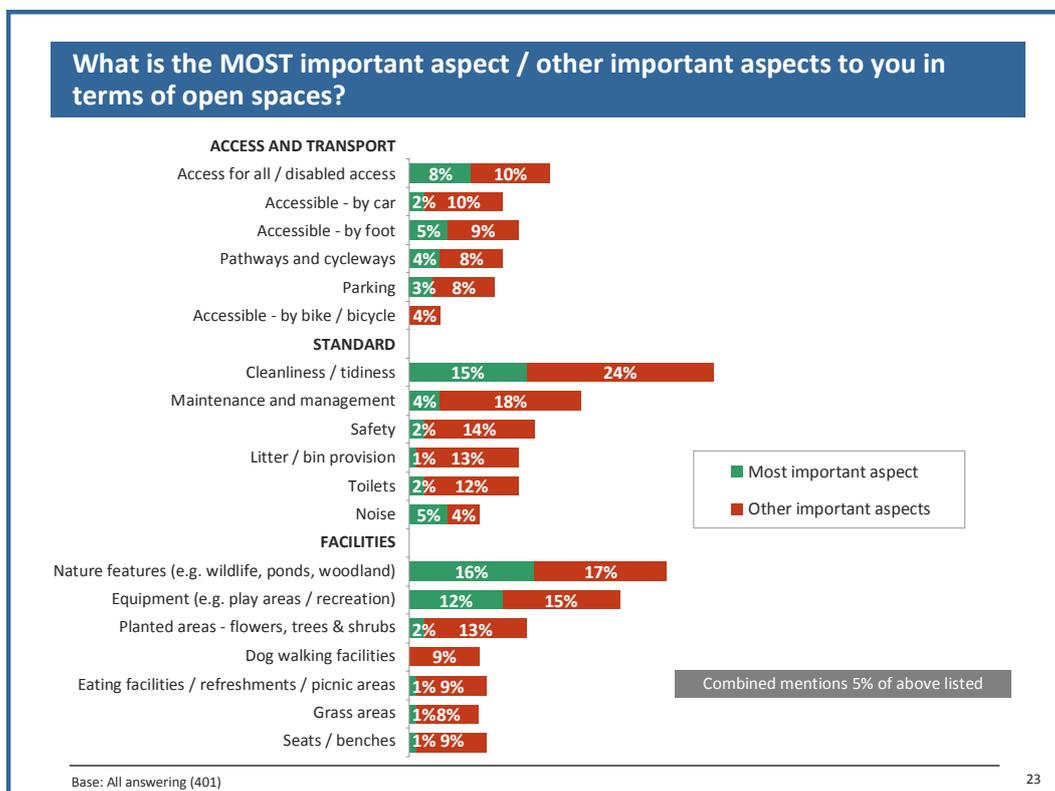


5.2 IMPORTANCE OF OPEN SPACE ASPECTS

Residents were asked to indicate the importance of a prompted list of access & transport, standard and facility aspects. First residents were asked to select the most important aspect to them (single selection), followed by other aspects that were important to them (multiple selection).

Cleanliness / tidiness are considered the most important aspect with 39% of residents selecting this aspect (15% as the most important, 24% as other aspects that are important). Nature features (e.g. wildlife, ponds, woodland) and equipment (e.g. play areas / recreation) are considered the next most important with 33% and 27% of residents selecting these aspects respectively. Maintenance and management is selected by 22% of residents.

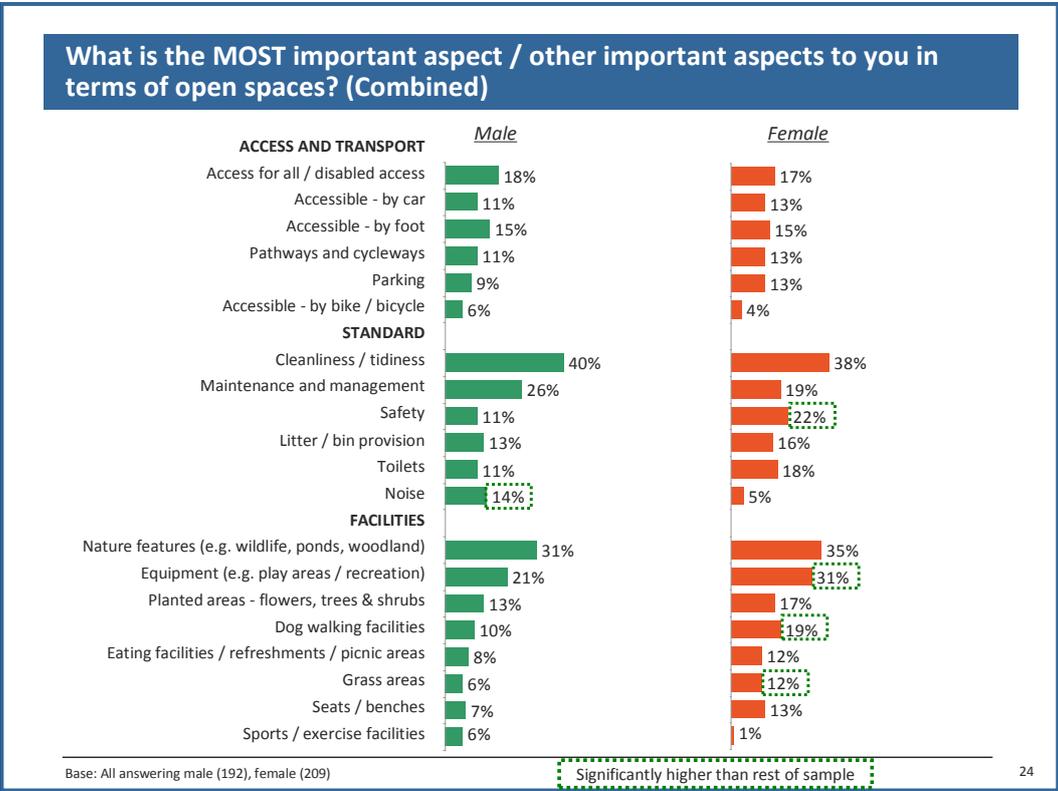
Other areas are considered important features to smaller proportions and are often considered as secondary factors of importance compared to those mentioned above.



There are significant differences observed when comparing male and female residents combined scores (i.e. the proportions selecting most important and other important aspects together).

Whilst cleanliness / tidiness and nature features are considered of broadly equal importance to both male and female residents, a significantly higher proportion of female residents consider equipment (e.g. play areas / recreation), safety, dog walking facilities and grassed areas important (31%, 22%, 19% and 12% respectively).

A clearer hierarchy is observed amongst male residents. Whilst a secondary aspect, noise is considered more important to male residents (14%) compared to female residents (5%).



There are also significant differences observed when comparing the combined scores from the different age groups of resident.

Cleanliness / tidiness stands out as particularly important to residents aged 18-34 (49%) and residents aged 35-54 (45%) compared to residents aged 55 and over (26%). In contrast, nature features (e.g. wildlife, ponds and woodlands) stand out as particularly important to residents aged 55 and over (43%).

In addition, equipment (e.g. play areas / recreation) and safety are selected by a significantly higher proportion of 18-34 year old residents (39% and 25% respectively).

