

**North Hertfordshire**  
**Open Space Review & Standards**  
**2016**

## **PART 1: OPEN SPACE REVIEW**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities; and if well designed and maintained they can make areas attractive places to live, work and visit.
- 1.2 Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17): Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002) aimed to improve the quantity and quality of open space, by requiring local authorities to undertake an assessment of needs and opportunities in their area, and to develop a series of local standards by which to improve the overall provision of open space.
- 1.3 In 2009 an assessment was carried out to assess the provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities in North Hertfordshire, based on PPG17 and its Companion Guide (Assessing Needs and Opportunities). This North Hertfordshire Green Space Standards document examined the existing provision based on different types of open space and set out open space standards, differentiating between urban and rural developments.
- 1.4 The purpose of this 2016 report is to review open space provision in the District since the open space assessment undertaken in 2009. In doing so, it will provide an updated position on the latest provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities in North Hertfordshire. This work is being done in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (2014), which have replaced PPG17 and its Companion Guide.
- 1.5 This 2016 update will ensure that the Local Plan is supported by an up-to-date assessment and will form part of the evidence base. It will also inform the development of future planning policy as appropriate, including any Neighbourhood Plans.
- 1.6 The definition of open space used in this update is unchanged from the 2009 assessment, which was set out in previous national planning policy (PPG17) and is now subsequently set out in the NPPF:

“All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity”.
- 1.7 The following typologies of open space, sport and recreation facilities are used and remain unchanged from the types of open space analysed in 2009:
  - Parks and Gardens
  - Amenity Green Space (including recreation spaces)<sup>1</sup>
  - Provision for Children and Young People
  - Outdoor Sports Facilities (including school facilities with community use)
  - Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace
  - Green Corridors
  - Cemeteries and Churchyards

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<sup>1</sup> Recreation spaces may also include play space and sports facilities, which for the purposes of this assessment have been counted separately

- Allotments

- 1.8 Each site is assessed with information provided on type of open space, size and location. This helps to determine the overall provision in the District in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility. Furthermore, the District is divided into six areas, including the four main towns of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston as well as Rural Area East and Rural Area West. Further detail on the methodology is set out below.

## **2. National Policy Context**

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines the Government's planning policies and how these should be applied. The requirements of the NPPF in relation to open space (replacing Planning Policy Guidance 17) are that:

*"Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreation provision is required." [Paragraph 73]*

- 2.2 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) states that:

*"Open space should be taken into account in planning for new development and considering proposals that may affect existing open space (see NPPF paragraphs 73-74). Open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. It can provide health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby; have an ecological value and contribute to green infrastructure (see NPPF paragraph 114), as well as being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development, and an important component in the achievement of sustainable development (NPPF paragraphs 6-10)."*

## **3. Local context**

- 3.1 Since the last open space assessment was undertaken in 2009 the emphasis has been on protecting existing open space, sport and recreation facilities to ensure that the District retains an adequate level of provision. It has also been a priority, where resources have been available, to improve open space provision across the District.
- 3.2 The Citizen Panel undertaken in 2014 indicates that 82% of residents in the District use parks and open spaces, which represents an increase in 8% since 2009. This shows that parks and open spaces are extremely valuable to the local community for both sport and recreation.
- 3.3 The emerging Local Plan policies aim to ensure that existing open spaces and facilities are protected and enhanced and that developments contribute to the provision of open space.

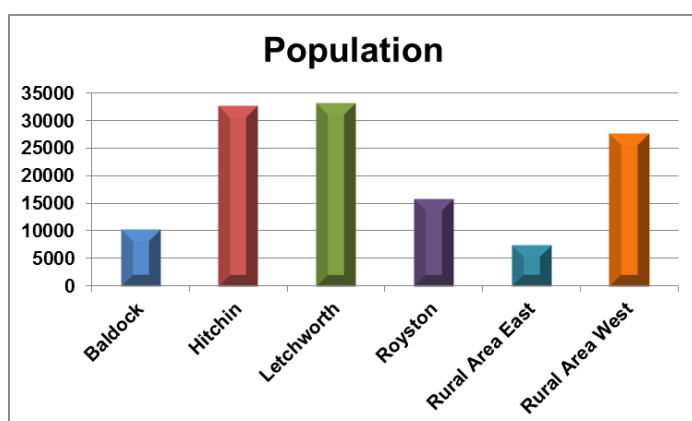
- 3.4 The Countryside Management Service provides management support to deliver maintenance at many of the countryside sites through friends of or groups of volunteers.

## Population

- 3.5 The District covers an area of 37,537 hectares<sup>2</sup>. The geographical area of the six analysis areas used in this assessment is set out below:

| Analysis Area          | Hectares (ha) |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Baldock                | 322           |
| Hitchin                | 1,564         |
| Letchworth Garden City | 2,011         |
| Royston                | 844           |
| Rural Area East        | 16,399        |
| Rural Area West        | 16,397        |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>37,537</b> |

- 3.6 The population of North Hertfordshire is focused within the four largest towns.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the 2011 Census the population in the District was 127,114 people. For the purposes of this assessment, the population in the six analysis areas based on the 2011 Census is as follows:



| Analysis Area          | Hectares (ha)  |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Baldock                | 10,280         |
| Hitchin                | 32,731         |
| Letchworth Garden City | 33,249         |
| Royston                | 15,781         |
| Rural Area East        | 7,395          |
| Rural Area West        | 27,678         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>127,114</b> |

- 3.7 By 2031, North Hertfordshire's population is projected to have grown to around 158,000<sup>4</sup> (around 20%). It is therefore essential that the projected increase in the number of people living in the District by the end of the plan period are planned for and that new development provides the necessary open space to meet the needs of new residents.
- 3.8 In terms of population profile, the District is anticipated to see a large increase in the number of people over the age of 65 over the plan period. In addition, whilst the District is relatively affluent, there are some communities that experience deprivation, and North Hertfordshire has two Index of Multiple Deprivation areas within the top 20 which indicates deprivation.<sup>5</sup> These factors are therefore important considerations

<sup>2</sup> Figure taken from the 2009 assessment for consistency

<sup>3</sup> The Council sets out proposed settlement boundaries in the emerging Local Plan, which would revise the town areas to 443.4 ha (Baldock), 881 ha, 1015 ha and 528.5 ha.

<sup>4</sup> This figure has been derived from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, calculating the additional population associated with an increase of 16,500 homes over the plan period

<sup>5</sup> North Hertfordshire Corporate Plan 2016-2020

when planning future open space, sport and recreational provision to ensure that inclusive and equitable communities can be created.

- 3.9 The Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out key priorities for the period 2013-2016, several of which are relevant to the provision of open space for leisure and sport. These include: promoting maintaining a healthy weight, improving mental health, helping all families to thrive, and enhancing the quality of life for people with long term conditions.

## 4. Methodology

- 4.1 The methodology used to undertake the 2009 assessment was based on the previous national planning guidance, PPG17, and the accompanying Companion Guide. Whilst this has since been deleted, a similar methodology has been used for the 2016 review for continuity.

### Types of open space

- 4.2 The types of open space set out below illustrate the broad range of open spaces that may be of public value. It should be recognised that open spaces can be multi-functional and may have secondary and even further purpose or function.

| Types of open space                                    | Primary purpose   |
|--|---|
| <b>Parks and gardens</b>                               | Parks and gardens: Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events. Examples: Urban parks .   |
| <b>Amenity Greenspace (including recreation space)</b> | Opportunities for informal activities close to home/work or enhancement of the appearance of residential areas<br>Examples: Informal recreation spaces, housing greenspaces, domestic gardens, village greens, and other incidental space.  |
| <b>Provision for children and young people</b>         | Provision for children and young people: Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people.<br>Examples: Equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard parks, 'hanging out' areas including teenage shelters.   |
| <b>Outdoor sports facilities<sup>6</sup></b>           | Outdoor sports facilities, including schools: Participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports.<br>Examples: Tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletic tracks, school playing fields, institutional playing fields and other outdoor sports areas. |
| <b>Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace</b>             | Wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education/awareness. Examples: Woodland and scrub, grassland, heath/moor, wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and bare rock habitats (e.g. cliffs, quarries, pits) and Local Nature Reserves.  |
| <b>Green Corridors</b>                                 | Walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife migration. Examples: river and canal banks, road and rail corridors, cycling routes, pedestrian paths, rights of way and permissive paths.   |
| <b>Cemeteries and Churchyards</b>                      | Providing areas for quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.  |

<sup>6</sup> Including schools where available for community use

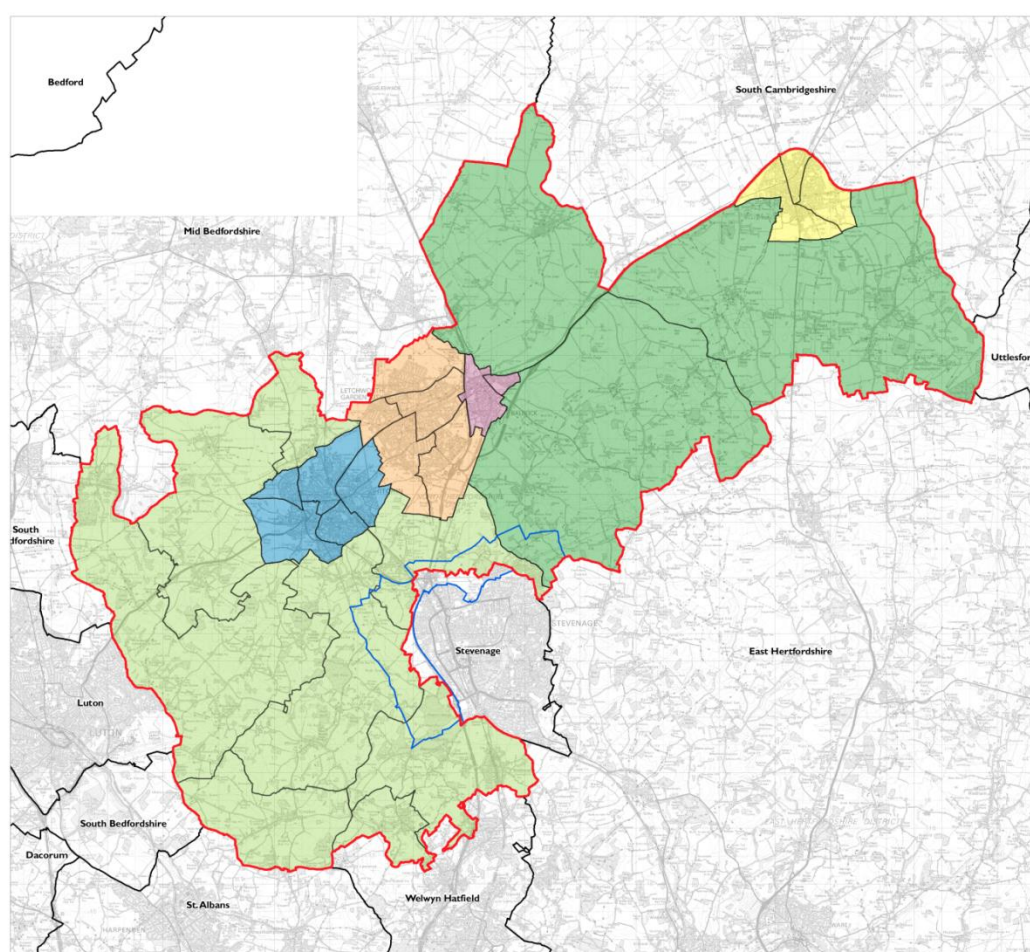
## Allotments

Opportunities for people to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion.







### Geographical Provision

4.3 In addition to assessing provision across the whole District, this review considers provision across six spatial areas, which were also used for the 2009 assessment<sup>7</sup>:

- Baldock
- Hitchin
- Letchworth Garden City
- Royston
- Rural Area East
- Rural Area West



#### Analysis areas

|   |                        |   |            |
|---|------------------------|---|------------|
|  | Baldock                |  | Royston    |
|  | Hitchin                |  | Rural East |
|  | Letchworth Garden City |  | Rural West |

<sup>7</sup> The map shows the analysis areas and administrative boundaries that were used in the 2009 assessment. This review has been based on the same six analysis areas although the administrative boundaries have been subject to change.



## Stages of the Assessment

- 4.4 Various research methods are used to identify all areas of open space, categorise these into types of open space (as set out previously) and then assess the quantity, quality and accessibility of each typology.
- 4.5 **Assessment of national policy and guidance (National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance)** to establish the key requirements for undertaking such an assessment.
- 4.6 **Desktop study** to identify all open spaces, sports and recreation facilities introduced since the 2009 assessment. Additional information has been gathered from the Council's teams responsible for Greenspaces and Grounds Maintenance, including details of recent projects undertaken; from aerial photography, internet searches and from S106 monitoring and planning application information dating from 2009.
- 4.7 In **2012, the Council issued a survey** to town and parish representatives and relevant Council officers to identify any necessary changes required to the open space data held by the Council. The feedback from this survey has now been incorporated into this 2016 review.
- 4.8 The **Green Space Management Strategy 2014-2019** has been used to identify recent projects completed, which provides an indication of quality improvements. The document additionally identifies priorities for future improvement projects, which demonstrates sites where quality improvements are required. The Strategy document is currently being reviewed.<sup>8</sup>
- 4.9 This assessment also includes updates to outdoor sports facilities that have been included in the **2016 Playing Pitch Strategy** to ensure that any changes (for instance the quality of the provision or the number of pitches) is up to date.<sup>9</sup>
- 4.10 Small sites of less than 0.1 ha are included in this review as these can provide valuable local open space, particularly in residential areas and the town centres. It is also worth noting that open space has been recorded where it is publically accessible, which could include membership of a club or team. Other types of open space (for example agricultural use) are not publically accessible and have therefore not been included within this assessment.
- 4.11 The next step involves assessing the **quantity, quality and accessibility** of each typology. **Deficits, surpluses and priorities** can then be identified and **standards** developed.
- 4.12 Provision is assessed for the whole District, the different type of open space as well for each of the six areas in order to calculate the provision density of each typology (using residential population and open space quantity data).

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<sup>8</sup> The Green Space Management Strategy relates to the four towns of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston as well as sections of Great Ashby, for which the Council is responsible for maintenance.

<sup>9</sup> Data in the 2016 Playing Pitch Strategy was collected in 2015. For pitches, adult pitches are recorded for the purposes of this audit. It is worth noting that in some instances whilst the geographical area of open space may not have changed, the number of pitches could have been amalgamated or sub-divided.



## **5. District Overview**

- 5.1 There are 585 open spaces identified in the District providing different types of open space<sup>10</sup> and covering an area of approximately 2,343.18 hectares (ha). This equates to 6% of the entire District.
- 5.2 This 2016 review of open spaces has identified that there has been a net increase of 58.32 hectares of open spaces since the 2009 assessment. Thirty six new open spaces (covering 88.92ha) have been identified from a number of sources including recent planning applications, S106 reports and the 2012 parish survey. This comprises: 17 Amenity Greenspaces (6.41ha), 1 Green Corridor (2.09ha), 4 Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces (18.67ha), 9 Outdoor Sports Facilities (24.94ha), 1 Park and Garden (36.37) and 4 sites for Provision for Children and Young People (0.44). Five open space sites have been removed from the 2009 assessment comprising 1 Amenity Greenspace, 1 Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace and 3 sites that were not categorised in 2009. These were removed from the 2009 list as they are not publically accessible. The combined loss of these sites constituted 30.6 hectares of open space.
- 5.3 The Rural Area West and Rural Area East have the highest number of open space sites (208 and 128 respectively) and Baldock which has the lowest (45). Whilst this suggests increased accessibility for residents in the rural areas, it is worth noting that the number of sites alone provides no indication regarding quality and actual use. Furthermore, it is logical that the four main towns of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston will have fewer open spaces given their town boundaries, urban nature and smaller geographical area covered. Of the four main towns Letchworth has the highest number of open spaces (115).
- 5.4 A substantial proportion of the District's open spaces are classified as Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (1195.61 ha). In contrast, Provision for Children and Young People represents the lowest provision (12.80ha). Amenity Greenspace accounts for the largest number of open space sites (201), although their often small scale is reflected by their more limited contribution to overall provision.
- 5.5 Over half of all sites (382) in the District are less than 1 ha in size, with a large proportion (297) less than 0.5 ha. These small sites largely comprise Amenity Greenspace.
- 5.6 With a population of 127,114, the total amount of open space equates to approximately 18.38 hectares of open space per 1000 persons. The highest provision is Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (9.41ha/1000 persons). The lowest provision is Provision for Children and Young People (0.1ha/1000 persons), which is to be expected given the small scale nature of such sites.
- 5.7 When considering provision by population, the Rural Area East has a substantially larger provision of open spaces (62.64ha/1000 persons) than the other analysis areas. Letchworth Garden City has the lowest level of provision (6.33ha/ 1000 persons) when taking into account the population of the town. This is attributable to the difference in population numbers, which has a bearing on the level of provision per 1,000 persons.

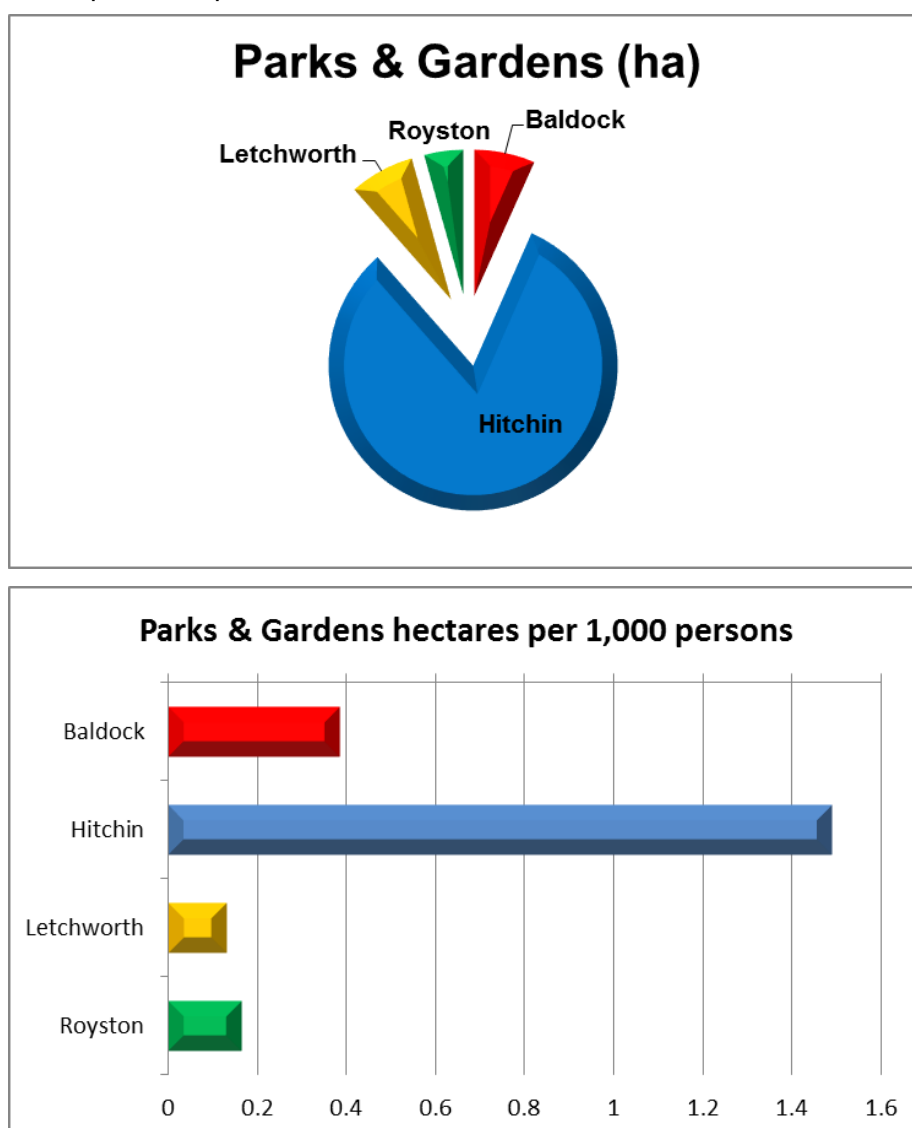
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<sup>10</sup> Open space with public access

- 5.8 In terms of considering the subjective quality of open spaces in the District, the Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire (2014-2019) reports that between 2001 and 2011, customer satisfaction of the District's parks and open spaces has been increasing year on year; and in 2011, 83% of customers were either very satisfied or satisfied.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that the quality of open spaces in the District has not declined, and in some cases improved since the 2009 assessment was undertaken.

## 6. Parks and Gardens

- 6.1 Parks and Gardens are generally multi-functional spaces, providing a range of facilities. For the purposes of this assessment, recreation grounds serving a neighbourhood function have been assessed as Amenity Greenspace and Recreation rather than more formal Parks and Gardens. This review has identified 11 Parks and Gardens, constituting 59.49 hectares of open space. This equates to 0.73 hectares per 1000 persons.



<sup>11</sup> 2011 Citizen Panel

- 6.2 **Baldock:** There are two Parks and Gardens in Baldock, covering a total area of approximately 3.94 hectares.
- 6.3 **Hitchin:** Hitchin contains three sites defined as Parks and Gardens, covering an area of approximately 48.7 hectares.
- 6.4 **Letchworth Garden City:** Letchworth Garden City has two Parks and Gardens, covering an area of approximately 4.27 hectares. This is the lowest provision of the analysis areas when considering population (0.13ha per 1,000 persons).
- 6.5 **Royston:** Royston contains one site defined as a Park or Garden, covering an area of approximately 2.58 hectares.

### Quality

- 6.6 The previous Green Space action plans (2010-2014) identified a significant number of investment priorities for parks and gardens, most of which have been delivered. The following sites have Green Flag status: Howard Park and Gardens, Norton Common, Ivel Springs, Purwell Meadows and Oughtonhead Common.<sup>12</sup>

### Accessibility

- 6.7 Four of the six areas contain at least one Park or Garden. However, there are substantial areas of North Hertfordshire with restricted access to Parks and Gardens when considering whether a site is within a fifteen minute walking distance,<sup>13</sup> particularly in village locations.

### Priorities

- 6.8 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.

## 7. Amenity Greenspace (including recreation)

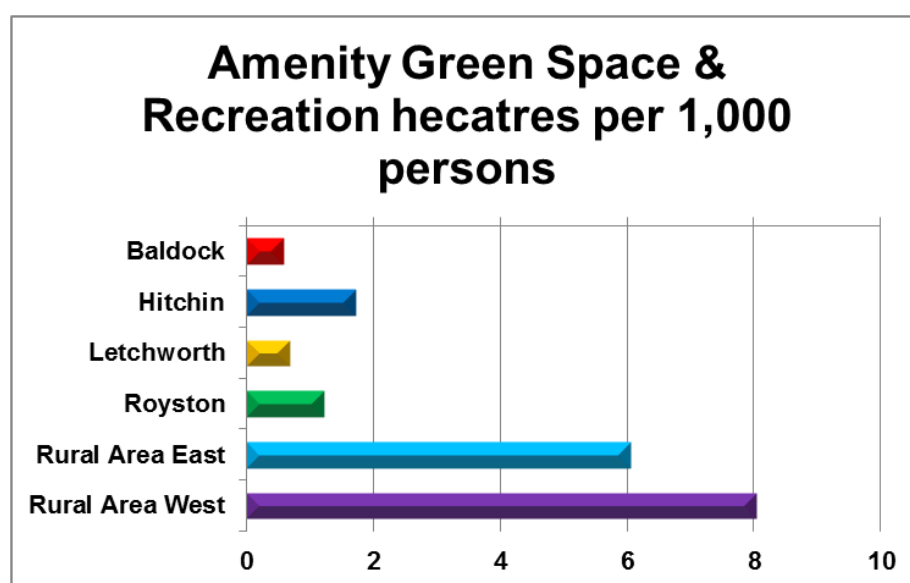
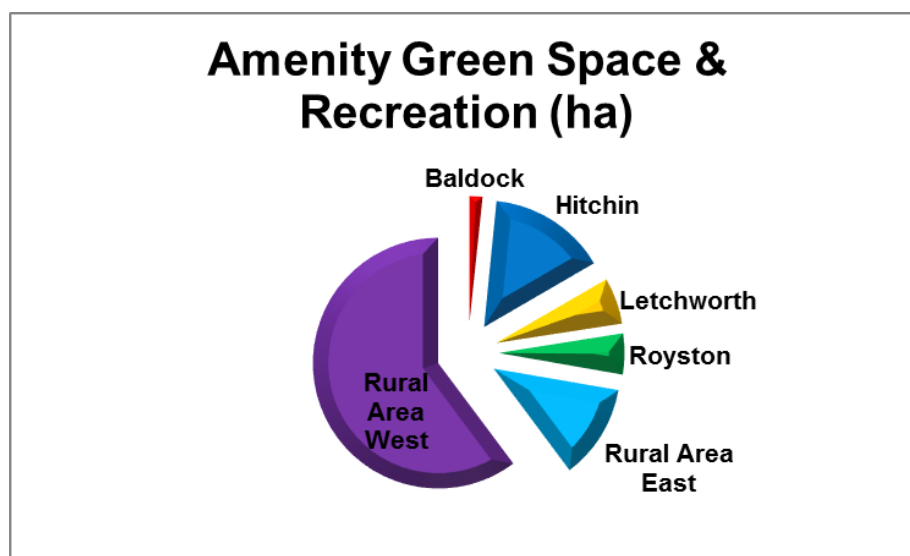
- 7.1 Amenity Greenspace includes recreation spaces providing opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancing the appearance of residential or other areas. They can also serve a valuable purpose in distinguishing between different land uses, for example between a residential area and a major road. For the purposes of this assessment, recreation space without an assigned function (e.g. play space) has been included. For this reason, some sites are large, whereas some are smaller and serve a more limited catchment.

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<sup>12</sup> Please note that some of these sites are categorised under different types of open space, for instance Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace.

<sup>13</sup> 15 minutes walking distance is the estimated time taken to walk 1,200 metres. Fields in Trust (2015) Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard

- 7.2 This review has identified 369.26 hectares of Amenity Greenspace in the District, across 200 sites. The current provision of Amenity Greenspace equates to approximately 2.90 hectares per 1000 persons.



- 7.3 **Baldock:** There are approximately 5.78 hectares of Amenity Greenspace provided over 15 sites in Baldock. This is the lowest geographical area of all six analysis areas, and also has the lowest provision in relation to population (0.56ha per 1,000 persons).
- 7.4 **Hitchin:** In terms of Amenity Greenspace there is approximately 55.56 hectares in Hitchin over 31 sites.
- 7.5 **Letchworth Garden City:** There is 21.94 hectares of Amenity Greenspace across 41 sites.
- 7.6 **Royston:** There is 19.09 hectares of Amenity Greenspace in Royston over 20 sites.

- 7.7 **Rural Area East:** There is 44.62 hectares of Amenity Greenspace in the Rural Area East over 37 sites.
- 7.8 **Rural Area West:** There is 222.28 hectares of Amenity Greenspace in the Rural Area West, which has the highest number of sites (55), largest geographical area of amenity greenspace and recreation and the highest level of provision in relation to population of the six analysis areas (8.04ha per 1,000 persons).

### **Accessibility**

- 7.9 Amenity Greenspace is distributed throughout the District, and therefore should be accessible to a large proportion of residents, particularly as a majority of amenity greenspace is located within residential areas.
- 7.10 The majority of Amenity Greenspace sites identified for the assessment are under 1 hectare in size. Therefore, whilst such sites are generally well distributed across the District, due to the nature and size of the sites access to these are likely to be local in scale.

### **Quality**

- 7.11 The quality of Amenity Greenspace sites throughout the District is generally high quality<sup>14</sup>, often comprising grassed and paved areas, and sometimes landscaped areas.
- 7.12 Previously Amenity Greenspace has seen little investment. Given their purpose of serving residential areas, these spaces are now being prioritised for investment in the current Green Space Management Plan and accompanying action plans. This will ensure that Amenity Greenspaces are maintained for the enjoyment of the communities they serve.

### **Priorities**

- 7.13 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.

## **8. Provision for Children and Young People**

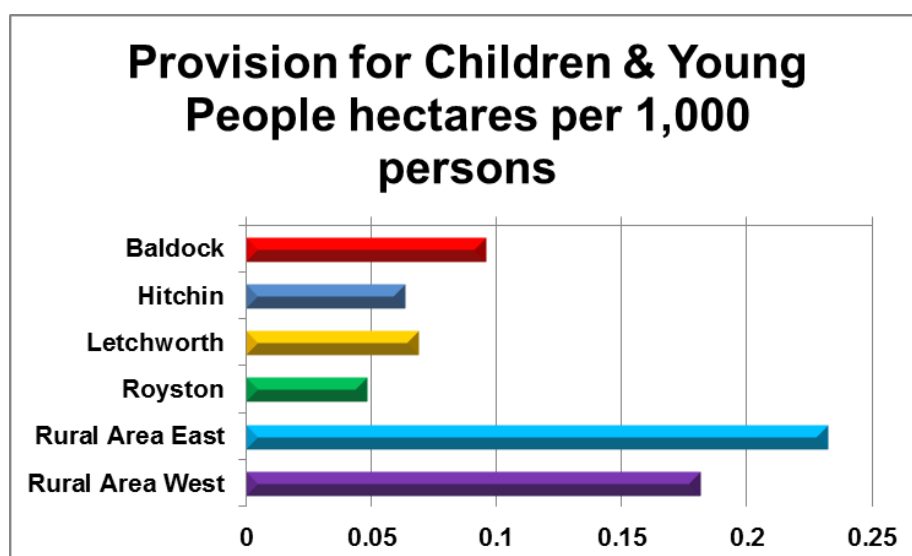
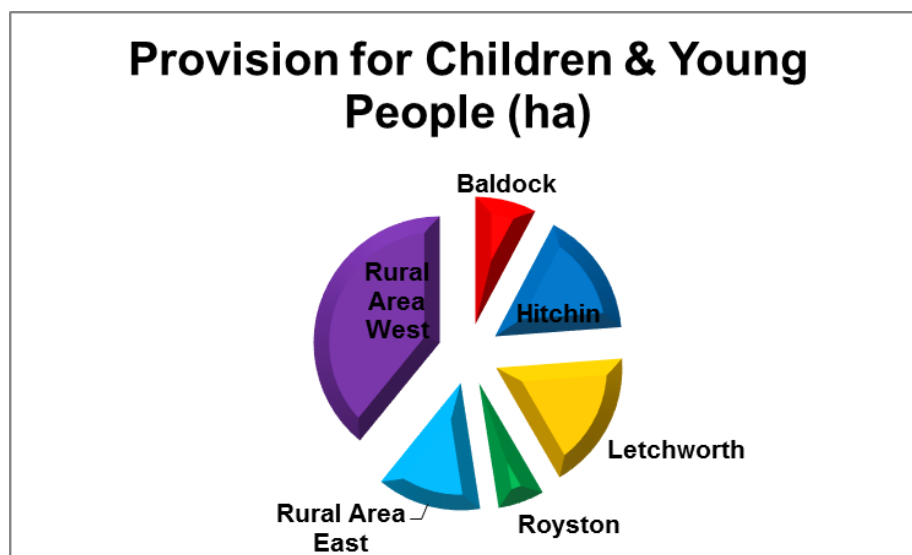
- 8.1 Provision which is specifically in place for children and young people is difficult to define, as children and young people will play in most kinds of public open space, ranging from playing fields and Amenity Greenspace to the more recognisable child play areas, such as equipped playgrounds, skate parks and Multi-Use Games Areas. Many of the areas utilised by children and young people provide informal play opportunities, and in terms of this assessment the spaces will often have a primary

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<sup>14</sup> 2009 assessment data

purpose which is not recognised specifically as provision for children and young people.

- 8.2 This review has identified 12.80 hectares of Provision for Children and Young People in the District, across 73 sites. The current provision equates to 0.10 hectares per 1000 persons.



- 8.3 **Baldock:** The Provision for Children and Young People in Baldock covers an area of 0.98 hectares across five sites.
- 8.4 **Hitchin:** Hitchin has 13 sites for Children and Young People, which cover an area of 2.07 hectares.
- 8.5 **Letchworth Garden City:** Letchworth Garden City has nine sites for Children and Young People, covering an area of 2.28 hectares.
- 8.6 **Royston:** When considering the population, Royston has the lowest Provision for Children and Young People across both the four main towns and the six analysis

areas overall (0.05ha per 1,000 persons). Royston has 0.75 hectares of this type of open space across six sites.

- 8.7 **Rural Area East:** The Rural Area East has the greatest Provision for Children and Young People of all analysis areas (0.23ha per 1,000 persons) when taking into account the population of this area. This covers 1.71 hectares across 11 sites.
- 8.8 **Rural Area West:** There are 29 sites and five hectares of Provision for Children and Young People in the Rural Area West. Whilst it has the greatest number of sites and geographical area, the overall provision when taking into account the population of this analysis area equates to 0.18 hectares per 1,000 persons, which is lower than the Rural Area East.

### Accessibility

- 8.9 Overall the four main towns have a lower provision of sites for Children and Young People than the rural areas. Nonetheless, the provision in the rural areas may not be accessible to the whole population as provision is often dispersed or located within settlements.

### Quality

- 8.10 Recent investment has included improvements to Purwell Recreation Ground play area, Smithsons Recreation Ground and the Splash Park at Bancroft Recreation Ground in Hitchin. The King George V Recreation Ground has also delivered improvements towards pitch improvements, a new flood lit Multi Use Games Area, refurbished play area and adult outdoor gym equipment
- 8.11 In Baldock, the Bush Spring Play Area has seen improvements, and Avenue Park has seen a refurbished play area, interactive water splash pool play feature, improvements to main entrance, new cricket nets and compound, shrub and tree planting and boundary security improvements
- 8.12 In Royston, at Priory Memorial Gardens improvements have included additional play equipment (including Splash Park), flood lighting for Multi Use Games Area and improvements to entrance gates. The BMX track has also been improved at Burns Road.
- 8.13 In Letchworth Garden City, Howard Park and Gardens has received Parks for People Lottery funding towards refurbishment, including interactive water play facilities. A new community cottage garden has also been created.
- 8.14 Norton Common has also recently received Green Flag awards and improvements have been delivered for the flood lit Multi Use Games Area, surfacing pathways, new signs and improvements to entrances. Improvements have also been delivered at Wilbury Recreation Ground for a refurbished play area and ball court. At Temple Gardens, funding has been spent on a new refurbished play area and teenager zone, and Hillbrow Recreation Ground has seen refurbishments to the play area. At the Grange Recreation Ground there has been the delivery of a new sports pavilion, pitch improvements, refurbished play area, adult outdoor gym equipment and new skateboard ramps.



- 8.15 The Pavillion at Barkway Recreation Ground has received S106 funding, and the Multi Use Games Area at Breachwood Green has also received funds.
- 8.16 In Codicote, the Council sports field at St Albans Road Recreation Ground has received S106 funding as has the pavilion at Tower Close, Little Wymondley. In Graveley, the play area on Ashwell Close has delivered improvements through S106 funding.
- 8.17 In Preston, S106 funds have been received to deliver improvements towards informal open space and pitch sports at the Recreation Ground on Hitchin Road.

## **Priorities**

- 8.18 Provision for Children and Young People is often located within neighbourhood parks that serve nearby residential areas, but can also be stand alone facilities. Whilst previously, little investment had been channelled into these uses, the current Green Space Management Strategy and Section 106 reports show that there has been investment in play and recreation space in recent years.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, future investment will be primarily directed towards one main play area in each of the four towns and the main play area in Great Ashby, with more limited investment for other areas with a strategic role in play provision.
- 8.19 It should be noted that due to the limited play value of equipped LAPS, the Green Space Management Strategy recommends provision of amenity green space to the same size.
- 8.20 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.

## **9. Outdoor Sports Facilities (including school sites with community access)**

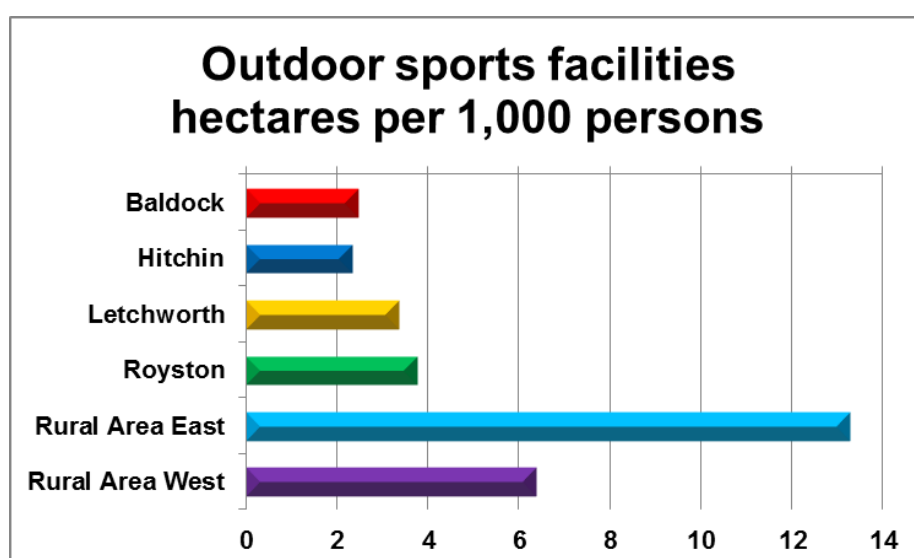
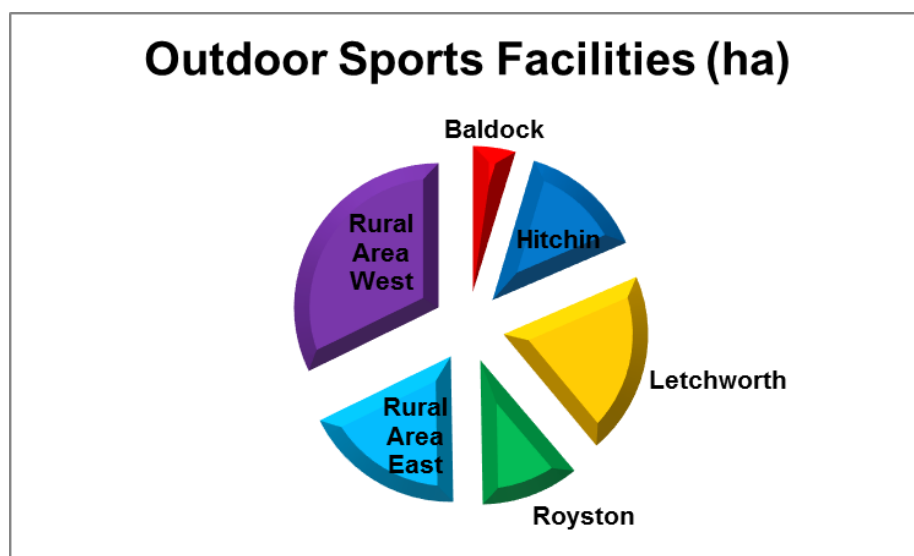
- 9.1 Outdoor sports facilities may include football or rugby pitches, cricket pitches, hockey pitches, golf courses, tennis courts, multi use games areas, BMX, skate boarding and bowling greens.
- 9.2 School playing fields and outdoor sports facilities also contribute to the provision of this type of open space. Whilst often inaccessible to the public, they can be opened up for community use after school hours or at weekends and these sites have been included in this assessment.<sup>16</sup> For the purpose of this assessment, only schools with community access have been included. Although the Council has no responsibility for school sports sites, it encourages the open spaces to be multi-functional and open to the local community where possible.
- 9.3 Whilst the Council has identified that certain investment to facilities, for example to sports pavilions and wheeled sports facilities, would be beneficial, current resources mean that the Council is not able to fund these works at present and other sources of funding are required.

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<sup>15</sup> Both datasets refer to 2010 onwards only.

<sup>16</sup> Information based on the Playing Pitch Strategy 2016

- 9.4 This review has identified 544.52 hectares of Outdoor Sports Facilities provided in the District, across 113 sites. The current provision of Outdoor Sports Facilities equates to approximately 4.28 hectares per 1000 persons.



- 9.5 **Baldock:** Outdoor Sports Facilities in Baldock cover an area of 25.05 hectares across 10 sites.
- 9.6 **Hitchin:** Hitchin has 75.92 hectares of Outdoor Sports Facilities across 26 sites. When taking into account population the town has the lowest provision across both the four main towns and the six analysis areas overall (2.32ha per 1,000 persons).
- 9.7 **Letchworth Garden City:** Letchworth Garden City has 110.84 hectares of Outdoor Sports Facilities at 23 sites.
- 9.8 **Royston:** Royston has the greatest provision of Outdoor Sports Facilities of the four main towns when taking into account the population of the analysis areas (3.74ha per 1,000 persons). Provision covers an area of 59.02 hectares across 10 sites.

- 9.9 **Rural Area East:** The Rural Area East has the greatest level of provision of Outdoor Sports Facilities when considering population of all six analysis areas (13.26ha per 1,000 persons). This is spread over 18 sites and covers an area of 98.07 hectares.
- 9.10 **Rural Area West:** The Rural Area West has 175.62 hectares of Outdoor Sports Facilities, distributed across 26 sites.

### **Accessibility**

- 9.11 The four main towns have comparable levels of access to open space. The Rural Area East has a significantly higher provision than the other analysis areas, however it is worth noting that the population in the rural areas may experience worse accessibility depending on the location of the Outdoor Sports Facilities sites.

### **Quality**

- 9.12 Two out of four pitches at Walsworth Common in Hitchin have been identified as poor quality and have been taken out of use. Work is also needed to improve the pavilion. Baldock has been identified as having a deficiency in provision of wheeled sports and therefore investment for this use would be beneficial.
- 9.13 In Ickleford, S106 funding has been directed towards improvements in pitch sports.
- 9.14 The provision of outdoor gym equipment should also be considered as part of any refurbishment to the major strategically important play areas in each of the towns.

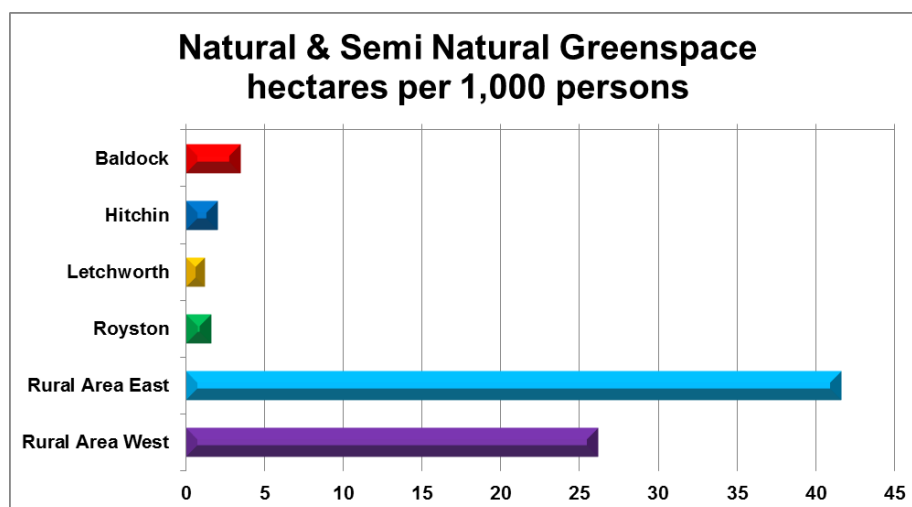
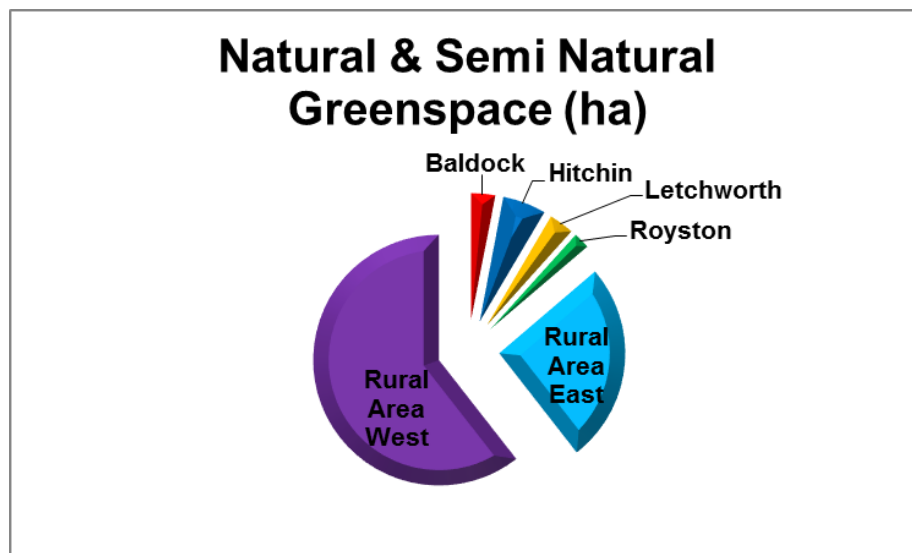
### **Priorities**

- 9.15 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.
- 9.16 Further priorities are set out in the Playing Pitch Strategy (2015).

## **10. Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces**

- 10.1 There are many Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces in the District, many of which are highly valued.
- 10.2 An immediate distinction is between natural/wild landscape areas where recreation and public access is actively encouraged, against other areas which because of their special botanical or wildlife interest have been designated as protected sites. Public access to such sites is still permitted, but the focus on these sites is on safeguarding their natural conservation assets for their own future as well as for people to enjoy.
- 10.3 This review has identified 1195.61 hectares of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces in the District, over 112 sites. The sites range in size from 0.11 hectares to 103.27 hectares. The current provision of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces equates to approximately 9.41 hectares per 1000 persons.

- 10.4 Areas of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace are mostly in the Rural Area East and Rural Area West (33 and 48 sites respectively), with Baldock containing the least number of sites (4).



- 10.5 **Baldock:** Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace covers approximately 35.59 hectares across four sites in Baldock.
- 10.6 **Hitchin:** There are 65.81 hectares of open space classified as Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace, covering over 11 sites in Hitchin.
- 10.7 **Letchworth Garden City:** In Letchworth Garden City there are 38.23 hectares of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace across 11 sites. In terms of population, the town has the lowest level of provision across all six analysis areas (1.15ha per 1,000 persons).
- 10.8 **Royston:** In Royston there are 24.72 hectares of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace across 5 sites.

- 10.9 **Rural Area East:** The Rural Area East has 307.41 hectares across 33 sites. By population, it has the greatest provision of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace of all six analysis areas (41.57ha per 1,000 persons).
- 10.10 **Rural Area West:** The Rural Area West contains a large number of sites of Natural or Semi-Natural Greenspace. There are 723.85 hectares across 48 sites.

### **Accessibility**

- 10.11 Areas of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace are largely concentrated in Rural Area East and Rural Area West. Nonetheless, all six analysis areas have access to some areas of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace, which tends to be a more strategic type of provision when compared with other types of open space.

### **Quality**

- 10.12 The following sites are classed as Local Nature Reserves and have had recent improvements (including to access, pathways and signage), largely delivered by the Countryside Management Service and support from friends of groups and volunteers:
- Norton Common
  - Ivel Springs
  - Weston Hills
  - Purwell Meadows
  - Pix Brook Meadows
  - Oughtonhead Common

### **Priorities**

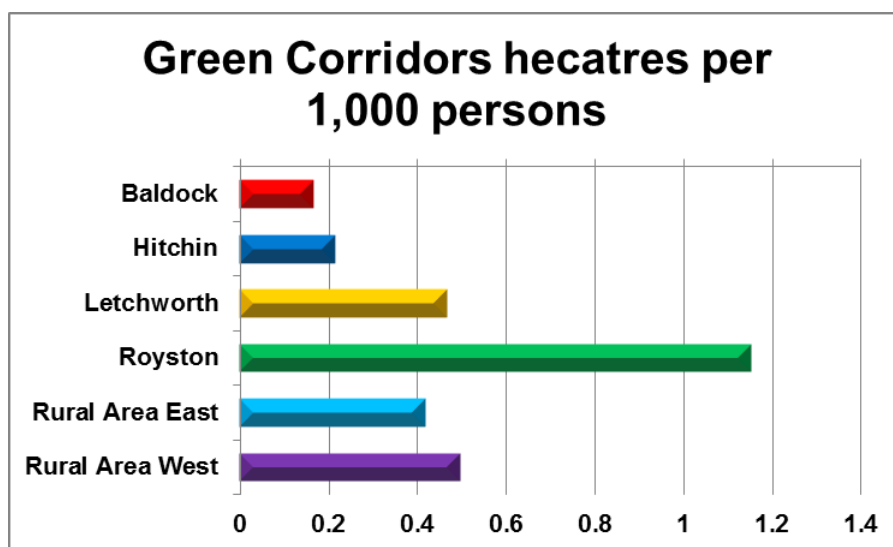
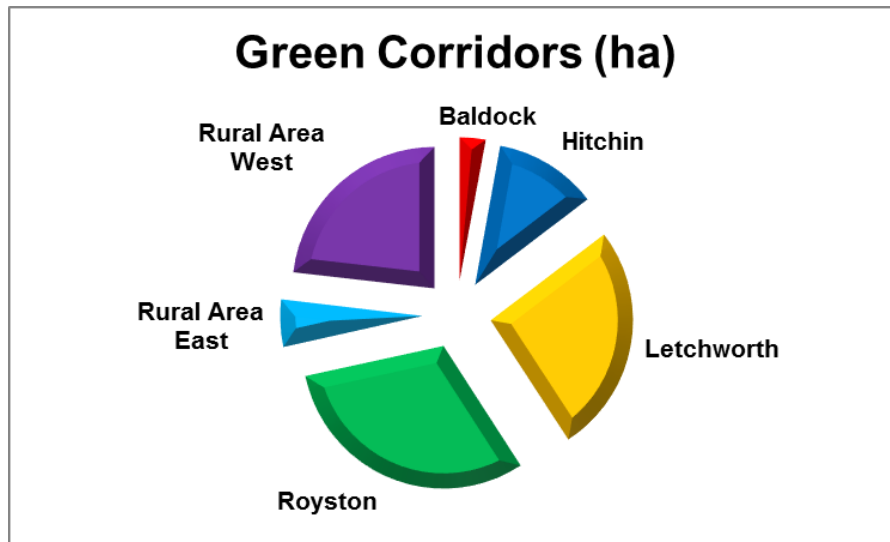
- 10.13 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.
- 10.14 Further biodiversity related priorities are contained within the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum 'A Local Biodiversity Action Plan'.<sup>17</sup>

## **11. Green Corridors**

- 11.1 This open space review has identified 46 Green Corridors, totalling an area of 59.04 hectares. This equates to 0.46 hectares per 1000 persons. Green corridors are green routes or linkages and may include grass verges, hedgerows or river corridors, for example. They are often a valuable resource for both biodiversity and for recreational use, such as walking and cycling.

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<sup>17</sup>Hertfordshire Environmental Forum 'A Local Biodiversity Action Plan, 2006,  
[http://www.hef.org.uk/nature/biodiversity\\_vision/](http://www.hef.org.uk/nature/biodiversity_vision/)



- 11.2 **Baldock:** In Baldock there are four Green Corridors, covering an area of 1.68 hectares. Baldock has the lowest level of provision of this type of open space across all analysis areas (0.16ha per 1,000 persons).
- 11.3 **Hitchin:** Hitchin has six Green Corridors, covering an area of 6.98 hectares.
- 11.4 **Letchworth Garden City:** Letchworth Garden City has the highest number of Green Corridors across all analysis areas with 14, covering an area of 15.44 hectares.
- 11.5 **Royston:** Royston has the largest geographical area of Green Corridors across all analysis areas with 18.18 hectares across 10 sites. It also has the greatest level of provision of all six analysis areas when taking into account population (1.15ha per 1,000 persons).
- 11.6 **Rural Area East:** There are five Green Corridors in the Rural Area East covering 3.07 hectares.
- 11.7 **Rural Area West:** There are seven Green Corridors in the Rural Area West covering 13.69 hectares

## Accessibility

- 11.8 Green Corridors are located in all six of the analysis areas. Nonetheless, in comparison with other forms of open space, there are a relative low number of Green Corridor sites, meaning that potentially large sections of the population have limited access to Green Corridors. Royston has the highest level of provision of Green Corridors, which given the compact nature of the town means that accessibility for the local population is good.

## Quality

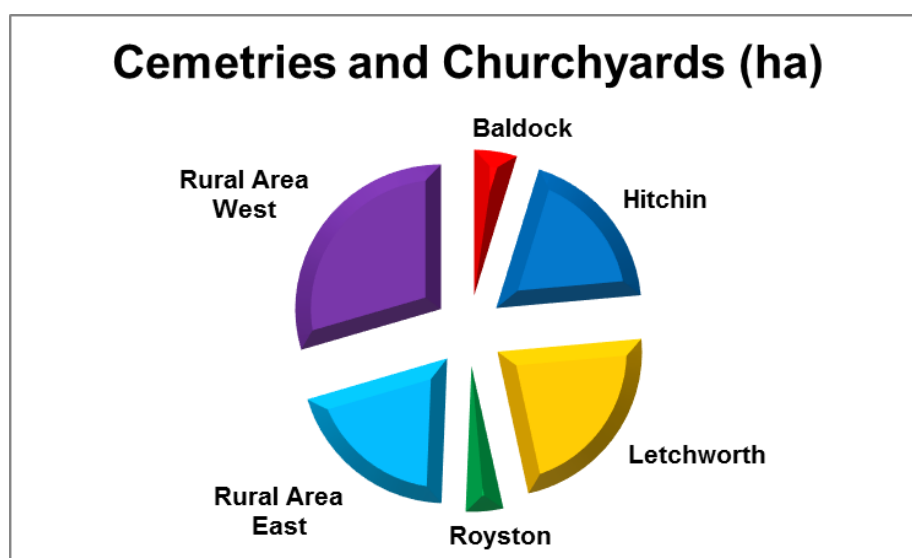
- 11.9 The quality of Green Corridors in the District is high overall.<sup>18</sup> At Pix Brook Meadows, recent funding has enabled the provision of improved pathways and allowed an ancient orchard to be opened.

## Priorities

- 11.10 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.
- 11.11 Further biodiversity related priorities are contained within the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum 'A Local Biodiversity Action Plan'.

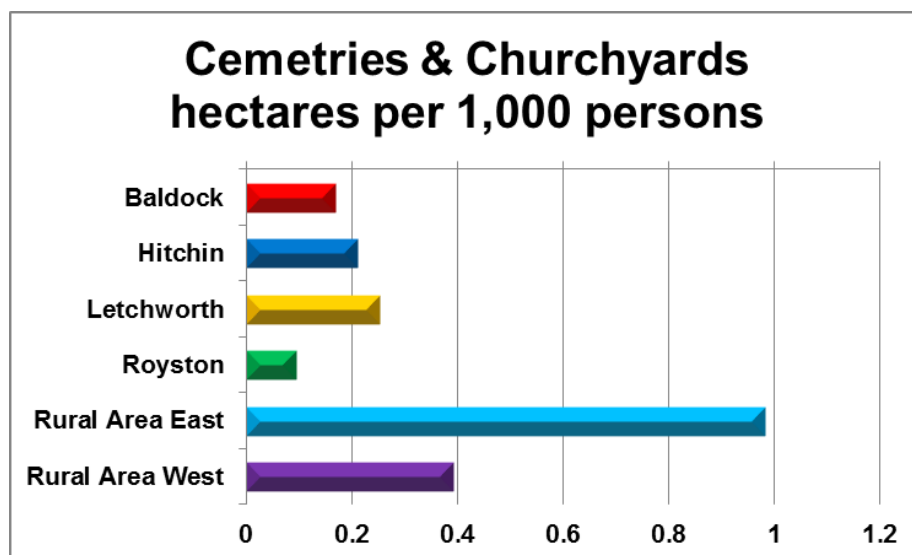
## 12. Cemeteries and Churchyards

- 12.1 These forms of open space serve a statutory function, allow public access and are often rich in biodiversity. This review has identified 50 Cemeteries and Churchyards in North Hertfordshire, which cover approximately 36.55 hectares. The current provision of Cemeteries and Churchyards per 1000 persons equates to 0.29 hectares.



<sup>18</sup> 2009 assessment data





- 12.2 **Baldock:** In Baldock there are two Cemeteries and Churchyards, covering an area of 1.74 hectares.
- 12.3 **Hitchin:** Hitchin has two Cemeteries and Churchyards, covering an area of 6.88 hectares.
- 12.4 **Letchworth Garden City:** Letchworth Garden City has 3 Cemeteries and Churchyards, covering an area of 8.4 hectares.
- 12.5 **Royston:** Royston has the lowest geographical area of Cemeteries and Churchyards across all analysis areas with 1.48 hectares across two sites.
- 12.6 **Rural Area East:** There are 20 Cemeteries and Churchyards Green Corridors in the Rural Area East covering 7.25 hectares.
- 12.7 **Rural Area West:** There are 21 Cemeteries and Churchyards in the Rural Area West covering 10.8 hectares, which represents the highest geographical area of all six analysis areas.

### Accessibility

- 12.8 Due to the primary purpose of such sites an assessment of accessibility is not included as, unlike other open space sites, the location of the sites are determined by a number of factors relating to the purpose and use of cemeteries.

### Quality

- 12.9 Overall, the quality of Cemeteries and Churchyards across the District is high.<sup>19</sup>
- 12.10 The Council has invested in a new district wide cemetery at Wilbury Hills near Letchworth Garden City. This burial site can accommodate a range of needs including those of different faiths and for ecologically sustainable burials, such as woodland burials.

<sup>19</sup> 2009 assessment data

12.11 The remaining capacity of cemeteries at Baldock, Hitchin and Royston are already a concern, and the cemeteries at Baldock and Hitchin have only five years capacity remaining. It is acknowledged that cemetery facilities may be developed by other parties to serve local needs.

12.12 The District also has a number of closed churchyards.

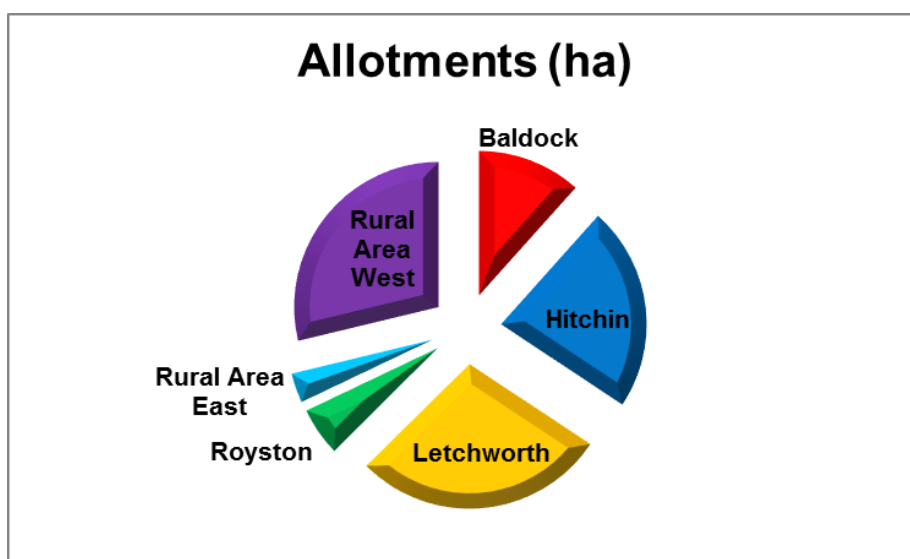
### Priorities

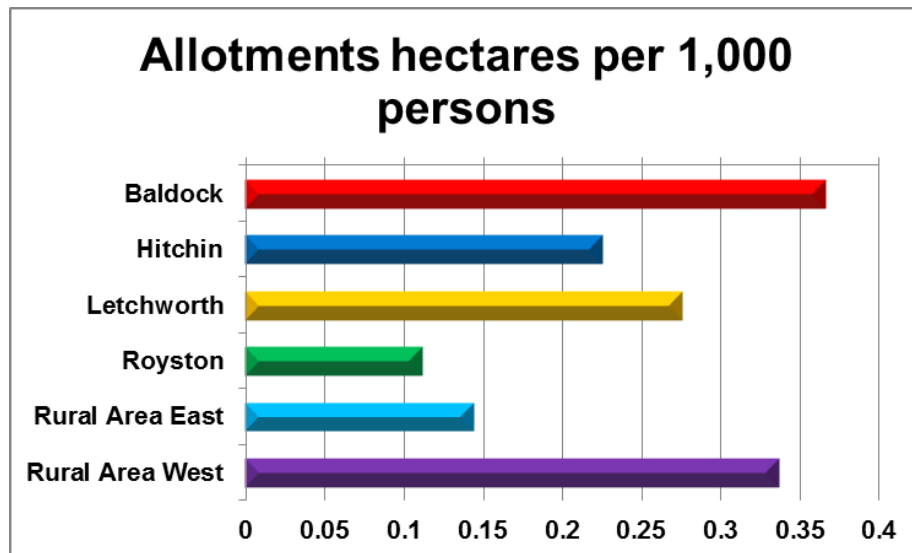
12.13 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.

## 13. Allotments

13.1 Allotments in North Hertfordshire are provided by a number of organisations including the District Council, Letchworth Garden City Garden City Heritage Foundation, Royston Town Council, Hertfordshire County Council, North Hertfordshire Homes as well as Parish Councils.

13.2 This review has identified 43 allotment sites, totalling an area of 32.4 hectares. This equates to 0.25 hectares of allotments per 1000 persons.





- 13.3 **Baldock:** Baldock has 3.76 hectares of allotments across three sites. In terms of population, the town has the highest level of provision (0.37ha per 1,000 persons) across all analysis areas.
- 13.4 **Hitchin:** Hitchin has five allotment sites, covering approximately 7.36 hectares.
- 13.5 **Letchworth Garden City:** In Letchworth Garden City there are 12 allotment sites, covering an area of 9.16 hectares.
- 13.6 **Royston:** In Royston there is one allotment site, covering an area of 1.75 hectares. This represents the lowest level of provision across all six analysis areas when considering the population (0.11ha per 1,000 persons).
- 13.7 **Rural Area East:** The Rural Area East contains three allotment sites, and has the lowest geographical area of allotments at 1.06 hectares, when comparing with the other analysis areas.
- 13.8 **Rural Area West:** In contrast, the Rural Area West has both the largest number and geographical area of allotments across all analysis areas, with 9.31 hectares across 19 sites.

### Accessibility

- 13.9 A large number of the District's allotments are located in the Rural Area West. Royston and the Rural Area East have the lowest provision when factoring in population. Therefore, residents in these areas may experience restricted access.
- 13.10 The nature of allotments means that access to the sites is often by car, due to the equipment required to tend to the plots, therefore walking access is not necessarily required. Regardless of this, it is still apparent that there is a more restricted supply and access to allotments sites in Royston and the Rural Area East.
- 13.11 With regards to allotments there is currently no statutory minimum or maximum level of service provision, however the government realises the important role leisure has to play in the fabric of community life and has outlined its vision through the

Departments of Culture, Media and Sport, Health, Education and Skills and Environment, Regions and Transport strategies and plans.

## **Quality**

- 13.12 There has been a long period of underinvestment in allotments, which is reflective of the general quality identified in the 2009 assessment. However, at Pryor Way in Letchworth Garden City, there has been the creation of 15 new plots in recent years, and new allotments have been created at Woolgrove in Letchworth Garden City.<sup>20</sup> In Ickleford, recent allotment provision has been funded through S106 receipts.
- 13.13 In Hitchin at Old Hale Way allotments, there has been the recent creation of a bee keeping garden with classroom, demonstrating the range of benefits that open spaces can deliver. Similarly at Burford Way allotments there has been the creation of woodland bee keeping garden.
- 13.14 Fifteen new plots have been created in Baldock as well as improvements to boundary fencing.

## **Allotment Priorities**

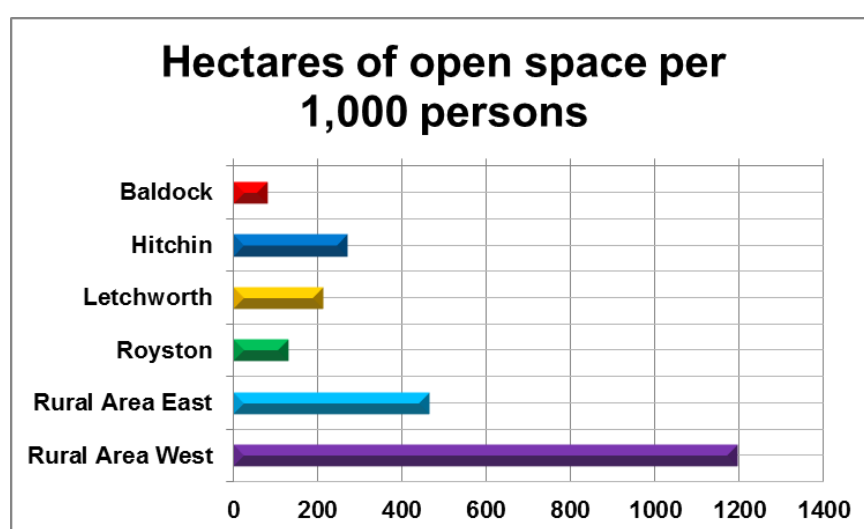
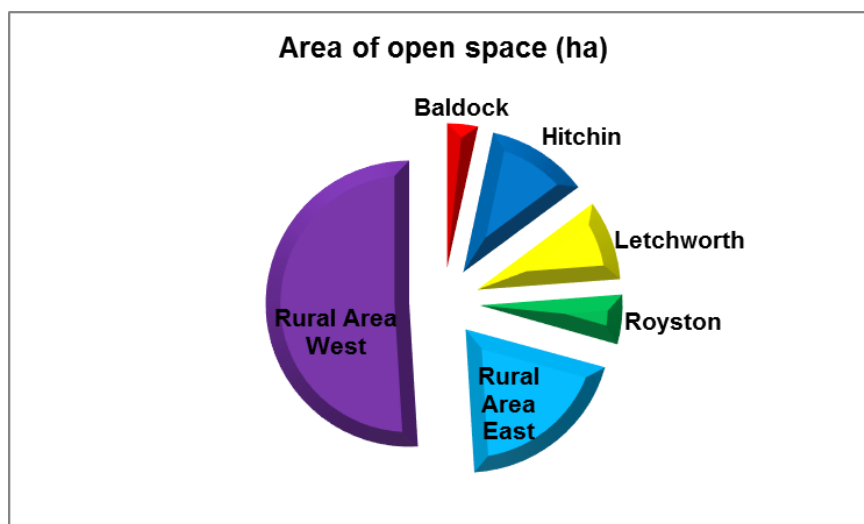
- 13.15 Current priorities are identified in the Green Space Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plans. This document is currently under review and the projects therefore could be subject to change.
- 13.16 The Council has devolved management of the allotments at Baldock to the Baldock Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association, but is now not supporting devolved arrangements for the management of other allotments.

## **14. Analysis by area**

- 14.1 The following section analyses the open space provision within each of the six areas of the District as identified by this review. This includes analysis on each typology, including quantity, quality and accessibility. Part 2 of this document sets out Open Space Standards that are informed by this analysis.

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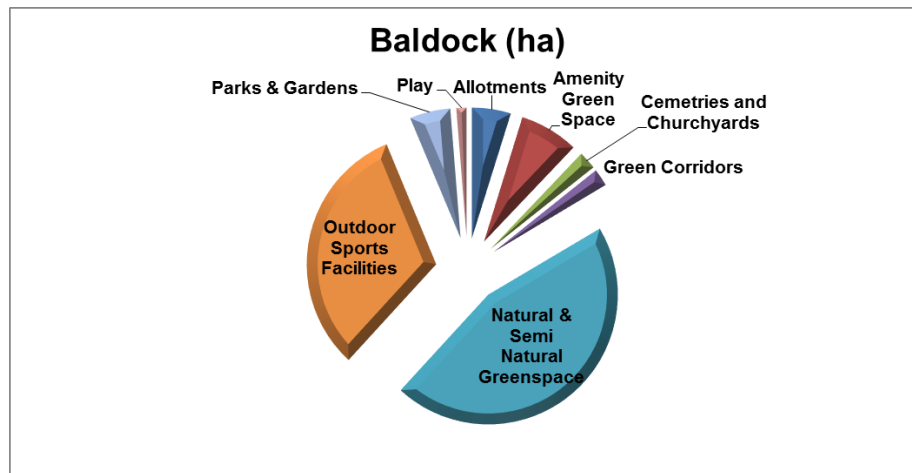
<sup>20</sup> As documented in the Green Space Management Plan



| Area                   | Population | Hectares of open space | Open space provision per 1,000 population |
|------------------------|------------|------------------------|---|
| Baldock                | 10,280     | 78.52                  | 7.64                                      |
| Hitchin                | 32,731     | 269.28                 | 8.23                                      |
| Letchworth Garden City | 33,249     | 210.56                 | 6.33                                      |
| Royston                | 15,781     | 127.57                 | 8.08                                      |
| Rural Area East        | 7,395      | 540.22                 | 73.05                                     |
| Rural Area West        | 27,678     | 1194.06                | 43.14                                     |

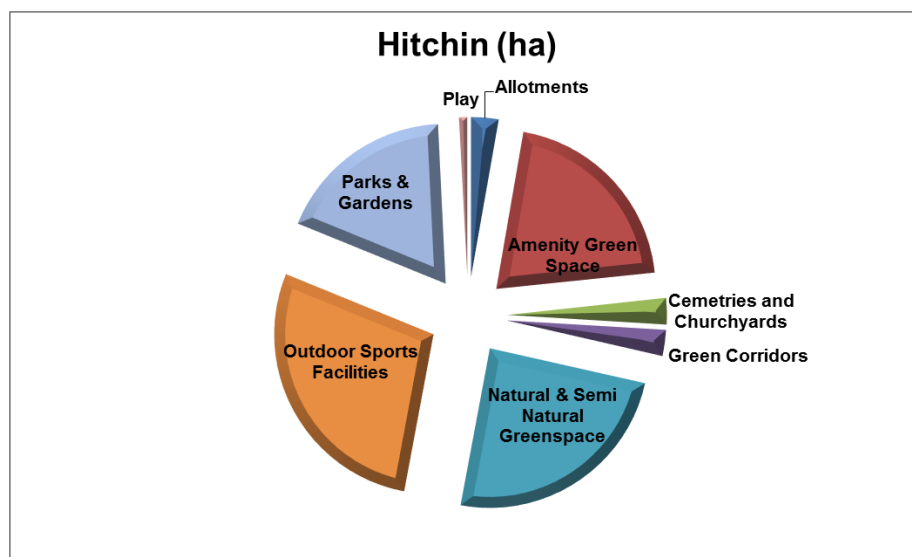
## Baldock

- 14.2 This review has identified 78.52 hectares of open space in total in Baldock, which represents the lowest geographical area of all analysis areas. The predominant type of open space in Baldock is Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (35.59ha). The lowest types of provision are Provision for Children and Young People (0.98ha) and Green Corridors (1.68ha). Baldock has 7.63 hectares of open space per 1,000 persons.



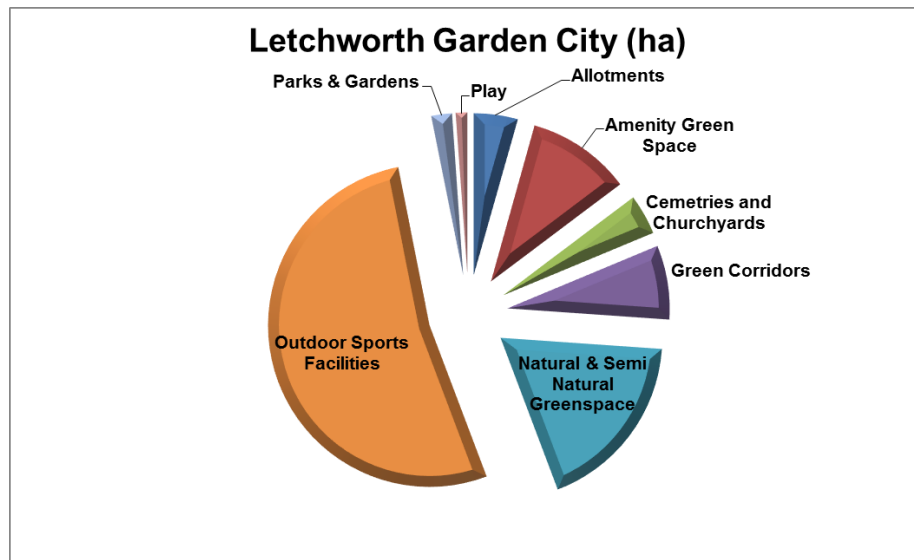
## Hitchin

- 14.3 This review has identified 269.28 hectares of open space in total, which is the largest geographical provision of all types of open spaces of the four main towns. Outdoor Sports Facilities account for the greatest type of provision (75.92ha). The lowest types of provision are for Children and Young People (2.07ha) and Cemeteries and Churchyards (6.88ha). Hitchin has 8.23 hectares of open space per 1,000 persons.



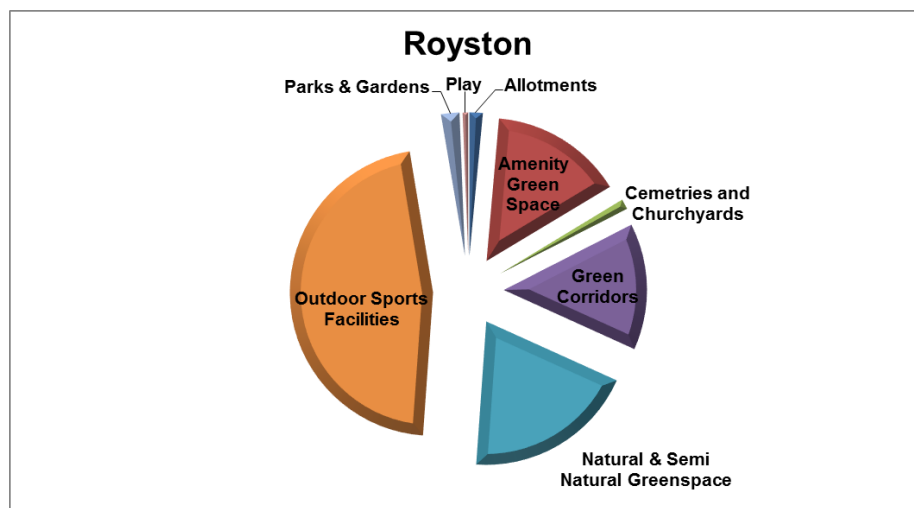
## Letchworth Garden City

- 14.4 This review has identified 210.59 hectares of open space in total. When taking into account population, Letchworth Garden City has the lowest level of open space provision of the six analysis areas (6.33ha per 1,000 persons). Outdoor Sports Facilities account for the greatest type of provision (110.59ha). The lowest types of provision are for Children and Young People (2.28ha) and Parks and Gardens (4.27ha).



## Royston

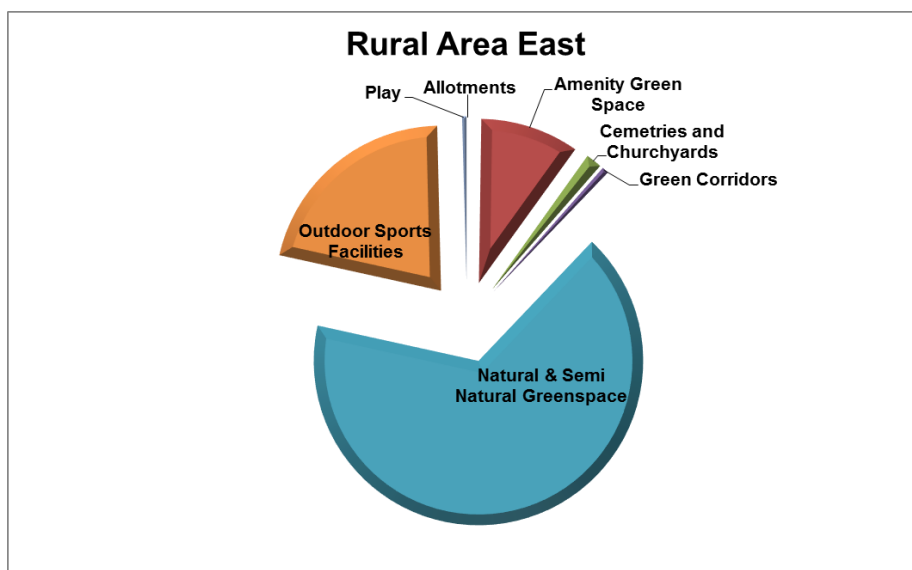
- 14.5 This review has identified that Royston has 127.57 hectares of open space in total. Outdoor Sports Facilities account for the greatest type of provision (59.02ha). The lowest types of provision are Provision for Children and Young People (0.75ha) and Cemeteries and Churchyards (1.48ha). Royston has 8.08 hectares of open space per 1,000 persons.



## Rural Area East

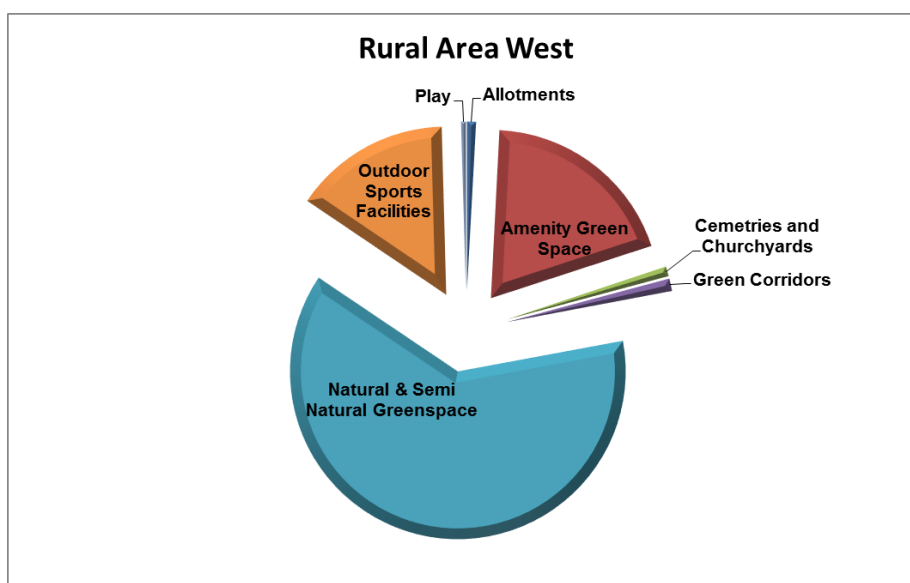
- 14.6 This review has identified 463.19 hectares of open space in total. The type of open space that is most prevalent in this area is Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace, constituting an area of 307.41 hectares. The lowest types of provision are Allotments (1.06ha) and Provision for Children and Young People (1.71ha). The Rural Area East has the greatest level of open space provision of all six analysis areas when taking into consideration population (62.64ha 1,000 persons).





### Rural Area West

- 14.7 The review has identified 1194.06 hectares of open space in total in the Rural Area West. Similar to the Rural Area East, this area has a large amount of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (723.85ha). Provision for Children and Young People and Allotments represent the types of open space with the lowest provision (5.00ha and 9.31ha) in this area. The Rural Area West has 43.14 hectares of open space per 1,000 persons.



## 15. Summary and Key Recommendations

- 15.1 This review has identified 2,343.18 hectares of open space in North Hertfordshire, equating to approximately 18.38 hectares of open space for every 1000 persons in the District. This represents a good level of provision for the District's residents when considering all types of open spaces. In deriving open space standards, it is therefore

vital to recognise that the current level of provision would be challenging to recreate within new development proposals over the plan period.

15.2 In considering the six different areas, it is important to differentiate between the urban and rural areas, in terms of both quantity and type of open space provided. This can be seen from the high levels of provision of Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace in the rural areas, whereas in the four main towns, provision tends to be the greatest (with the exception of Baldock) for larger and more formalised forms of open space, such as Outdoor Sports Facilities.

15.3 The main recommendation for all areas is to maintain the quality and quantity of open space in accordance with the needs of the local community, given the large number of open space sites and geographical area of the District covered. The open space standards will provide detail on the quantity of open space that will be required to support a development depending on the size and location of the site. Planning obligations may be used to secure improvements to the quality of existing open space provision where required.

15.4 The key priorities are:

- deliver improvements to the quality of existing open spaces through grant funding, S106 receipts and Council funding, where available.
- new development to contribute to provision and quality improvements to support the demand arising from development. This may be secured through planning conditions, planning obligations, or CIL if taken forward by the Council. Long term management regimes, or contributions towards such regimes, are required to support the provision of new open spaces.
- maintain a good distribution of high quality open spaces and address any deficiencies in provision through a plan-led approach. This will be achieved through regular reviews of the open spaces across the District.
- work in effective partnerships both within the Council (Planning, Greenspaces, Leisure) as well as externally (Natural England, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust etc) to manage public access to open space sites in a sensitive manner so that biodiversity can be protected and enhanced;
- continue to update a prioritised programme of improvements to the quality of open spaces, taking into account available resources.<sup>21</sup>

15.5 The most up to date information should be used when planning the provision of new, or improvements to existing open spaces. This will ensure that provision, whether on site or off site, is reflective of current need based on location, quantity, quality, accessibility and the type of open space provided.

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<sup>21</sup> Please note that the Councils current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) recognises that significant savings in revenue expenditure are required over the coming years. The Councils green space investment proposals that comprise the existing Green Space Strategy (2014-2019) were developed prior to the adoption of the current MTFS. It should be noted that many of the proposals within the existing strategy would not hold up to the scrutiny required by the current MTFS and are therefore under review.

## **PART 2: OPEN SPACE STANDARDS**

## Part 2: Open Space Standards

### Findings of the Open Space Review

15.6 The Open Space Review has identified that there are 585 open spaces in the District covering 2,343.18 hectares. There have also been the following changes since the 2009 assessment:

- 36 new open spaces, from a variety of sources, such as planning applications, S106 reports and the 2012 parish survey. This resulted in a gain of 88.92ha of audited open space. These new sites are categorised as:
  - 17 Amenity Green Spaces
  - 1 Green Corridors
  - 4 Natural & Semi Natural Greenspaces
  - 9 Outdoor Sports Facilities
  - 1 Parks & Gardens
  - 4 Provision for Children and Young People

15.7 Five open space sites were removed from the list as they were discovered as being on private land and have no public access. This resulted in a loss of 30.6ha of new open space. These sites are categorised as:

- 1 Amenity Green Space;
- 1 Natural & Semi Natural
- 3 Other (no category assigned in 2009)

15.8 The gain in 88.92ha, and the loss of 30.6ha results in a **net gain of 58.32ha** of open space when comparing the updated assessment with the 2009 assessment.

### Current provision and 2031 provision

15.9 Based on the current population and geographical area sizes, access to all types of open spaces currently equates to 18.38 hectares per 1000 people.

15.10 Based on the existing open space provision, there would be 14.83 hectares per 1000 people when taking into account the projected population at the end of the plan period, 2031.

### Deriving Open Space standards

15.11 It is recognised that existing provision has been determined by the existence of many significant and historic areas of open space within the District, enabling easy access to the countryside for many of the District's residents. Simply taking existing levels of provision and using them as the basis for open space standards is considered inappropriate as it is unrealistic to expect these to be replicated in new development.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, it is unrealistic to provide open space on the scale of existing large open spaces in the District such as Norton Common, Walsworth Common or Therfield Heath

- 15.12 Furthermore, given limited Council resources, having onerous standards is not deemed desirable, especially when considering future adoption and maintenance regimes. This has also been taken into account when formulating standards.
- 15.13 A range of further examples have therefore been examined to help determine the most appropriate approach to future open space standards in the District.

### Adjusted open space provision in North Hertfordshire

- 15.14 Existing provision has firstly been re-analysed below by excluding sites over five hectares. This has been undertaken to derive a more realistic level of provision that might be sought on future development sites. This generates the following levels of provision based on existing provision across the District.

#### Existing provision

| LOCAL AUTHORITY  | TYPE OF OPEN SPACE (PER 1,000 PERSONS) |   |                           |            |                          |
|--|--|---|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
|  | Amenity Greenspace & Recreation        | Provision for Children and Young People | Outdoor Sports Facilities | Allotments | Natural and semi-natural |
| Existing baseline provision (all sites)                | 2.90                                   | 0.57 <sup>23</sup>                      | 4.27                      | 0.25       | 9.38                     |
| Existing provision (open space sites below 5 hectares) | 0.95                                   | 0.57                                    | 1.35                      | 0.25       | 0.89                     |

- 15.15 The analysis identifies that excluding sites above five hectares does not affect the levels of provision for Allotments and Provision for Children and Young People as these sites are often small in scale.
- 15.16 Large format open space provision, such as Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces, Outdoor Sports Facilities, and to a lesser extent Amenity Greenspace and Recreation sites, can vary in size and therefore introducing a five hectare threshold for the purpose of this analysis has a more notable impact. These types of open spaces tend to vary in size, which is linked to the facilities contained within them, the geographical area they serve, and whether they are located in an urban or rural area.
- 15.17 Parks and Gardens, Cemeteries and Churchyards and Green Corridors have not been included in this analysis as these types of open spaces are often strategic in nature, more likely to be provided as standalone facilities and/or provided as part of other forms of open space or landscaping.

<sup>23</sup> Unlike the other types of open space, existing Provision for Children and Young People has been calculated taking the number of sites rather than area by hectares. This level of provision could be subject to change, contingent on the outcome of the proposed rationalisation of play spaces in the District as set out in the review of the Green Space Management Strategy, due to be reported to Cabinet in November 2016. Should the proposals proceed to rationalise the play spaces and deliver a reduction in play space sites, the level of provision would be adjusted to 0.46 sites per 1,000 persons.

## National recommended standards

15.18 The Fields in Trust<sup>24</sup> has a number of recommended standards as outlined below. Although it is important to review these recommended standards against local circumstances, they are helpful in providing an indicative level of provision for different types of open space.

| Open Space Typology      | QUANTITY GUIDELINE <sup>3</sup><br>(hectares per 1,000 population) | Open space typology                                  | QUANTITY GUIDELINE <sup>1</sup><br>(hectares per 1,000 population) |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| Parks and Gardens        | 0.80   | Playing pitches                                      | 1.20   |
| Amenity Green Space      | 0.60   | All outdoor sports                                   | 1.60   |
| Natural and Semi-Natural | 1.80   | Equipped/designated play areas                       | 0.25<br>See <a href="#">table 4</a> for recommended minimum sizes  |
|                          |  | Other outdoor provision (MUGAs and skateboard parks) | 0.30   |

15.19 By comparing the Fields in Trust (FIT) recommended standards above with the existing level of provision, including and excluding sites above five hectares, the following can be identified:

- **Amenity Greenspace:** The FIT recommended standards are lower than the existing levels of provision in North Hertfordshire including and excluding sites above five hectares.
- **Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace:** The FIT recommended standards are lower than the existing level of provision when sites above five hectares are included, but higher when sites above this threshold are excluded.
- **Outdoor Sports Facilities:** The FIT recommended standards are lower than the existing level of provision when sites above five hectares are included, and are similar when excluding sites above this threshold.
- **Equipped/designated play areas:** The FIT recommended standards are worked out on the basis of geographical area, whereas existing provision in North Hertfordshire has been calculated using the number of sites in the District.

## Open space provision in development schemes

15.20 To ensure the delivery of open space a sample of recent development schemes and sites allocated in the Local Plan have been assessed. This acts as a 'sense check' in order to derive realistic open space standards. Please note that the analysis of open space provision on the schemes below does not include landscaping or incidental open space. A standard assumption of 2.4 people per dwelling has been used for simplicity for this analysis. The detailed calculations are set out in Appendix A.

<sup>24</sup> Fields in Trust (2015), Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard, <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/guidance>

|  | Site  | NHDC<br>adjusted<br>existing<br>standards | FIT<br>recommended<br>standards | Achieved<br>(where<br>applicable) |
|--|---|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Recent<br/>planning<br/>applications<br/>granted<br/>consent</b>              | Land adjacent to Walkdens, Ashwell Street, Ashwell (15 dwellings) | 0.14                                      | 0.16                            | 0.83                              |
|  | 61 Station Road, Ashwell (20 dwellings)                           | 0.19                                      | 0.22                            | 0.63                              |
|  | Ivy Farm, Phase 1, Royston (50 dwellings)                         | 0.48                                      | 0.54                            | 4.08 <sup>25</sup>                |
| <b>Sites tested<br/>in the Green<br/>Space<br/>Background<br/>Paper 2014</b>     | Land at Wheatsheaf Meadow, Barkway (10 dwellings)                 | 0.10                                      | 0.11                            | 0.03                              |
|  | Site A, Fairview Royston (124 dwellings)                          | 1.19                                      | 1.20                            | 0.66                              |
| <b>Sites under<br/>consideration<br/>for inclusion<br/>in the Local<br/>Plan</b> | North of Baldock (2,800 dwellings)                                | 26.95                                     | 30.24                           | N/A                               |
|  | Land south of Newmarket Road, Royston (300 dwellings)             | 2.89                                      | 3.24                            | N/A                               |
|  | Land south of Waterdell Lane, St Ippolyts (40 dwellings)          | 0.38                                      | 0.43                            | N/A                               |

15.21 The above table identifies that there has been variable open space provision in recent years. The first three development schemes in the table are examples of good open space provision, whereas the two sites below that were tested in the Green Space Background Paper 2014 provide notably lower provision when comparing against the FIT recommended standards and the North Hertfordshire adjusted existing standard. This highlights that open space standards in North Hertfordshire would be beneficial to establish a clear and consistent approach when determining the level of open space provision required by development proposals.

### Neighbouring authorities' standards

15.22 Below is a list of the some neighbouring authorities and their open space standards (where existing or emerging). Understanding the approaches of neighbouring

<sup>25</sup> This open space provision will also serve the adjacent phase of development and forms part of the overall strategy for open space on the site.



authorities is helpful in ensuring that any standards implemented in North Hertfordshire are deliverable and realistic.

| LOCAL AUTHORITY                               | TYPE OF OPEN SPACE (HECTARES PER 1,000 PERSONS) |   |                           |                                |                                     |
|---|---|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|   | Green space                                     | Provision for Children and Young People | Outdoor Sports Facilities | Allotments                     | Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace |
| South Cambridgeshire                          | 0.4 (informal open space)                       | 0.8                                     | 1.6                       | N/A                            | -                                   |
| Central Bedfordshire                          | 1.8 informal recreation<br>0.6 amenity          | 0.4                                     | 1.8                       | 0.34 or 0.58 depending on area | 5.4                                 |
| Luton <sup>26</sup>                           | 0.4 amenity <sup>27</sup>                       | -                                       | -                         | 0.2                            | 0.45 or 0.55 or 1.15 <sup>28</sup>  |
| Stevenage                                     | 1.1 amenity                                     | 0.8                                     | 2.2                       | 0.25                           | 1.78                                |
| East Hertfordshire                            | 0.55 amenity                                    | 0.2                                     | 3.90                      | 0.22                           | 7.76                                |
| Uttlesford                                    | 1.0 amenity                                     | 0.2                                     | 1.2                       | 0.25                           | 7.0                                 |
| Fields in Trust standards                     | 0.60 amenity                                    | 0.25                                    | 1.60                      | -                              | 1.80                                |
| NHDC existing provision (sites less than 5ha) | 0.95  | 0.57                                    | 1.35                      | 0.25                           | 0.89                                |

15.23 The above table identifies that certain types of open space provision (for example Allotments and Provision for Children and Young People) tend not to vary greatly between different authority areas. Green space provision, Outdoor Sports Facilities and Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces do vary between authority area and this may be attributable to a number of factors including: whether the authority is located in an urban or rural area, the population the site serves as well as the historical green infrastructure network in the area. In addition to these factors, the above levels of provision for North Hertfordshire have been calculated by excluding sites above five hectares, whereas similar adjustments may not have been undertaken for some local authorities. For instance, the figure for Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace provision is significantly higher for Uttlesford, East Hertfordshire and Central Bedfordshire when compared against the adjusted figure for North Hertfordshire.

## Open Space Standards 2016

15.24 The following open space standards have been derived from Part 1 of this report (the Open Space Review) and resulting levels of existing open space provision, recent planning applications, nationally recommended standards and sites being considered for inclusion in the Council's Proposed Submission Local Plan.

15.25 The findings of the Open Space Review and the above analysis indicates the following:

- The District currently has a high level of open space provision.
- The Fields in Trust standards are generally higher than the adjusted levels of provision for the District when discounting sites above five hectares, but this

<sup>26</sup> Luton's standards are in metres squared and therefore have been converted for the purposes of this comparison

<sup>27</sup> No standard set for Amenity Greenspaces of Local Importance

<sup>28</sup> Depending on whether Strategic, District or Local in scale

is to be expected given the standards are recommended standards and can be adapted to local circumstances.

- Open space provision achieved in recent development schemes indicates that the use of open space standards would be beneficial to ensure a clear and consistent approach.
- Open space provision varies between neighbouring authorities which highlights the need to assess open space needs at the local level when deriving standards.
- Resource constraints and opportunities need to be taken into account when deriving standards to ensure the long term management and maintenance of open spaces in the District.

## 2016 Open Space Standards

15.26 The standards below comprise a Multi-Functional Open Space standard that includes Amenity Greenspace and Recreation and/or Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace.

| Type of open space                             |                                     | Standard<br>(per 1,000<br>persons) |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Multi-functional Open Space</b>             | Amenity Greenspace & Recreation     | 2                                  |
|  | Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace |                                    |
| <b>Provision for Children and Young People</b> |                                     | 0.57 <sup>29</sup>                 |
| <b>Outdoor Sports Facilities</b>               |                                     | 1.60                               |
| <b>Allotments</b>                              |                                     | 0.25                               |

15.27 The standards have been derived as follows:

- **Multi-functional Open Space:** Totalling the adjusted existing levels of provision (sites below five hectares) for both Amenity Greenspace & Recreation and Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace and rounding to 2 hectares per 1,000 persons, in part to acknowledge that the adoption of FIT standards would result in a higher level of provision.
- **Provision for Children and Young People:** Taking the existing levels of provision based on the number of sites per 1,000 persons rather than the geographical area of existing sites.
- **Outdoor Sports Facilities:** Applying the Fields in Trust recommended standard as this is comparable to existing provision.
- **Allotments:** Taking the existing levels of provision.

15.28 Whilst a broad occupancy figure of 2.4 persons per household has been used in the above analysis, the Council will have regard to the following household sizes when determining the level of open space provision in a particular development. These household sizes have been derived from average household sizes taken from the 2011 Census.

<sup>29</sup> Based on the number of sites per 1,000 persons

|                       | 1<br>bedroom | 2<br>bedrooms | 3<br>bedrooms | 4+<br>bedrooms |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Affordable<br>housing | 1.3          | 2.1           | 2.9           | 4.0            |
| Private housing       | 1.4          | 1.8           | 2.5           | 3.0            |

### **Qualitative criteria: determining the type of open space provided**

15.29 The Council will take a pragmatic approach to the application of the standards and the delivery of new open space. To streamline the open space standards, and to recognise the need to respond to specific site circumstances, the general 'Multi-functional Open Space' category is used. This category includes Amenity Greenspace & Recreation as well as Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace. Provision can therefore be adapted depending on the site in question, taking into account deficiencies, surpluses and priorities, which will be variable over the plan period and in different locations.

15.30 It is acknowledged that some types of open spaces can only be delivered at a strategic scale due to the amount of space that would be required and that they may need to be grouped together to ensure the long term management.

15.31 No standards have been set for the following types of open space, which are often either strategic in nature, more likely to be provided as standalone facilities and/or provided as part of other forms of open space or landscaping.

- Parks and Gardens
- Cemeteries and Churchyards
- Green Corridors

15.32 In relation to Parks and Gardens, most proposed sites will not be large enough to accommodate a meaningful Park or Garden on-site or would be served by an existing Park or Garden or other strategic-scale open space provision. The exceptions to this are most likely to be the proposed North of Baldock and East of Luton sites, which would generate a requirement of five hectares or more open space provision when considering the Fields in Trust recommended standards and expected occupancy figures. In relation to the remaining proposed strategic sites, open space provision may be dealt with as follows:

- The site North of Letchworth Garden City is located adjacent to the existing recreation ground which could provide opportunities for some more formal provision.
- The site North of Stevenage would have access to the proposed Forster Park, which would provide strategic scale open space provision.
- The Land off Mendip Way site in Great Ashby would have access to Great Ashby District Park.
- The Highover Farm site in Hitchin is smaller in size and is therefore unlikely to be able to accommodate a new Park or Garden.

15.33 The Council will expect on-site provision for Children and Young People for development proposals that generate a provision requirement equal to or exceeding

0.8 facilities. In determining the size of facilities provided on-site, the Fields in Trust<sup>30</sup> recommended facilities sizes should be used. These are as follows:

| Type | Minimum size | Minimum dimensions  | Buffer zones  |
|------|--------------|---|---|
| LAP* | 0.01ha       | 10x10m (minimum activity zone of 100sqm)  | 5m (minimum separation between activity zone and the boundary of dwellings)               |
| LEAP | 0.04ha       | 20x20m (minimum activity zone of 400sqm)  | 20m (minimum separation between activity zone and the habitable room façade of dwellings) |
| NEAP | 0.1ha        | 31.6x31.6m (minimum activity zone of 1,000sqm comprising an area for play equipment and structures & a hard surfaced area of at least 465sqm (the minimum needed to play five-a-side football)) | 30m (minimum separation between activity zone and the boundary of dwellings)              |

\*Due to the limited play value of equipped LAPS, the Green Space Management Strategy recommends a provision of amenity green space to the same size.

- 15.34 In relation to Outdoor Sports Facilities and Allotments, the Council will only seek on-site provision where this would generate a usable quantity of open space for a form of provision for which there is an identified requirement. For other developments, the Council will take a discretionary approach to commuted sums.<sup>31</sup>
- 15.35 For allotment provision, the Council may accept provision in the form of informal community gardens or landscaping with space for residents to grow food rather than towards the provision of formalised plots, which tend to grouped together in larger numbers. Where this is the case, a maintenance and management plan should be provided to ensure the long-term quality of such sites.
- 15.36 The most up to date open space data available should be used to inform the type of provision. The Council will expect the standards to inform scheme design and discussions with officers responsible for Greenspaces.
- 15.37 Most sites will be expected to make contributions towards open space. However, proposed Local Plan policy NE5 'New and improved public open space and biodiversity' sets out the circumstances in which on-site provision will be required. This includes where development proposals are: over 200 residential units, over 10,000sqm gross external floorspace, or where a specific need has been identified by the Council. This will ensure that on-site provision is meaningful and can be managed long term.

<sup>30</sup> Fields in Trust (2015), <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/guidance>

<sup>31</sup> This will be considered against, amongst other factors, pooling restrictions on developer contributions.

- 15.38 Payments in lieu may be considered where the full amount of required open space cannot be realistically delivered on-site, or for developments below the above thresholds. Financial contributions may be directed towards the creation of new, or improvements to existing open spaces. The Council's approach to financial contributions is set out in the proposed policy SP7 'Infrastructure requirements and developer contributions'.
- 15.39 Long term management regimes should be demonstrated (such as private management companies secured through S106 Obligations), or arrangements made for a commuted sum to cover the cost of long term maintenance. This is important in light of the Council's current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which recognises that significant savings in revenue expenditure in Greenspaces is required over the coming years.<sup>32</sup> It should also be noted that the Countryside Management Service provides management support to deliver maintenance at many of the countryside sites through friends of or groups of volunteers.
- 15.40 Notwithstanding the thresholds identified above, all development proposals will be expected to accord with other Local Plan policies and design guidance, including policy D1 'Sustainable Design', that promote good design (including, for example, landscaping and public realm enhancements). To accord with these requirements, the Council may expect a range of different types of 'Multi-functional Open Space' including landscaping, other forms of incidental green space, buffers or Sustainable Urban Drainage systems (SuDs) are provided in any scheme<sup>33</sup>.
- 15.41 Although some of this provision could be incorporated within any formal open space requirements<sup>34</sup>, this may result in further green infrastructure provision in addition to the open space standards and / or the provision of open space upon sites below the formal threshold. All schemes should therefore have regard to these standards as a guide when proposals are developed. As a result, the open space standards should not be treated as a cap for open space provision nor the thresholds as an absolute.

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<sup>32</sup> It should also be noted that the Countryside Management Service provides management support to deliver maintenance at many of the countryside sites through friends of or groups of volunteers.

<sup>33</sup> The Council will not adopt smaller areas of open space and an appropriate management regime will need to be demonstrated

<sup>34</sup> For example, SUDs could be provided within Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace

## Appendix A

### Recent planning applications granted consent

#### **St Richard's House**

**15 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 36 residents**

#### **Maintained by Origin Housing**

Recreational and Amenity (Village Green) – 0.025 hectares

Provision for Children and Young People – 0.005 hectares

Total Area= 0.03 hectares

Provision per 1,000 persons=  $0.03/36= 8.33$

$8.33 \times 1000= 0.83\text{ha}$  per 1,000 persons

#### **61 Station Road, Ashwell**

**20 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 48 residents**

#### **Maintained by Origin Housing**

Recreational and Amenity (Village Green) – 0.03 hectares

Provision per 1,000 persons=  $0.03/48= 0.000625$

$0.000625 \times 1000= 0.63\text{ha}$  per 1,000 persons

#### **Ivy Farm, Phase 1**

**50 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 120 residents**

Recreational and Amenity – 0.49 hectares

Provision per 1,000 persons=  $0.49/120= 0.004$

$0.004 \times 1000= 4.08 \text{ ha}$  per 1,000 persons<sup>35</sup>

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### Sites tested in the Green Space Background Paper 2014

#### **Land at Wheatsheaf Meadow, Barkway**

**10 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 24 residents**

#### **Fields in Trust standards**

**10 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 24 residents**

Recreational and Amenity –  $0.6/1000 \times 24 = 0.0144$  hectares

Natural and Semi Natural –  $1.8/1000 \times 24 = 0.0432$  hectares

Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 24 = 0.006$  hectares

Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.25/1000 \times 24 = 0.006$  hectares

Outdoor Sport –  $1.60/1000 \times 24 = 0.0384$  hectares

Total open space requirement = **0.108 hectares**

#### **NHDC existing provision**

**10 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 24 residents**

Recreational and Amenity –  $0.95/1000 \times 24 = 0.0228$  hectares

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<sup>35</sup> This open space provision will also serve the adjacent phase of development and forms part of the overall strategy for open space on the site.

Natural and Semi Natural –  $0.89/1000 \times 24 = 0.02136$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 24 = 0.006$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.57/1000 \times 24 = 0.01368$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.35/1000 \times 24 = 0.0324$  hectares  
Total open space requirement = **0.09624 hectares**

What was achieved = **0.029 hectares** consisting of a community garden, i.e. recreational and amenity green space.

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**Site A, Fairview Royston**  
**124 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 298 residents**

#### **Fields in Trust standards**

Recreational and Amenity –  $0.77/1000 \times 298 = 0.23$  hectares  
Natural and Semi Natural –  $1.47/1000 \times 298 = 0.44$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.23/1000 \times 298 = 0.06$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.20/1000 \times 298 = 0.05$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.42/1000 \times 298 = 0.42$  hectares  
Total Green Space Requirement = **1.2 hectares**  
Actual Site Area = 3.62 hectares

#### **NHDC existing provision**

Recreational and Amenity –  $0.95/1000 \times 298 = 0.2831$  hectares  
Natural and Semi Natural –  $0.89/1000 \times 298 = 0.26522$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 298 = 0.0745$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.57/1000 \times 298 = 0.16986$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.35/1000 \times 298 = 0.4023$  hectares  
Total Green Space Requirement = **1.19498 hectares**  
Actual Site Area = 3.62 hectares  
What was achieved = **0.66 hectares** comprising recreational and amenity space.

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### **Sites under consideration for inclusion in the Local Plan**

#### **North of Baldock**

##### **Fields in Trust standards**

**2,800 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 6,720 residents**  
Recreational and Amenity –  $0.6/1000 \times 6720 = 4.032$  hectares  
Natural and Semi Natural –  $1.8/1000 \times 6720 = 12.10$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 6720 = 1.68$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.25/1000 \times 6720 = 1.68$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.60/1000 \times 6720 = 10.75$  hectares  
Total open space requirement = **30.242 hectares**

##### **NHDC existing provision**



**2,800 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 6,720 residents**  
Recreational and Amenity –  $0.95/1000 \times 6720 = 6.384$  hectares  
Natural and Semi Natural –  $0.89/1000 \times 6720 = 5.9808$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 6720 = 1.68$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.57/1000 \times 6720 = 3.8304$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.35/1000 \times 6720 = 9.072$  hectares  
Total open space requirement = **26.9472 hectares**

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### **Land south of Newmarket Road, Royston**

#### **Fields in Trust standards**

**300 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 720 residents**  
Recreational and Amenity –  $0.6/1000 \times 720 = 0.432$  hectares  
Natural and Semi Natural –  $1.8/1000 \times 720 = 1.296$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 720 = 0.18$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.25/1000 \times 720 = 0.18$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.60/1000 \times 720 = 1.152$  hectares  
Total open space requirement = **3.24 hectares**

#### **NHDC existing provision**

**300 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 720 residents**  
Recreational and Amenity –  $0.95/1000 \times 720 = 0.684$  hectares  
Natural and Semi Natural –  $0.89/1000 \times 720 = 0.6408$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 720 = 0.18$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.57/1000 \times 720 = 0.4104$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.35/1000 \times 720 = 0.972$  hectares  
Total open space requirement = **2.8872 hectares**

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### **Land south of Waterdell Lane, St Ippolyts**

#### **Fields in Trust standards**

**40 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 96 residents**  
Recreational and Amenity –  $0.6/1000 \times 96 = 0.0576$  hectares  
Natural and Semi Natural –  $1.8/1000 \times 96 = 0.1728$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 96 = 0.024$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.25/1000 \times 96 = 0.024$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.60/1000 \times 96 = 0.1536$  hectares  
Total open space requirement = **0.432 hectares**

#### **NHDC existing provision**

**40 dwellings x 2.4 people per dwelling = 96 residents**  
Recreational and Amenity –  $0.95/1000 \times 96 = 0.0912$  hectares



Natural and Semi Natural –  $0.89/1000 \times 96 = 0.08544$  hectares  
Allotments –  $0.25/1000 \times 96 = 0.024$  hectares  
Equipped Play and Youth Facilities –  $0.57/1000 \times 96 = 0.05472$  hectares  
Outdoor Sport –  $1.35/1000 \times 96 = 0.1296$  hectares  
Total open space requirement = **0.38496 hectares**