

Newry, Mourne & Down Open Space Strategy



Technical Report *DRAFT*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Open Space Strategy

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) appointed Ironside Farrar to assist the Council with the preparation of an Open Space Strategy for the Council area. The Plan will cover the period 2025 - 2035. An Open Space Strategy is the formally approved policy document defining a Local Authority's approach, commitment and management to protect, enhance and manage open space assets. The Council recognises that good quality and easily accessible open space can contribute to a better quality of life.

The **Strategic Planning Policy Statement** (SPPS) states that in plan making councils should bring forward an Open Space Strategy that must reflect the aim, objectives and policy approach of the SPPS, tailored to the specific circumstances of the plan area.

The Council owns and maintains a large variety of open space, sport and outdoor recreational areas throughout the district. There are also privately owned playing fields and other areas of open space including playing fields in the education sector, woodlands, parks and amenity green space including those located within housing developments. Understanding the role and function of NMD open spaces will enable the Strategy to make the most of these assets as well as providing better access and connections to them.

This report sets out the methodology for the preparation of the NMDDC Open Space Audit and the technical outputs, which have informed the preparation of the Open Space Strategy.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the project is to deliver the following:

- Develop an overall Open Space Strategy for the district using the Field in Trust standard, working collaboratively in partnership with Council Officers;
- Provide a detailed quantitative and qualitative review of all existing open space provision in the district (formal and informal, public and private);
- Consider the type of open space facility in relation to accessibility;
- Explore further linkages between existing areas of open space and the potential for linkages with the proposed Strategic Greenways;
- Advise on future open space and recreational provision across the district up to 2035;
- Consider what open space provision (existing and potential) will need to be considered in all of the settlements within the district;
- Consider the importance and role of the Strategic Greenways identified within the district, and how these can link with and provide additional opportunities for open space; and
- Provide recommendations for the delivery of the objectives of the Open Space Strategy.

The study involved a robust analysis identifying all existing areas of open space within the district, based upon the open space data captured by the LDP team. The spatial elements of the strategy will feed into and underpin the evidence base of the Local Development Plan (LDP). The strategy will form an important part of the LDP evidence base, helping to inform policy and planning.

1.3 The Benefits of Open Space

It is recognised that open space, sport and outdoor recreation is important to society now and in the future. It supports many cultural, social, economic, health and environmental benefits and has become increasingly important during the recent world wide pandemic. The importance of safe accessible and well-connected green spaces for improving quality of life have never been more pertinent and some of the benefits include the following:

- Mitigates against climate change
- Improves physical properties of open space
- Better mental health and well being
- Better physical health
- Creating a stronger society
- Increasing economic value
- Moving towards a sustainable urban environment

The provision of open space plays an important role in contributing to the wellbeing, physical and mental health and quality of life of the population. The importance of open space is recognised within the Districts Corporate Plan, advocating a healthy and sustainable district which will provide better environmental and social outcomes for all. One of the key aims of the Community Plan¹ is to improve the wellbeing of people in the district. Future planning policies should take account of the need to:

- Provide opportunities for and encourage healthy lifestyles and physical activity
- Create open space with public access
- Improve ability to reach schools and workplaces by active travel

The **vision of the Community Plan** is to create a district which “is a place with strong safe and vibrant communities where everyone has a good quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high-quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people’s needs.”

Open space provision is particularly relevant to 3 of the 5 key priorities/outcomes outlined within the Community Plan including: enjoyment of resident’s good health and well being, benefiting from a clean, quality and sustainable environment and that all residents live in respectful, safe and vibrant communities. The Community Plan’s thematic group for the environment and spatial development seeks to increase the promotion of both green and blue infrastructure and to promote and enhance access to the built and natural environmental assets. The Plan also seeks to better utilise community planning partners estates to create more green space which is open and accessible to all.

¹ Newry, Mourne & Down Community Plan 2030 ‘Living Well Together’

Outdoor recreation has a very broad range of benefits and spans many social, economic and environmental fields, as the diagram below highlights².



Open space, particularly the natural resources in the district, are important contributors to the character and appearance of the landscape. This natural resource encourages people to visit, live, work and invest in the district and as such can make a valuable contribution to the local economy. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the success of the activity tourism industry in the district, which benefits from the variety of open space assets available for outdoor recreation.

The provision of open space also has important benefits in terms of the environment. It provides for various habitats and species (many of which are protected and of local, national and international importance) and includes many of our natural features that make our landscape so distinctive. Within urban areas it also provides green lungs, visual breaks, opportunities for recreation and wildlife habitats.

² The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland, Sport NI

1.4 Audit Outputs

The outputs of the study are specifically directed to achieve the main project goals, which are as follows: understand the supply / demand for open spaces, identify deficiencies, secure new provision and improve the quality through better accessibility and management.

The outputs of the study are as follows:

- **Technical Audit Report** – summary of the audit methodology
- **Mapped Assessment** – analysis drawings of the data collected through the audit
- **Excel Spreadsheets** – Results of the site audit summarised in tabular form (Electronic Data)
- **GIS Database** – The results of the assessment are recorded in a geo-database to enable the analysis of the collected data. All information collected during the audit has been entered in the database. However, the longer sections of text such as the site description are recorded in the Excel site proformas, to reduce the size of the database.
- **Photographs** – 1 to 4 for each site included in the audit (Electronic Data)

1.5 Data Management

An important element in planning for the Audit is understanding the need for information and securing all necessary agreements on how data will be managed, co-ordinated and accessed, together with appropriate protocols for GIS mapping and data capture. Care should be taken in ensuring that change records are established for the database to ensure that any changes are properly logged and reported.

It is important to note that the Audit is a dynamic piece of work and the sites included in the study should be considered to be stage 1 of an ongoing process. The information recorded in the GIS and Excel database should be reviewed on an annual basis and added to as environmental work is undertaken to ensure that the information remains current.

2.0 NEWRY, MOURNE AND DOWN OPEN SPACES

2.1 Study Area

Newry, Mourne and Down district covers an area of 1,700 km², covering part of County Down and County Armagh, and has over 160 km of coastline including Strangford Lough, the Irish Sea and Carlingford Lough. The landscapes are amongst some of the most scenic in Ireland, including the dramatic mountain areas of the Ring of Gullion and the Mourne Mountains, towards the south and west of the council area. rugged volcanic peaks. To the west of Newry, the uplands of the Ring of Gullion are dramatic, rugged volcanic peaks, with Slieve Gullion at the centre of the 'Ring'. Between the two mountain areas, the drumlin lowlands around Newry surround Carlingford Lough.



The district has a wide ranging provision of open space. In addition, the district benefits from several country estates, forest parks, walking trails, greenways, beaches and activity centres all of which provide a range of outdoor recreational opportunities and attract large numbers of visitors every day. There are a range of parks, sports facilities and children's play areas throughout the settlements, which are well served by a wide range of private recreational clubs including, soccer, rugby, cricket, gaelic games and golf.

The Kingdom of Mourne is a unique landscape with drystone walls of rounded glacial boulders, a dramatic mountain backdrop, and extensive sea views. To the south, lies the Kilkeel Coast with its coastal strip, wetlands and mudflats. Slieve Roosley comprises an area of lower but still highly distinctive and dramatic hills to the north west of the main chain of the Mourne Mountains. The Mourne Foothills immediately to the north of the mountains form a chain of small hills connecting the Mourne Mountains to rugged uplands of Slieve Croob to the northern part of the district.



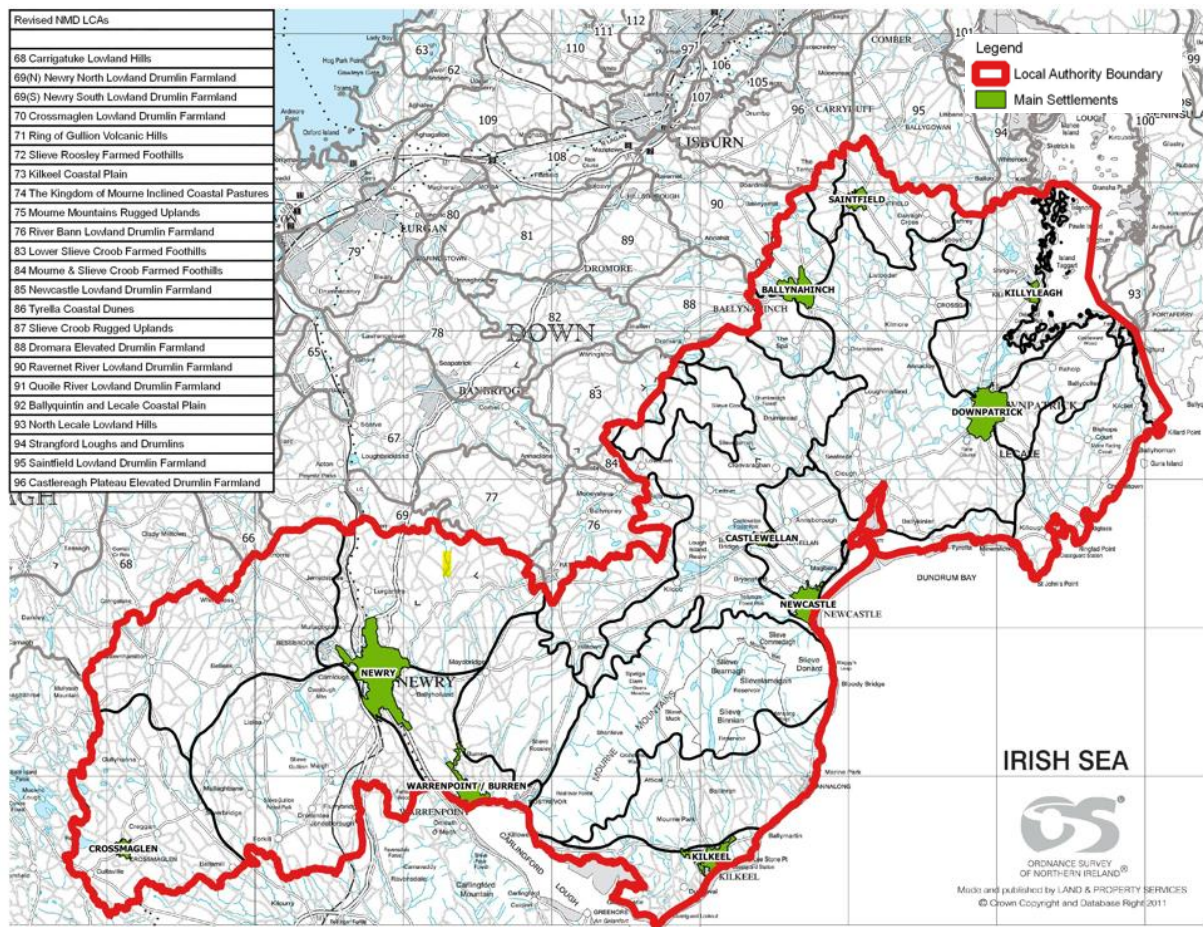


Figure 1: Map of Newry, Mourne and Down



By contrast, drumlin landscape to the north of Newcastle is characterised by river valleys flowing to the coast and the sand spits of Murlough Bank, and the Dundrum Inner Bay. To the east, the sandy coastline is broken by the rocky headlands of the Lecale Coast. This part of the former Down district has a special remote and historic character, with windswept farmland and numerous archaeological sites. Slieve Croob and the peaks of the Mournes provide a dramatic backdrop to views across these eastern lowlands and, together with the sea, provide a striking setting for Newcastle.

Downpatrick is a historical focus to the east of the council area, sited at a bridging point of the Quoile River at the foot of the Lecale Hills. The towns of Ballynahinch, Crossgar and Saintfield are set in a drumlin landscape, on the banks of a river and beside the wooded parkland landscape of local estates.

The 2021 Census indicated that the total population was 182,074. The 2011 Census data showed that 65% of the district's population (then 171,533) resided within the 88 designated settlements with 16% living in Newry City, 24% living in the towns, 20% within the villages and 5% within the 52 small settlements. The remaining 35% were living outside of the settlements in the open countryside.

The District Electoral Area Fora across Newry, Mourne and Down area as follows:

- Crotlieve
- Downpatrick
- Newry
- Rowallane
- Slieve Croob
- Slieve Gullion
- The Mournes



Figure 2: The District Electoral Areas

2.2 Policy Context

Northern Ireland Regional Context

The Regional Development Strategy 2035 aims to promote development which improves the health and wellbeing of communities. RG7 recognises the importance of promoting recreational space within cities, towns and neighbourhoods and new developments. It states that plans should make provision for adequate green and blue infrastructure. RG11 further promotes the protection and encouragement of green and blue infrastructure within urban areas. It also recognises built heritage is a key tourism and recreational asset.

One of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement's core planning principles includes improving health and wellbeing. It states that planning authorities should contribute positively to improving our health and wellbeing through safeguarding and facilitating quality open space, sport and outdoor recreation and through providing safe and secure age-friendly environments. The SPPS highlights the fact that

well designed buildings and successful places can have a positive impact on how people feel. The way in which places and buildings are configured, patterns of movement in the space around us and the level of access to quality open space are all factors that can contribute to our general wellbeing.

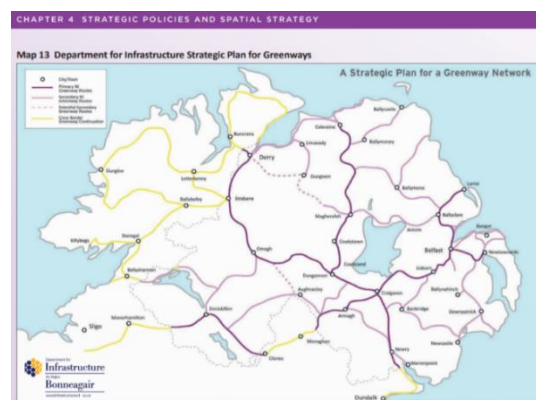
The SPPS requires councils to bring forward an Open Space Strategy that must reflect the aims, objectives and policy approach of the SPPS, tailored to specific circumstances of the plan area. It also notes that the LDP should be informed by a survey / assessment of existing open space provision and future needs to include both public and private open space and identify the different needs they serve.

The SPPS and PPS8 set the following regional strategic objectives for open space, sport and outdoor recreation:

- Safeguard existing open space and sites identified for future such provision;
- Ensure that areas of open space are provided as an integral part of new development and that appropriate arrangements are made for their management and maintenance in perpetuity;
- Facilitate appropriate outdoor recreational activities in the countryside;
- Ensure that new open space areas and sporting facilities are convenient and accessible for all sections of society, particularly children, older people and those with disabilities;
- Achieve high standards of siting, design and landscaping for all new open space areas and sporting facilities; and
- Ensure that the provision of new open space areas and sporting facilities is in keeping with the principles of environmental conservation and helps sustain and enhance biodiversity.

A wide range of other strategies and documents are relevant to open space, including those which have been produced by government departments and agencies and are listed below:

- Sports Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019
- PFMDFM Play and Leisure Policy Statement for Northern Ireland
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – Fitter Future for All 2012-2002
- Out Great Outdoors – Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland – DCAL, DETI and DoE (now the Department for Communities) (2014)
- Sports Facility Strategy for Northern Ireland 2009-2019
- Active Places Research for 2009 Report and 2014 update
- Our Passion, Our Place – NIEA Strategic Priorities 2012 – 2022
- DARD – The Rural White Paper Action Plan (2012)
- Northern Ireland Changing Gear – A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015
- Active School Travel Initiative



Local Policy Context

The importance of open space is recognised at a Council wide level through a number of its Plans and Strategies, which include the following key documents:

- NMD Corporate Plan 2021-2023
- 'Living Well Together' A Community Plan for Newry, Mourne and Down to 2030
- Emerging Local Development Plan
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2017
- Sports Facilities Strategy- Multi Sports Hub Review Strategic Recommendations (June 2022)
- Play Strategy Impact Review and Assessment of Current Need 2024 - 2029, Playboard NI
- Newry, Mourne and Down Active Travel Masterplan, Sustrans 2020

A key vision of the Council's Corporate Plan is to 'facilitate and encourage healthy lifestyles'. It states that a key objective of the Council over the corporate plan period is to have 'supported improved health and wellbeing outcomes' by improving quality of life and reducing health inequalities, primarily through programmes, services and access to open spaces.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Open Space Database

The Open Space Audit has quantified the scale of provision, the quality of the open space and how accessible they are, based on the analysis of the NMDDC Open Space database. This has been undertaken for the DEA areas in the district to enable the identification of qualitative and accessibility deficiencies in each area. The outcomes will enable decision making to be informed by robust and up to date evidence in relation to future need and open space provision across the district.

The NMDDC **Open Space database contains a total of 1,147No. GIS polygons**, which formed the basis of the GIS desk study exercise review of open space provision across the district.

Of the 1,147 GIS open space polygons, there are 751 “outer sites” drawn around the perimeter of the site, and 374 “inner sites” consisting of secondary uses (e.g. play areas, sports pitches) within the outer site polygon. There were also 22No. buildings identified on the map. All of the open spaces will remain in the audit, but only the larger open spaces (170No.) containing facilities open spaces were visited for the audit and included in the quality assessment.

Open Space Shapefiles	Number of Sites Included in the Open Space Database
Allotments and Community Gardens	3
Amenity Space	415
Civic Space	9
Community Greenway	9
Indoor Sports Facility	24
Natural and Semi-Natural Urban Green Space	38
Outdoor Sports (playing pitches and other outdoor sports)	380
Parks & Gardens	69
Play Area	200
Total	1,147No.

Table 1: NMDDC Open Space Database

There are also 17No. publicly accessible beaches in the following locations: Kilclief, Ballyhornan, Coney Island, Killough, Rossglass, Minerstown, Clanmaghera, Tyrella, Downpatrick Bay, Murlough, Newcastle, Springwell, Kilkeel, Cranfield, Killowen, Rostrevor and Warrenpoint. Publicly accessible beaches are important areas of open space and will be considered in more detail in the next update of the Open Space Audit.

The Open Space Strategy will consider the links between the existing and proposed Strategic Greenways in more detail in the next update of the Open Space Audit.

3.2 Open Space Audit

The audit included the analysis of existing public and private, formal and informal open space provision in terms of quantity, spatial distribution and the different needs they serve. Open spaces were mapped and assessed for quality and captured in Excel / GIS databases. The following settlements were included in the Open Space Audit:

Hub (2No.)	Town (9No.)	Village (23No.)	Small Settlements (29No.)
Downpatrick	Ballynahinch	Annsborough	Altnamacken
Newry	Burren	Ardglass	Annacloy
	Castlewellan	Ballyholland	Ballyhornan
	Crossmaglen	Ballykinler	Ballymaderphy
	Kilkeel	Ballymartin	Barnmeen
	Killyleagh	Bessbrook	Belleek
	Newcastle	Camlough	Bryansford
	Saintfield	Clough	Cloughoge
	Warrenpoint	Crossgar	Creggan
		Cullyhanna	Cullaville
		Drumaness	Darragh Cross
		Dundrum	Drumroad
		Forkhill	Drumintee
		Hilltown	Glassdrumman
		Jonesborough	Glen
		Killough	Kilclief
		Mayobridge	Kilcoo
		Meigh	Kilmore
		Mullaghbane	Leitrim
		Newtownhamilton	Lislea
		Rathfiland	Lurganare
		Rostrevor	Maghera
		Strangford	Mullaghglass
			Saul
			Sheeptown
			Shrigley
			Silverbridge
			The Spa
			Whitecross

Out of all settlements in the district, the following 12 settlements do not have open spaces large enough to audit, or they are not selected due to type, size or facilities within the open spaces:

- Attical
- Ballyalton
- Ballymoyer
- Ballynoe
- Clonvaraghan
- Dechomet
- Dorsey
- Dunnaval / Ballyardle
- Kileen
- Laganare
- Longstone
- Loughinisland

The following table summarises the amount of the various types of open space in each of the DEAs.

Open Space Typology	The Mournes	Crotlieve	Slieve Croob	Downpatrick	Slieve Gullion	Rowallane	Newry	Total (Ha)
Parks & Gardens	513.30	1652.89	769.01	782.23	667.34	616.11	69.16	5062.38
Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space	3758.39	24.37	233.96	12.00	1.03	17.84	7.79	4055.39
Outdoor Sports Facility	553.04	57.33	56.01	109.48	62.38	88.75	48.50	1028.83
Amenity Green Space	6.87	50.86	7.30	49.12	10.81	15.47	24.14	165.03
Play Space	0.45	0.20	0.66	1.32	3.44	0.65	1.78	9.01
Community Greenway	1.78	3.13	0.16	1.21		0.43		6.71
Community Gardens							1.60	1.60
Civic Space	0.19		0.11	0.19	0.04	0.05		0.59
Grand Total (Ha)	4834.14	1788.83	1067.55	959.02	745.94	739.63	152.97	10342.36

Table 2: Amount of Open Space in the DEAs

The following table sets out the ownership of the open spaces in the database:

Ownership	Number	Types of Open Space
CHURCH	1	Tobar Mhuire
CLUB	166	Outdoor Sports Facilities
CLUB/NMDDC	4	Outdoor Sports Facilities
DfC	2	Clough Castle and Dundrum Castle
EDUCATION	62	School Sports Facilities
HEALTH TRUST	2	Downshire Estate
NATIONAL TRUST	5	Mourne Mountains, Rowallane, Castleward, Old Court, Derrymore House
NIEA	1	Amenity space
NIHE	218	Amenity space
NMDDC	431	Parks/Gardens, play areas, Allotments and Community Gardens, Natural and Semi-Natural Urban Green Space, Outdoor Sports Facility
PRIVATE	51	Parks/Gardens, Outdoor Sports Facility, Amenity Space
SEELB	2	Outdoor Sports Facility
UNKNOWN	191	All types of open space
WOODLAND TRUST	11	Tollymore Forest Park, Derrymore House, Bunkers Hill etc.
Total	1,147No.	

Table 3: NMDDC Open Space Ownership Summary

3.3 Site Selection for the Audit

An exercise was undertaken to identify the spaces to be included in the quality assessment and the site visits, to ensure that the larger parks and open spaces that are publicly accessible were quality assessed. **170No. open space audit sites** were identified, based on a size threshold of over 0.2ha / 0.5ha in size, type of open space and those that are publicly accessible. These sites were mapped and a detailed quality assessment undertaken. The quality open space audit includes the following types of open spaces:

- Outdoor Sports - not visited as included in the Sports Strategy, except where they include a wider park function (e.g. play facilities)
- Play Areas including Equipped Play Areas - included as part of the overall assessment of a park / open space but informed by the Play Strategy and Audit
- Parks and Gardens - included in the audit
- Amenity Green Space - only sites over 0.5ha in size
- Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace - community woodlands / accessible woodlands close to residential areas
- Greenways / Green Corridors - where they are close to residential areas
- Allotments and community Gardens - included in the audit
- Civic Space - included where there is greenspace e.g. town square with seating and trees

Note: The following types of open space have been assessed through other Strategies, including:

- Provision for Children and Young People (provided by Play Strategy)
- Formal sport pitches and other formal facilities (provided by Playing Pitch Strategy)

The following chart illustrates the number of open space sites included in the audit for each settlement:

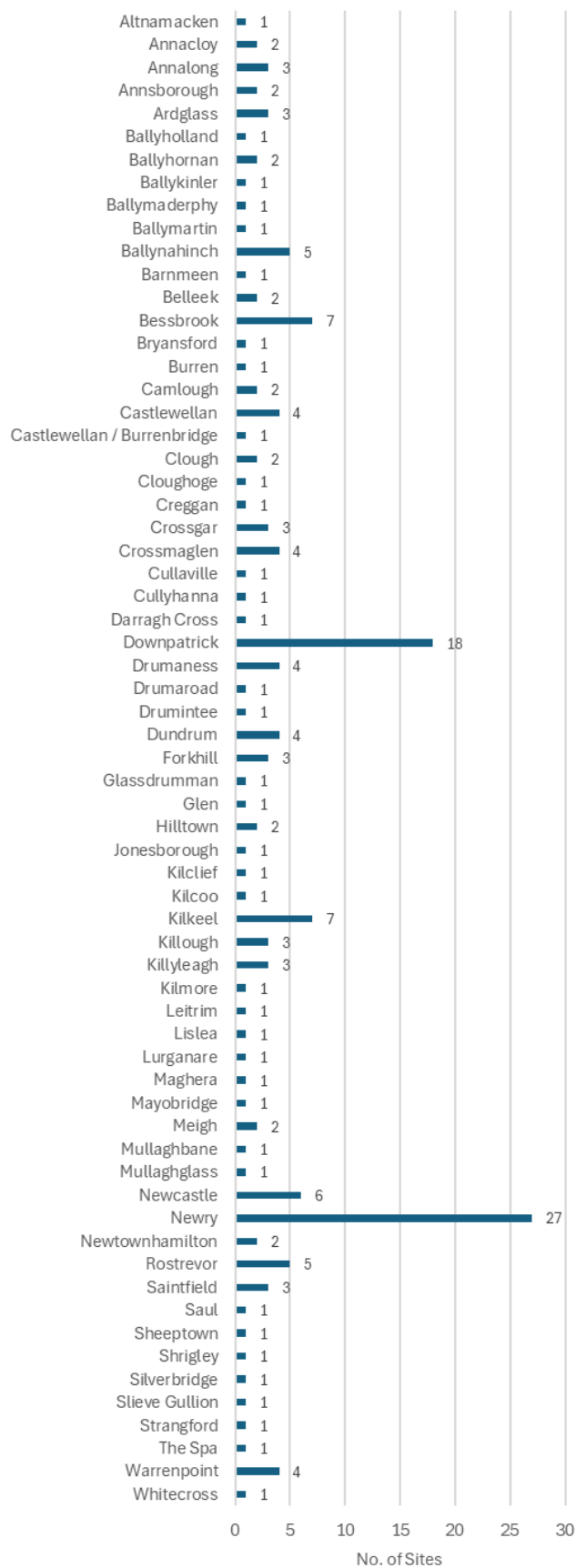


Chart 1: Number of Sites
Included in the Audit

3.4 Site Assessment Process

The open space analysis was informed by on-site audits of the 170 No. open space sites, using the following process:

- Site visits and assessment, using agreed quality assessment criteria
- Site description, condition assessment, function, and condition of the spaces
- Assessment of accessibility for the spaces including any barriers preventing access to the site
- Fitness for purpose of the open space and identification of priority areas or issues

The audit open space sites were mapped and GIS data (ESRI ArcGIS) was loaded onto Tablet PCs that allowed the site audit team to record site information directly into qualitative assessment forms. Each of the 170 sites were visited and audited. A number of representative photographs were taken of each site. A proforma was completed for the site visits, held on an excel spreadsheet with a row for each site, using the agreed categories and assessment criteria.

The following information was recorded:

- Site information / Site ID / Site Name / Location of the site / site size (hectares)
- Type of open space, according to the agreed typology and sub-categories
- Characteristics of the open space, for example:
 - Site Condition
 - Quality Assessment - 'Fitness for purpose' numerical score for each site
 - Priority for action (high / medium / low)
 - Recommendations for each site

Note: The following types of open space have been assessed through other Strategies, including:

- Provision for Children and Young People (provided by Play Strategy)
- Formal sport pitches and other formal facilities (provided by Playing Pitch Strategy)

The written assessment has been captured in an excel spreadsheet, to enable easy updating of the audit data and transfer of information to the GIS database for mapping purposes. See extract below:

Location	Hierarchy	Typology	Suggested amendments to OS Typology	Sub Category	Area (ha)	Owner	Site Description	Site Condition	Recommendations	Total Overall Score	Priority for Action (H/M/L)	Created By	Created Date	IG Easting	Number
ALTNAMACKEN	Small settlement	Play Area	Play area		0.85	NIWDC	Small play area set in an area of grassed open space with football goals at the end of Fair Valley Park cul-de-sac. There is a play area, with woodchip safety surfacing, play equipment and wooden fencing. It is a pleasant local open space, probably only used by the local residents.	This site is hidden away from view of the housing. The wooden fence has been partially destroyed with one panel missing. The play surface is weedy. The play equipment needs retaining.	The size and location of the site will limit its use and development. The play area is currently fit for purpose, but the fencing should be repaired / replaced. Ongoing maintenance to renew the play surface and maintain the play equipment.	57	M	Sarah Crane	2024/07/04	308096	936
ANNACLOY	Small settlement	Outdoor Sports Facility			2.79	NIWDC	Area of sports pitches and associated changing facility located to the south west of the village. The site is primarily for sports use and has no other function. It is gated and locked outwith practice times.	The sports facility is of reasonable quality.	The site is considered fit for purpose. Its location at a distance from the village will encourage people to travel by car, but access is along a quiet country road. However, it provides a good quality facility for sports.	54	L	Sarah Crane	2024/07/04	344300	716
ANNACLOY	Small settlement	Outdoor Sports Facility	Sports facility with play area. Just inside play area?		4.03	CLUB	Sports complex on the outskirts of Annacloy comprising football pitches, clubhouse, car park and a fenced play area at the entrance to the site. Recently installed children's play area located to the south east of the village of Annacloy. The play facility provides facilities for younger children and includes a zip wire, basket swing, net saw which may attract older children. There are benches on site. The sports facility is gated so access but with football pitches may be limited. Good quality and well used facility.	The play facility and the wider sports facility is of high quality and recently installed.	The site is considered fit for purpose. Its location is a distance from the village will encourage people to travel by car, but access is along a quiet country road. However, it provides a good quality facility for families.	68	L	Sarah Crane	2024/07/04	344812	713
ANNALONG	Village	Community Greenway			1.45	UNKNOWN	Strip of semi natural open space running along the coast from Russell's Point to Springwell Beach, providing a well surfaced along part of the route. Some sections of the route run along areas of amenity open space, quiet residential roads and areas of rough ground. The path is an attractive walkway and is well marked in parts.	The site is in good condition overall. However, the path surface in some sections is rough or across areas of mean grass.	The variations of the path surfacing along the route provides an attractive environment. However, the surface material along the route should be reviewed to ensure that the surface is overall fit for purpose. Ongoing management and maintenance to ensure that the path, and connecting spurs, is in good repair throughout.	72	L	Sarah Crane	2024/07/04	336810	943
ANNALONG	Village	Parks/Gardens	Local park		1.80	NIWDC	Extensive area of open space in the heart of the village, surrounded on 3 sides by residential housing and the coast to the east. There is a large car park to the east and access along the southern. The site comprises: extensive areas of open space, sports pitches, an indoor sports building, FAIC an MIRA Community Centre a children's play area and a picnic area defined by a row of boulders. The boundary of the site along Glassdunnam Road is defined by attractive stone walls, rows of standard trees and boulders. There is a path crossing the site, providing access across the site.	The open space is in good condition and the young children's play area is fenced and recently installed.	The site is currently fit for purpose and the play area has been recently installed. There may be opportunity to improve the visual amenity of the site through the addition of attractive trees and shrub planting, seating areas and well designed entrances.	71	L	Sarah Crane	2024/07/04	337437	221
ANNALONG	Village	Amenity Space	Amenity as no play space		0.54	NIWDC	Large area of open space to the north of Annalong, beside a residential area. The site comprises an area of rough grass with storage containers, a former games area with concrete walls and what looked like goals. There is a footpath link to the community greenway along the shore.	The place space has no features, the surface is rough and uneven so appears semi-deserted. The grass is rough and there is dumping around the containers, which detracts from the space.	Clean up the site and improve the play value and amenity of the site, in consultation with local people.	49	M	Sarah Crane	2024/07/04	337674	219
ANNBOROUGH	Village	Outdoor Sports Facility	Or local park?		2.56	NIWDC	Extensive area of open space comprising 10 sports pitches, mown grass areas around the pitches, expansive areas of car park and a fenced play area. There are dense hedges around the site perimeter and the site is overlooked by a row of houses. The play facility provides facilities for younger children and includes swings, climbing equipment and some equipment for older children and young adults. There are benches on site. The sports facility is gated so access out with football practices may be limited.	The site is a reasonably good quality and well used facility. However, the design of the site is poor, with a lack of connectors between the site facilities, the large area of rough surfaced car park. The site is open and exposed to the weather and does not contain any attractive features. The play matting is lifting in places and weedy and the waste bin is rusting. There is a raised embankment along the outside edge, but very little landscaping or attractive landscaping areas. There is some litter around the play area.	The site appears to be fit for purpose and the pitches / play area in good condition. However, the open space could be better planned with a network of connected paths to and around the site and connectors to the adjacent Conry Woods. Areas of attractive trees and shrub planting, seating areas and well designed entrances would improve the amenity of the site. Provide play facilities / hanging out shelters for older children and young adults.	62	M	Sarah Crane	2024/07/04	335546	556

Newry Mourne and Down District Council Audit			Qualitative Site Assessment																														
Site Number	Site Name	Location	Individual scores and overall average	Access & Community				Attractiveness / Place Appeal								Biodiversity				Functionality				Community Benefits				Total Overall Score	Priority for Action (H/M/L)				
				1. Access to site	2. Access to site	3. Access to site	4. Access to site	1. Attractiveness	2. Attractiveness	3. Attractiveness	4. Attractiveness	1. Biodiversity	2. Biodiversity	3. Biodiversity	4. Biodiversity	1. Functionality	2. Functionality	3. Functionality	4. Functionality	1. Community Benefits	2. Community Benefits	3. Community Benefits	4. Community Benefits										
NP0011	FAIR VALLEY PARK	ANNALONG	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	57	H	
NP0020	LOUGHSHILL ROAD	ANNALONG	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	54	L	
NP0028	BAIN ROAD	ANNALONG	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	68	L	
NP0738	ANNALONG SHORE	ANNALONG	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	72	L	
NP0781	GLASSBOROUGH ROAD	ANNALONG	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	71	L	
NP0812	MONA VIEW	ANNALONG	5	4	2	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	49	M
NP0880	ANNBOROUGH PAVILLION	ANNBOROUGH	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	62	M	
NP0874	CORRY WOOD	ANNBOROUGH	5	3	2	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	69	L
NP1107	GREEN ROAD	ANNBOROUGH	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	66	L	
NP1114	QUAY STREET	ANNBOROUGH	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	70	L	
NP1111	SEAVIEW	ANNBOROUGH	5	3	2	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	54	L
NP0424	BETTS HILL ROAD	BALLYHOLLAND	5	2	2	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	72	L
NP1138	BALLYHOLLAND SHORE	BALLYHOLLAND	5	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	85	L
NP1122	BOURKE'S LANE	BALLYHOLLAND	5	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	67	M
NP0914	SAND LANE	BALLYHOLLAND	6	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	61	M
NP0860	OLIVE ROSE PARK	BALLYHOLLAND	5	4	3	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	64	L
NP0824	MILLFORD CLOSE	BALLYHOLLAND	5	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	73	L
NP0782	MILLFORD CRESCENT	BALLYHOLLAND	5	4	3	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	64	M
NP0782	LANGLEY ROAD	BALLYHOLLAND	5	4	3	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	56	M
NP0758	WINDMILL HILL	BALLYHOLLAND	5	4	2	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	72	L
NP0752	LOUGH PARK	BALLYHOLLAND	5	4	2	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	59	M
NP0741	WINDMILL STREET PLAY AREA	BALLYHOLLAND	5	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	74	L
NP0515	LONGSTONE HILL	BALLYHOLLAND	5	4	3	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	65	L
NP0091	MAIN STREET	BALLYHOLLAND	5	4	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	75	L
NP0101	OLIVER PLUNKETT PARK	BALLYHOLLAND	5	3	3	2	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	44	M

Table 4: Audit Database (extract) – Refer to the database for the assessment of 170No. sites

3.5 Open Space Typology

Open space may serve a range of functions and some areas, particularly informal spaces, may not fit neatly into the typology.

The Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation defines open space as: *“all open space of public value...including not just land, but also inland bodies of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunity for sports and outdoor recreation and can also act as visual amenity.”*

An appreciation of the hierarchy of open spaces can help councils to understand the different functions they perform and distinguish between spaces of strategic, local and neighbourhood importance. This should be tailored to fit local circumstances, and is usually most applicable to parks, greenspaces and woodland areas. Criteria linking population catchments to the size of different spaces and sensible distance or time thresholds can be included, helping to ensure that spaces of different types, functions and sizes are easily accessible to the communities they serve.

A typology has been developed to assist understanding of the breadth of the open space resource in the district, each having a variety of uses and secondary uses / characteristics. Each open space audit site has been assigned an identification reference, a name, location, typology and type, as set out in the table below. A GIS shape file was prepared for the open spaces included in the audit, to which the site survey data was attached.

The following classification or typology of open space, based on PPS8, represent the wide range of open spaces that are of public value:

Open Space Type	Sub-type	Description
Parks & Gardens	Historic Park / Garden & Demesnes* / Forest Park / Regional Scenic Area / Country Park <i>2.5km walking catchment (approx. 35min walk)</i>	Areas of parkland of significant size, offering a combination of recreation / visitor facilities and heritage features. National Trust property, private estates, Country Parks, Woodland Trust sites and Forest Parks, which are accessible and open to the public. Major leisure facility, with a range of visitor facilities and a wide catchment of users, often travelling long distances by car and or public transport for a 'family day out'.
	City / Town Park <i>1,000m walking catchment (approx. 12min walk)</i>	Open spaces that provide a variety of activities and natural features, including sports facilities, children's play for all ages, informal recreation, gardens and seating areas. City parks located in Newry and Downpatrick, will provide facilities appropriate to the main hub settlements. Town Parks will provide facilities appropriate to towns (e.g. Newcastle and Ballynahinch) or peripheral residential areas of the City or main town.
	Local Park <i>400m walking catchment (approx. 5min walk)</i>	These parks are small areas of open space, and may contain children's play, seating or informal recreation. They are often well used parks within walking distance of the immediate residential area.
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Playing Pitches	Sports facilities with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned. Including tennis courts, bowling greens, sport pitches, golf courses, athletic tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas. Some GAC sites include play facilities that are open at times when the sports facility is closed.
	GAC Facility with Play Space <i>700m walking catchment (approx. 8min walk)</i>	
	Other Outdoor Provision	
Amenity Green Space		Landscaped areas providing visual amenity or separating different buildings or land uses including informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing, and village greens, most commonly found in housing areas.
Play Space for Children and teenagers	Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP)	Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play are areas of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children (aged 12+ years), but also with play opportunities for younger children. May include kickabout areas, Multi Use Games Area, skateboard parks and outdoor basketball hoops).
	Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP)	Local Equipped Area for Play, aimed at children who are beginning to go out to play independently (aged 5 – 12 years), close to where they live. May include opportunity for informal recreation.
Green Corridors	Strategic Greenways	Designated segregated walking and cycling routes identified in the DfI Strategic Plan for Greenways. A public path or route, including former railways, river and canal banks, amenity footpaths and cycleways.
	Community Greenways	
Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces	Woodlands & Urban Forestry	Areas of undeveloped or previously developed land with residual natural habitats or which have been planted or colonised by vegetation and wildlife, including woodlands, urban forestry, grasslands (e.g. meadows), wetlands, open and running water and accessible beaches.
	Open Semi-natural Greenspace	
	Accessible Beaches	
Allotments & Community Gardens		Allotments and areas of land for growing fruit and vegetables, either in individual allotments or as a community activity.
Cemeteries		Includes cemeteries and churchyards.
Civic Spaces		Civic and market squares and other hard surface areas designed for pedestrians.

Table 5: Open Space Typology Note: * identified in the NI record of Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes, Department for Communities

4.0 OPEN SPACE STANDARDS

4.1 Introduction

Setting standards for open space enables a better understanding of the current status of open space assets across a local authority area. UK best practice guidance suggests that standards should contain three elements:

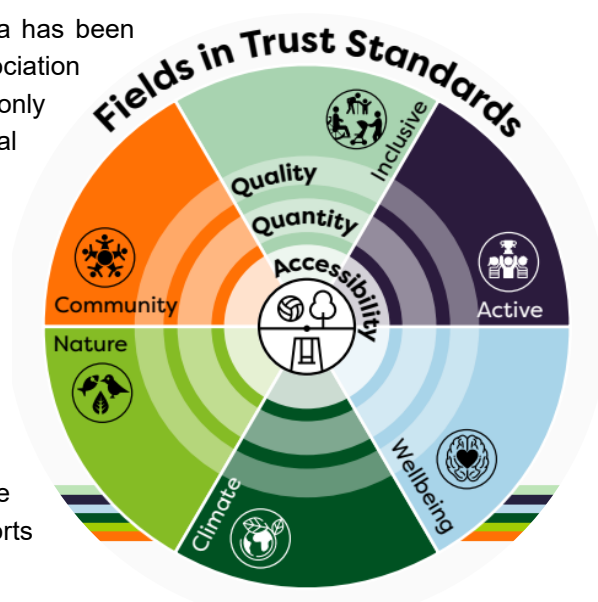
- **Quantity** – an amount of space per house unit or head of population
- **Quality** – a benchmark against which quality can be measured
- **Accessibility** – an amount of particular types of open space within a specified distance

The audit methodology was informed by the knowledge and lessons learnt from UK Open Space Audit and Strategy Best Practice, creating usable outputs and the development of a tool for future open space management.

4.2 Quantity Standards

The existing provision of open space in the plan area has been assessed against the National Playing Field Association (NPFA) recommended minimum standard (commonly referred to as the '6 acre standard'). This is a national standard which recommends a **minimum of 2.4 hectares of outdoor playing space per 1000 population**. This is commonly referred to as the 'Six Acre Standard', comprising of 4 acres (1.6 hectares per 1000 population) for outdoor sport provision and 2 acres (0.8 hectares per 1000 population) for children's play. This has been renamed as the Fields in Trust (FIT) Standard³.

The Benchmarks enable calculations to be made on the quantity and accessibility of open space, outdoor sports and play spaces as possible.



Benchmark Category	FIT Standard per 1000 people (ha)
Parks and gardens	0.8
Amenity green space	0.6
Sports pitches	1.2
Other outdoor sports (courts, greens, tracks, trails or sports equipment)	0.4
Equipped play areas	0.25
Informal play provision (incl. MUGAs, pump tracks or skateboard parks)	0.3
Natural and semi natural greenspace	1.8
TOTAL	5.35 hectares

Table 6: FiT Recommended Benchmark Guidelines

³ <https://fieldsintrust.org/content/images/FIT-Standards-2024-Accessible-version.pdf>

4.3 Quality Standards

Quality is a key component of open space. The quality assessment part of the audit process is probably the most complex area to secure consistent evaluation. Setting quality criteria to assess the standard of an open space is made more difficult by the diversity of spaces (character, scale, function) and the difficulties involved in establishing a common set of criteria against which to evaluate quality. There is a recognition that quality criteria are not absolute measures but rather provide an informed, common-sense approach on which a consistent judgement of the quality of a space can be determined.

The indicators are based on the recommendations included in the “Greenspace Quality: A Guide to Assessment, Planning and Strategic Development”⁴. There are 5 themes and 7 or 8 indicators under each theme. The following table sets out the scoring criteria for each of the indicators:

Access & Community	Attractiveness / Place Appeal	Biodiversity	Functionality	Community Benefits
Well located & close to community	Attractive and offers a positive image	Contribute +ve biodiversity/water/air quality	Offers a range functions / flexibility of use	Safe and welcoming
Meets DDA requirements/ Disabled Needs	Provides an attractive setting	Large enough to sustain wildlife populations	Diverse play / sport/ recreational opportunity	Good levels of natural surveillance
Provides Quality Paths Fit-for-Purpose	Quality materials/equipment/furniture	Offer diversity of habitats	Offers good places for Social Interaction	Low levels/Absence of anti-social behaviour
Connects to other transport nodes	Attractive planting/ landscape elements	Part of wider landscape structure	High quality facilities meeting user needs	Appropriate lighting levels
Allows movement in & between places	Welcoming boundaries/entrances	Connects to wider green Networks	Appropriate facilities for location/ size/use	Sense of local identity & place
Has accessible entrances in right places	Facilities in clean/safe/usable condition	Balance habitat protection & access	Facilities well sited for all ages	Provide routes to wider community facilities
Offers connected path network and signage	Low levels of litter & adequate bins	Resource efficient (grass cutting/peat compost/)	Adaptable to changing needs / use	Contains distinctive/ memorable places
	Well maintained			Community involvement in management

Table 7: Open Space Quality Assessment Criteria

Each site is given a score between 1 and 5 (low to high) for each of the assessment indicators, which are then sub totalled for each theme. All of the criteria are relevant for the larger multifunctional sites. Then each of the site scores are totalled and a percentage score generated. However, as with any database, there are limitations regarding the use and function of the dataset. The audit includes open spaces of all types and sizes, with a diverse range of functions and greenspace elements. Therefore, the study recommends that the total value score should not be viewed in isolation of the other parts of the assessment, but rather seen as an indicator to highlight issues and patterns. The scores for each indicator are totalled and an overall percentage score given. The total percentage scores have been separated into three bands. This banding provides a useful starting point to review the quality of the overall open space resource. Any sites in band E are not considered to be fit for purpose.

Quality Scoring		
Band A	Score of 80% or more	Excellent
Band B	Score of 70% - 79%	Very Good
Band C	Score of 60% - 69%	Good
Band D	Score of 50% - 59%	Fair
Band E	Score of less than 50%	Poor

Table 8: Open Space Quality Scoring

⁴ Greenspace Quality: A Guide to Assessment, Planning and Strategic Development, Greenspace Scotland

The communities of NMDDC should have access to networks of good quality useable open space close to where they live. The application of a Quality Standard has been used to better understand the quality of open spaces in each area.

The following quality standard has been developed for NMDDC:

City / Town Park / Local Parks with a quality score of less than 60% are considered in need of improvement, through a rolling programme of upgrades as resources and project coordination allow. Historic Park / Garden & Demesnes / Forest Park / Country Parks with a quality score of less than 70% are considered in need of improvement.

All other types of open space, included in the open space audit, that have been given a quality score of less than 50% are considered in need of improvement.

New open space in consented developments should address the quality standards across all open space typologies.

4.4 Accessibility Standards

Access is a key component of open space. Open spaces need to serve local communities and deliver locally accessible open space providing a local resource that addresses daily needs, supports access by walking, cycling, horse riding and public transport, supports unsupervised use with safe accessibility and promotes informal recreation and exercise (dog walking, health walking or general passive use).

The accessibility standard refers to how close people should be to their nearest publicly usable open space. It requires assessment using straight line distance thresholds for particular types of open space. Distance thresholds are a useful planning tool. It is possible to map households within a distance threshold comparison of sites, neighbourhoods and community settlements. Distances set the maximum distance that typical users can reasonably be expected to travel on foot to each type of open space. International research into the impacts of greenspace on health and on wider quality of life shows that having greenspace within a 5 minute walk of home is a strong indicator for health and quality of life benefits. A five minute walk is widely considered to equate to a distance of 400 metres 'door to space'.

NMDDC sets an accessibility standard for open space that requires all residential areas have easy access to the following:

The following accessibility standard has been developed for NMDDC, based on the Open Space Strategy. The residents of NMDDC should have easy access to 1 or more of the following types of open space:

- **2.5km*** (or a 35 minute walk) **of a Historic Park / Garden & Demesnes / Forest Park / Regional Scenic Area / Country Park**
- **1,000m*** (or a 12 minute walk) **of a City / Town Park**
- **700m*** (or an 8 minute walk) **of a GAC Facility with Play Space**, where there are no parks
- **400m*** (or a 5 minute walk) **of a Local Park**

* Straight line distance

Provision of Historic Parks / Country Parks / Forest Parks is dependent on the existence of these larger scale natural features. Residents living local to a Country Park or Forest Park may use the parks for activities similar to town parks / historic parks. The parks may also attract visitors from further within the district and beyond.

5.0 AUDIT AND EVALUATION FINDINGS

5.1 Newry Mourne and Down Open Spaces

Newry, Mourne and Down is abundant with a beautiful natural environment and open spaces with many walking and cycling trails. It has numerous forests, parks, and open space as well as 3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

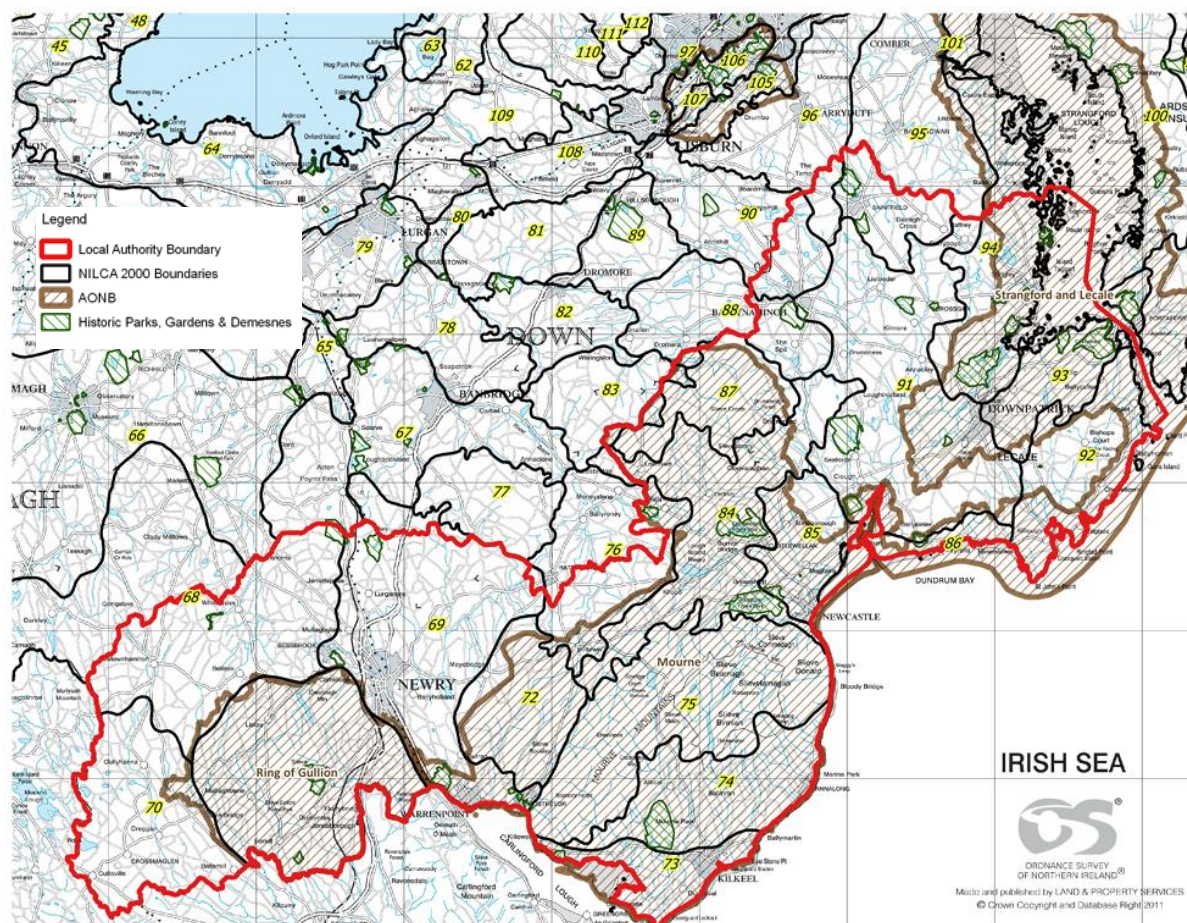


Figure 3: Landscape Designations

The area has a wide diversity of public open spaces including woodlands, beaches, parks, allotment gardens, wildlife sites, burns and ponds. Many open spaces are multi-functional and contribute to the quality of life in the district, by providing opportunities for active and passive recreation, an attractive and sustainable urban environment and a space for nature. The open spaces vary considerably in size from Country Parks / Forest Parks of over 400ha in size to small local greenspaces of less than 100m². Whilst the large parks provide day trip locations, the smaller parks and amenity open spaces also make a valuable contribution to accessible local provision.

The Newry, Mourne and Down district contains **10,577.34 hectares of open space** (excluding indoor sports facilities). The following table sets out the amounts of the various types of open space included in the Open Space Audit (all open space sites).

Open Space Type	Area (hectares)
Parks and gardens	9146.30
Amenity space	76.49
Outdoor sports facilities	855.60
Play Areas	27.37
Community Greenways	10.50
Natural and semi natural urban greenspaces	459.96
Allotments	0.25
Civic spaces	0.87
Total Open Space	10,577.34 hectares

Table 9: Open Space Quantity (Source data NMDDC)

5.2 Quantity of Open Space

The audit focussed on NMDDC owned and managed open space included in the NMDDC open space database. A calculation of the amount of open space per 1,000 people was calculated, with the results set out in the table below. The categories of open space were selected from the total area of open space set out in table 8 above, which therefore excludes large outdoor sports facilities such as golf courses and privately owned parks/gardens (e.g. National Trust properties and private estates).

Benchmark Category	FiT Standard per 1000 people (ha)	NMDDC Total (ha)	NMDDC per 1000 people (ha) ⁵
Parks and gardens	0.8	91.71	0.52
Amenity green space	0.6	76.49	0.43
Sports pitches (excl. School pitches)	1.2	432.02	2.46
Other outdoor sports (courts, greens, tracks, trails or sports equipment)	0.4	19.98	0.11
Equipped play areas	0.25	27.37	0.16
Informal play provision (incl. MUGAs, pump tracks or skateboard parks)	0.3	47.95	0.27
Natural and semi natural greenspace	1.8	459.96	2.61
TOTAL	5.35 ha	11,769.36 ha	6.57ha

Table 10: FiT Recommended Benchmark Guidelines

When assessed against the FiT standards, the audit identified that the total open space in the Newry, Mourne and Down area meets the standards. The NMDDC quantity standards requires there to be 5.35 hectares of open space per 1,000 people and the overall figure is 6.57 hectares of open space per 1,000 people which exceeds the standard.

⁵ Population of the District approximately 175,974 people (2015 estimate)

Furthermore, the district includes a number of large forest parks / country parks, some of which are located close to the towns and villages, including: Kilbroney Forest Park, Slieve Gullion, Delamont Country Park, Castlewellan Castle, Tollymore Forest Park and Mourne Park. The combined total area of these large scale parks is 3,505.76 hectares, so they have been removed from the calculation. Some are suitable for a day out visit, whereas others located closer to settlements can be enjoyed for shorter walks and cycle rides.

Beaches are not included within the definition of Open Space as set out in PPS8. These open spaces have not been captured in the open space audit database but are often publicly accessible and provide a wealth of opportunities for active outdoor pursuits such as walking, sailing, angling, children's play and cycling. However, the open space audit will consider the accessible beaches along the coastline, which are within easy reach of the settlements. *To be completed.*

The chart below demonstrates the open space provision in each DEA area, when compared with the FiT standard of 5.35ha per 1,000 people. (Note: The large Country Parks / Forest Parks / golf courses / private estates that are at a distance from the settlements have been omitted from the assessment).

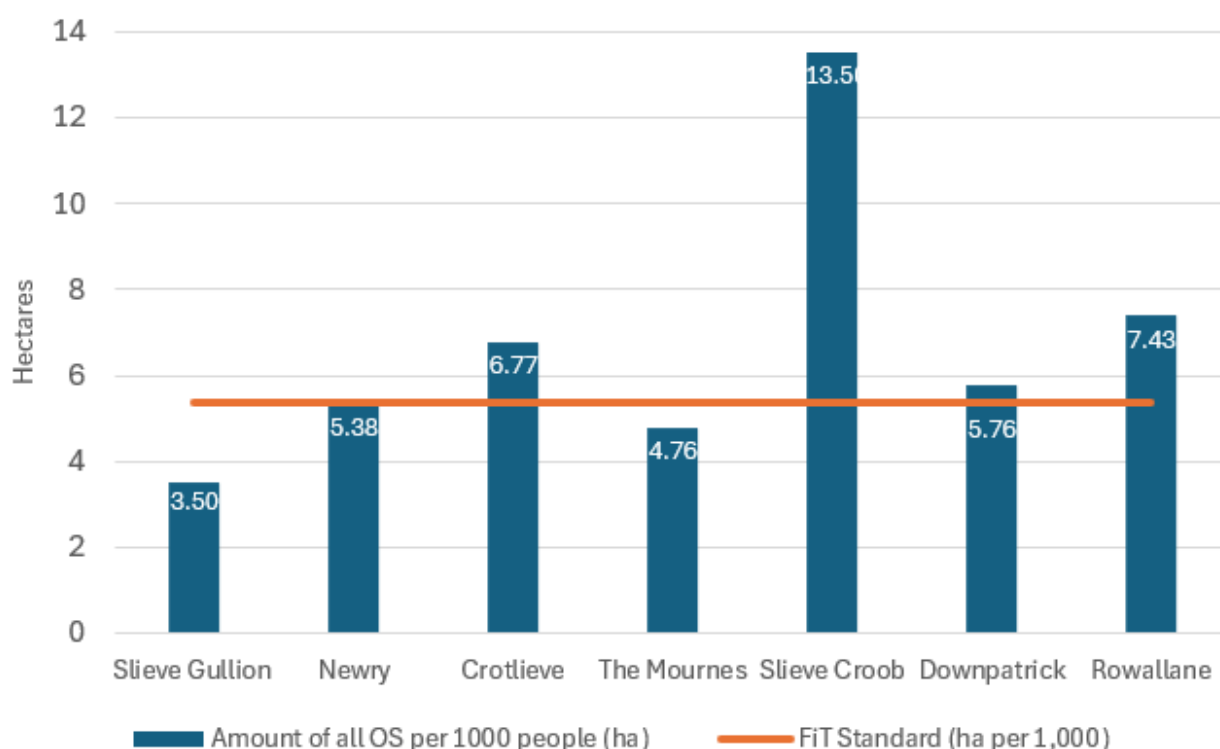


Chart 2: Quantity assessment based on the FiT standard (based on Census data for 2015)

The chart above demonstrates that the Slieve Gullion DEA area falls below the Fields in Trust quantity standard with regard to total amount of open space in the settlements. The Mournes DEA also falls just below the quantity standard. However, the settlements in these areas are set within attractive landscapes with access to the countryside and large Forest Parks (Slieve Gullion Forest Park, the Mourne Mountains, Tollymore forest Park and Mourne Park).

5.3 Quality of Open Space

The quality of the 170No. selected open spaces has been analysed and the evaluation of the physical quality and the 'fitness for purpose' assessment findings have been set out in a settlement and DEA basis to review any trends, priority areas or issues. The chart below illustrates that of the open spaces included in the quality assessment, the majority of the assessed sites are in good condition, with only 25 in a "poor condition".

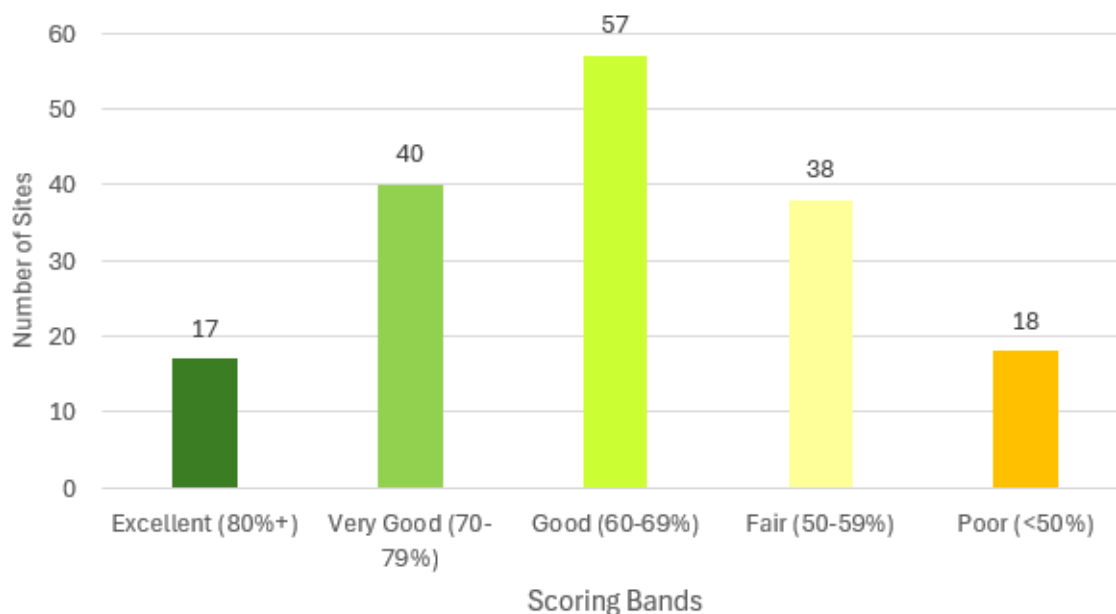


Chart 3: Quality Assessment

The chart below illustrates the average quality scores for each of the settlements. Newry and Slieve Gullion DEAs have the lowest average quality scores. The Mourne DEAs have the highest average quality score. The overall average quality score for all 170No. sites is 65%.



Chart 4: Average Quality Scores for the DEAs

The chart below shows the average quality score for every settlement assessed in the open space audit.

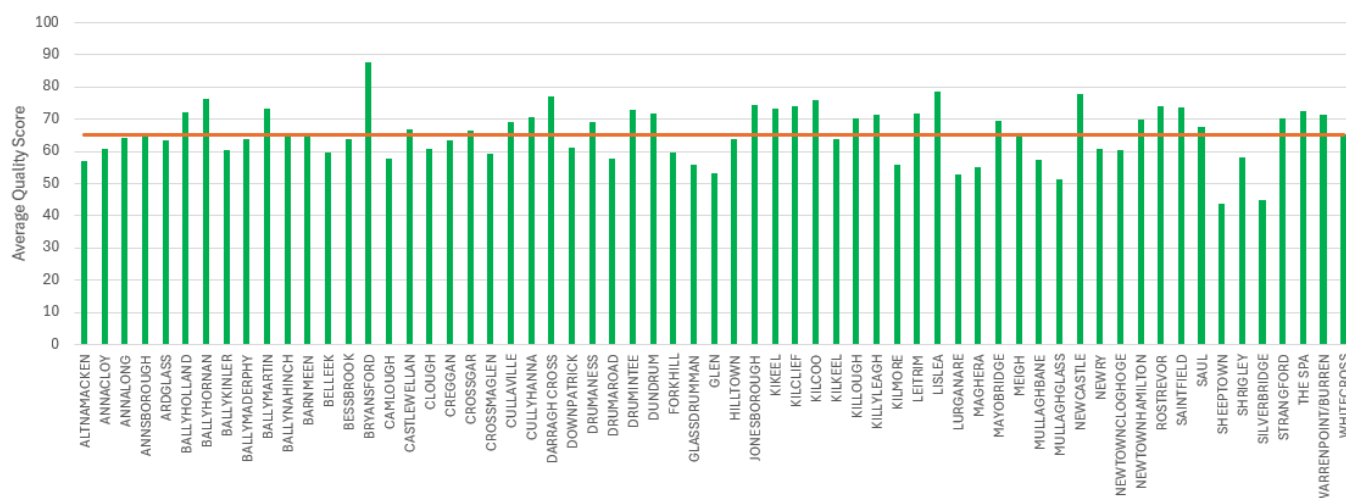


Chart 5: Average Quality Scores for the Settlements

The following table sets out the sites with the lowest quality scores, considered not fit for purpose:

Site Name	Reference	Settlement	Type	Size	Owner	Score (%)
Mona View	NM0812	Annalong	Amenity Space	0.54	NMDDC	49
Ard Ross Park	NM0021	Crossmaglen	Parks/Gardens	0.27	NMDDC	49
Scrogg Road	NM0588	Kilkeel	Parks/Gardens	0.99	UNKNOWN	49
Heather Park Stream St	NM0359	Newry	Parks/Gardens	1.66	NMDDC	48
Father Cullan Park	NM0148	Bessbrook	Parks/Gardens	0.40	NMDDC	48
Cushowen Place	NM0828	Drumaness	Play Area	0.97	UNKNOWN	46
Mourne View Park	NM0347	Newry	Play Area	0.11	NMDDC	45
Slieve View	NM0076	Silverbridge	Play Area	0.19	NMDDC	45
Oliver Plunkett Park	NM0101	Belleek	Play Area	0.74	NMDDC	44
Glenvale Road	NM0435	Sheeptown	Play Area	0.16	NMDDC	44
Vianstown Park	NM0975	Downpatrick	Amenity Space	0.62	NMDDC	42
Main Street	NM0120	Forkhill	Play Area	0.10	NMDDC	37

Table 11: Lowest Quality Open Spaces

The bottom 25 lowest quality sites (below 50% quality score) were identified and considered for upgrading in the Action Plan.

The Open Space Audit database contains the sites that were included in the quality assessment and the quality score allocated to them, reflecting their current quality assessed against the quality assessment criteria.

5.4 Accessibility of Open Space

The Country Park / Forest Parks, Town Park / Historic Parks, Neighbourhood Park / Seaside parks and Local Parks were mapped and the accessibility standards applied, with the catchments drawn to illustrate the accessibility of the communities to the various types of open space.

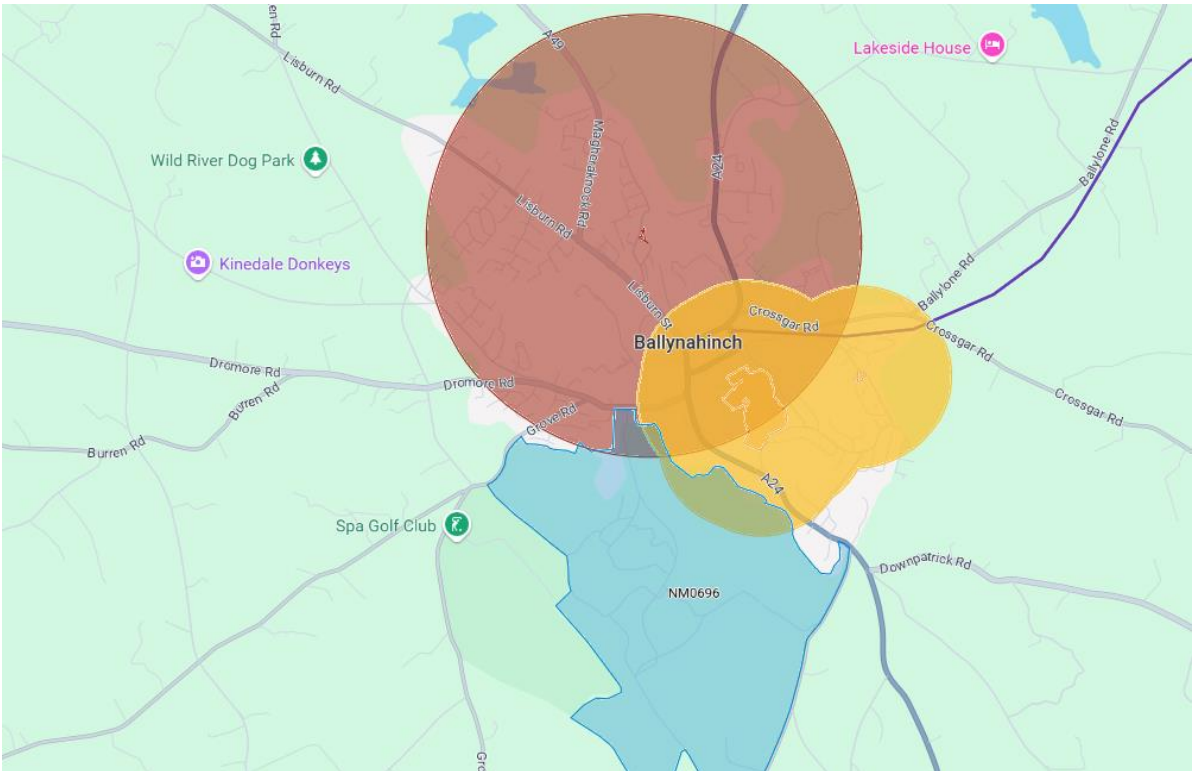
The accessibility assessment concluded the following:

	Settlement	Accessibility Assessment	Meets the Standard
Hub	Downpatrick	Downpatrick has 5 local parks within the settlement boundary, and no town parks. There are a number of Heritage / Country / Forest Parks in the wider countryside, but none within easy walking or cycling distance of the town. The residential areas on the periphery of the town that are not within 400m of a local park. Therefore, there is a need to upgrade an existing open space to provide a town park, which provides a range of open space, play and recreation facilities for all ages and abilities (e.g. Dunleath Park).	No
	Newry	There are 2 Cown Parks in Newry, which are centrally located. There are also 9 local parks distributed across the town. However, the residential area to the north east of the town is not within 400m of a Local Park or 1000m of a Cown Park. Currently, the residential area to the south west of the city is not within easy reach of a City Park or a Local Park. However, the proposal for a 15 Acre park to be created at the Albert Basin which will provide access to high quality open space facilities located close to the city centre.	No
Town	Ballynahinch	The town has a Town Park and 2 Local Parks, which provide easy access to open space facilities from all residential areas in the town.	Yes
	Burren	There is 1 Local Park in Burren. The residential area to the south of the park are not within 400m of the park.	No
	Castlewellan	Castlewellan does not contain any town or local parks, but has access to an extensive area of open space at Castlewellan Forest Park, located to the north of the town. Bunkers Hill also provides an area of semi-natural space for informal recreation and play opportunities.	No
	Crossmaglen	There are 2 Local Parks in Crossmaglen. The majority of residential areas are within 400m of the parks.	Yes
	Kilkeel	There are 1 Town Park and 3 Local Parks in Crossmaglen. The majority of residential areas are within easy distance of the parks apart from the residential areas on the northern periphery. The location of the town park along the coastline provides access along the coastline.	Yes
	Killyleagh	The town has 1 local park. The residential areas to the south west of the town centre do not have easy access to the park.	No
	Newcastle	The town of Newcastle contains 3 large Town Parks, providing a wide range of open space, sports, recreation and play opportunities for all ages. There is good access to the beach, which provides a linear open space along the eastern edge of the town, accessed along an attractive promenade. Access to Tollymore Forest Park is within reach of the town, as are the path to Slieve Donard.	Yes
	Saintfield	There is 1 centrally located Local Park in Saintfield. However, the peripheral areas of the town are not located within 400m of the park.	No
	Warrenpoint	Warrenpoint contains 1 Town Park and 1 local park. All residential areas are within easy distance of the parks.	Yes

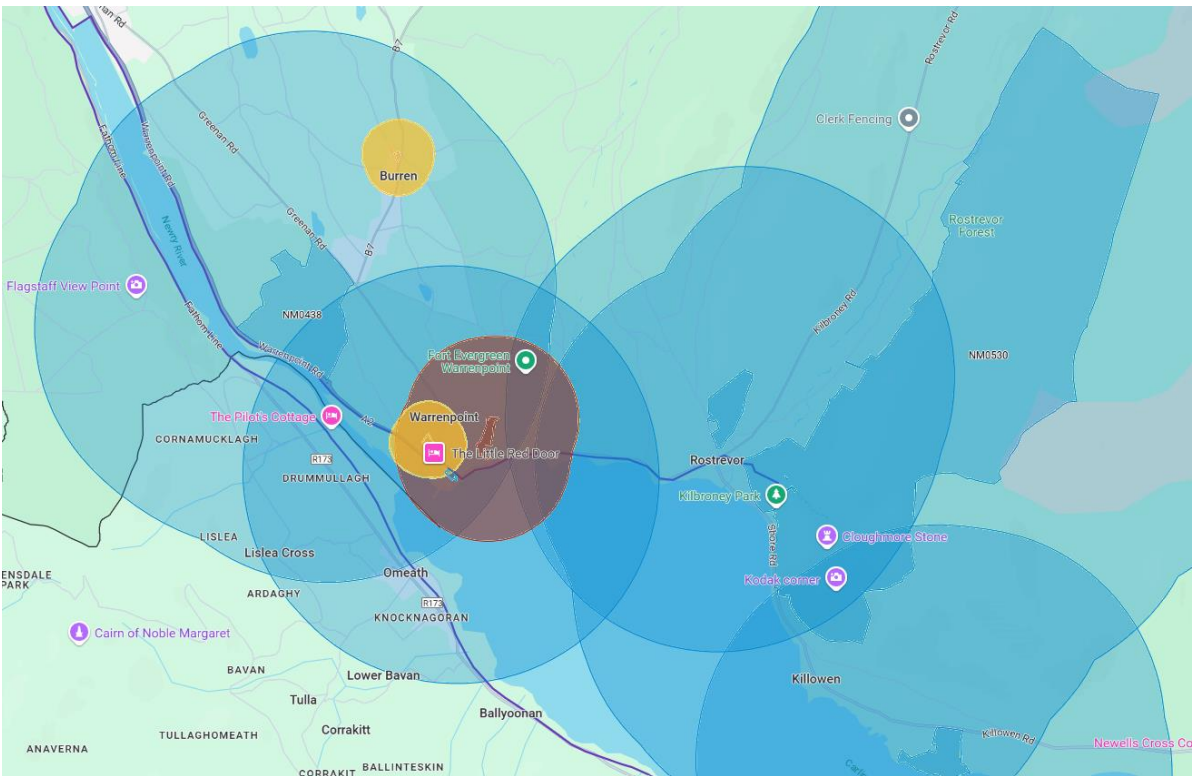
Table 12: Accessibility Assessment for the Hubs and Towns

A map of the Mullaghglass area, showing various locations and roads. The map includes a large blue area representing the Mullaghglass area, with several yellow and orange circles highlighting specific locations. The locations marked include Mullaghglass, Bessbrook, Camlough, Newry, and Sheepstown. Roads shown include Kingsmill Rd, Maytown Rd, A28, A29, A27, A26, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, B12, B13, B14, B15, B16, B17, B18, B19, B20, B21, B22, B23, B24, B25, B26, B27, B28, B29, B30, B31, B32, B33, B34, B35, B36, B37, B38, B39, B40, B41, B42, B43, B44, B45, B46, B47, B48, B49, B50, B51, B52, B53, B54, B55, B56, B57, B58, B59, B60, B61, B62, B63, B64, B65, B66, B67, B68, B69, B70, B71, B72, B73, B74, B75, B76, B77, B78, B79, B80, B81, B82, B83, B84, B85, B86, B87, B88, B89, B90, B91, B92, B93, B94, B95, B96, B97, B98, B99, B100. Other locations marked include National Trust Derrymore House, Camlough Lake Glamping, Bernish Viewpoint, The Quays Shopping Centre, and Tesco Extra. The map also shows the A25, A26, A27, A28, A29, A30, A31, A32, A33, A34, A35, A36, A37, A38, A39, A40, A41, A42, A43, A44, A45, A46, A47, A48, A49, A50, A51, A52, A53, A54, A55, A56, A57, A58, A59, A60, A61, A62, A63, A64, A65, A66, A67, A68, A69, A70, A71, A72, A73, A74, A75, A76, A77, A78, A79, A80, A81, A82, A83, A84, A85, A86, A87, A88, A89, A90, A91, A92, A93, A94, A95, A96, A97, A98, A99, A100.

Accessibility Map for Ballynahinch (draft)



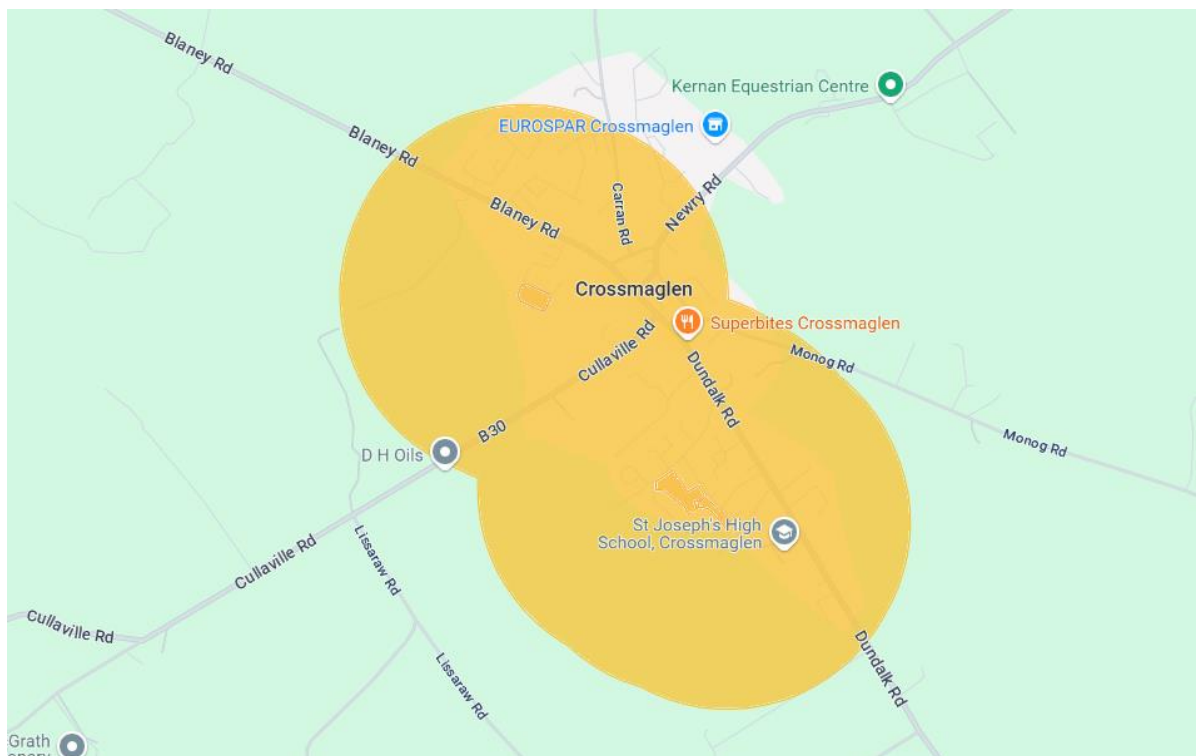
Accessibility Map for Burren and Warrenpoint (draft)



Accessibility Map for Castletwellan and Annsborough (draft)



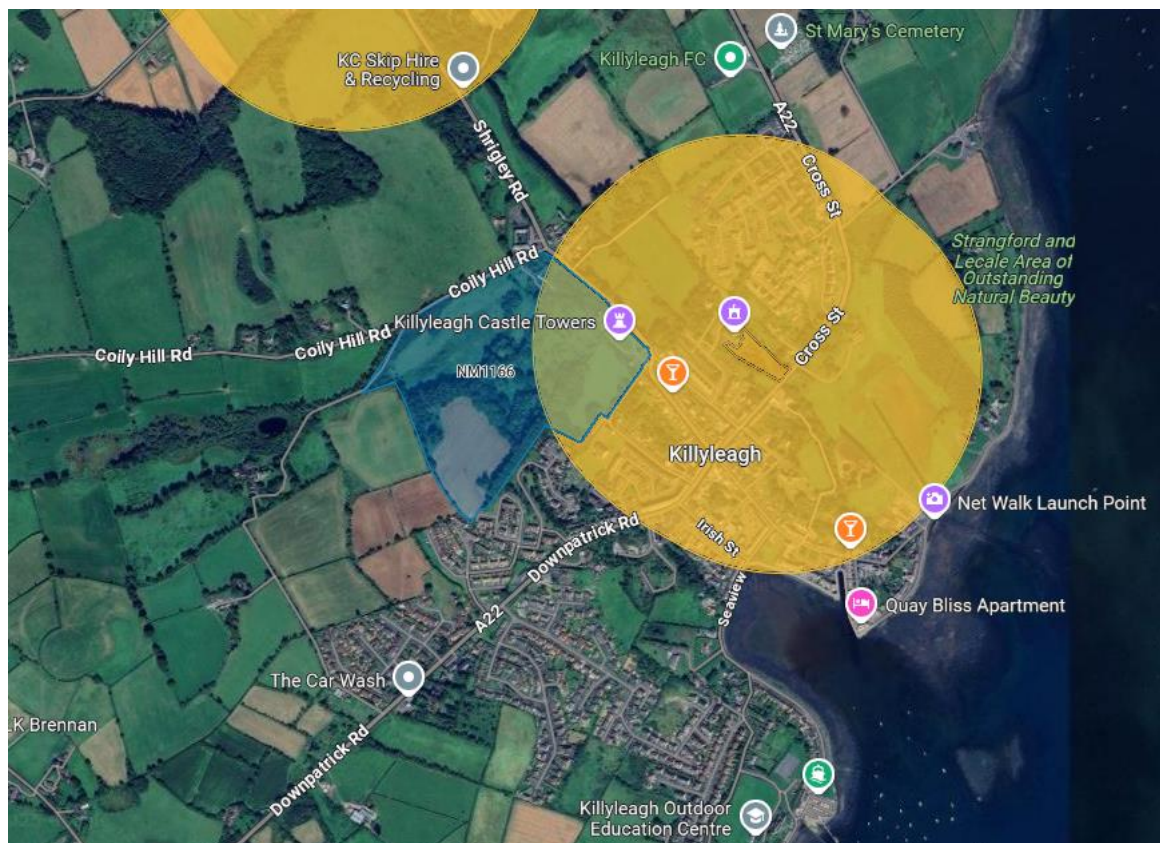
Accessibility Map for Crossmaglen (draft)



Accessibility Map for Kilkeel (draft)



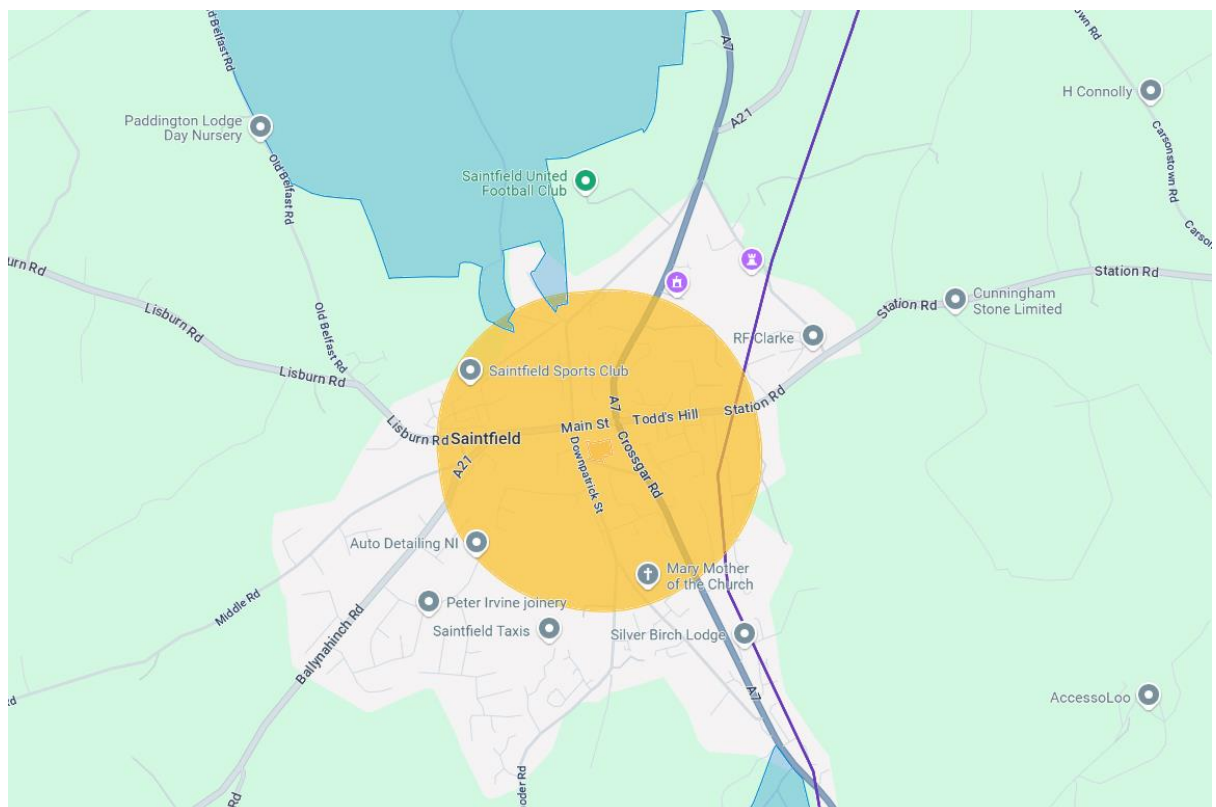
Accessibility Map for Killyleagh (draft)



Accessibility Map for Newcastle (draft)



Accessibility Map for Saintfield (draft)



6.0 ACTION PLAN

6.1 Introduction

The Open Space Audit has been used to inform the Action Plan recommendations and will inform area-based working, prioritisation and planning.

Action Plan identifies the open spaces needing upgrades through a combined analysis of the following:

- Quantity analysis – an overall look at the quantity of open space provision to identify areas that significantly fall below the quantity standard. It can be difficult to create new open space, but sites can be identified for upgrading to address quality issues / add function to existing sites.
- Quality analysis – site visits and quality scoring across a wide range of types of open space that can identify particularly poor quality sites
- Accessibility analysis – mapping according to an agreed set of standards that identifies any residential areas without good access to the various types of open space (usually the parks hierarchy). The Play Strategy has assessed the play resource in this way.
- Site specific proposals for projects, community group aspirations, access projects, other departmental projects, funding opportunities, or other Partner ownership of specific sites etc. informed by internal Council departments.
- External consultation, reflecting stakeholder and community aspirations that may confirm the Action Plan and suggest new projects.

The Action Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis, identifying the tasks required for implementation of the Strategy, in conjunction with Service Plans and the Community Plan.

6.2 The Action Plan

The Action Plan will be developed in discussion with the NMDDC Officers and in consultation with other stakeholders. The Action Plan will set out the recommendations that have been identified from the Open Space Audit Mapping and Assessment, and agreed through consultation with NMDDC Officers and other stakeholders.

Appendix 1 Open Space Quality Criteria

Access and Community

Fitness for Purpose Assessment Criteria	5 High	3	1 Low	not applicable n/a
Well located & close to community	integral with community infrastructure and local path and greenspace networks	direct, safe and legible connections to local communities	poorly sited with clear severance between greenspace and other community infrastructure	connections to community not relevant
Meets DDA requirements/ Disabled Needs	compliant in all respects with DDA includes specific elements supporting disabled use	DDA compliant in terms of grades and main routes step and barrier free	non DDA compliant with barriers to free access for disabled and other user groups	DDA compliant not appropriate or achievable on a site of this character/ location/type
Provides Quality Paths Fit-for-Purpose	appropriate path surface, well maintained with no management or drainage issues	appropriate path surface with some minor maintenance and/or drainage issues	poor quality or inappropriate path surface for location or levels of use; significant maintenance or drainage issues	no paths expected on a site of this type or size (e.g. waterbody, dense woodland or scrub, small scale amenity space)
Connects to other transport nodes	good connectivity with fixed transport links, quality bus routes, cycle and path networks	connects to other path and cycleway networks provided by footways and footpaths	poorly connected with no obvious path networks or transport modes	connectivity not available or appropriate on a site of this character/location/type
Allows movement in & between places	provides for highly permeable boundaries and multiple points of entry/access as part of a path or greenspace network	provides routes and connections connecting places	poorly connected with paths and natural desire lines unprovided for or restricted	movement between places not relevant to the site
Has accessible entrances in right places	entry points well placed and accessible to encourage safe access and use	entrances satisfactory	entrances poor by reason of siting; safe accessibility and connection to communities	entrance locations determined by other factors and non-relevant to the site
Offers connected path network and signage	high quality, legible way marking and signage indicates links to wider path and cycleway network	some good connections but signage incomplete and/or no way marking	limited connections and no signage or way marking to indicate wider connectivity	signage inappropriate to the location/site

Attractiveness / Place Appeal

Fitness for Purpose Assessment Criteria	5 High score	3	1 Low score	not applicable n/a
Attractive and offers a positive image	overall quality image, feel and appeal created through character and quality of the elements	attractive with many positive elements but includes issues that need addressing	poor image and low level of appeal/ attractiveness likely to generate a negative image	attractiveness not an issue by reason of site/character or use
Provides an attractive setting	contributes significantly to the quality, character and setting of the urban area/ settlement/place	contributes to quality but the profile and level of visibility limit the capacity to significantly impact on place quality	does little to support place quality by reason of location or quality and image of the site	not relevant
Quality materials/equipment/furniture	provides quality suite of external/public realm furniture and equipment with good materials	mixed quality with some elements in need of renewal or upgrading to remain fit for purpose	poor quality finishes, materials and equipment that limit appeal and use	not relevant
Attractive planting/landscape elements	offers attractive plant assemblages (native or exotic) that support place character and quality	offers a variable quality of plants and landscape elements that supports quality but could be better	generally poor quality or inappropriate planting and landscape management	plant and landscape elements not relevant to function and/or type of space
Welcoming boundaries/entrances	user friendly boundaries and entries offer clear sense of welcome and signal community value and use	functional boundaries and entrances define site with neutral impact on character or functionality	poor quality boundaries impact negatively on perceptions of place entrances and boundary treatments	not relevant to site and/or location
Facilities in clean/safe/usable condition	spaces and facilities clean, tidy and clearly valued, well used and well maintained	spaces in usable condition but issues evident with cleanliness, and condition	facilities either in poor condition or issues with cleanliness and condition likely to restrict use	condition of facilities not relevant to the site
Low levels of litter & adequate bins	no evidence of litter and litter bins (where provided) in good condition and maintained	low levels of litter with bins evident and litter generally localized and/or short term	litter clearly an issue with established litter problem and bins absent or not adequately maintained	litter not relevant
Well maintained	clear indications of appropriate levels of maintenance well targeted to the site that supports quality of place	level of maintenance generally good but challenged by use/ mis-use	levels of maintenance failing to support quality of place and address use/ mis-use	maintenance not relevant to the site by reason of scale and/ or other management activity

Biodiversity

Fitness for Purpose Assessment Criteria	5 High score	3	1 Low score	not applicable n/a
Contribute positively to biodiversity/ water/ air quality	biodiversity issues are clearly evidenced within the site and contribute to site quality	biodiversity contributes through semi-natural elements but no other evidence of active management	opportunity to support biodiversity not taken and site offers little positive value	biodiversity not relevant by nature of the space and function
Large enough to sustain wildlife populations	site strongly supports native populations by green networks and quality of landscape elements	site supports some native populations but fragmented and value limited to site	site fragmented and unconnected to wider networks with little habitat value	habitat opportunity and value not relevant
Offer diversity of habitats	offers a diversity of habitats that offer good connections with extended edges and linkages	offers a range of habitat types but connections and the range of habitat types could be stronger	poor quality and attention to habitat development	habitat diversity not relevant
Part of wider landscape structure	a key part of a wider network and landscape character area	contributes to wider networks and landscape character areas	poorly connected and very limited contribution to the wider landscape setting	landscape setting not relevant
Connects to wider green Networks	offers strong connections and plays an important role within the wider Green Network	offers limited connections and contribution to the Green Network	poorly connected and represents a fragmented and discrete site with very limited role within the Green Network	not relevant
Balance habitat protection & access	clear balance evident; where appropriate, supported by information and good path routing	access and habitat protection clearly working and no evidence of problems	quality habitats suffering from other uses and need for management attention	not a relevant issue on the site
Resource efficient (grass cutting/peat compost)	clear attention to resource and sustainability issue evidenced on site (SUDS/recycling/encouragement to reduce litter)	site and facilities fit for purpose demonstrating some evidence of attention to resource efficiency	evidence of inappropriate resource activity that offers very limited benefits to user or quality of place	resource efficiency not a relevant issue

Functionality

Fitness for Purpose Assessment Criteria	5 High score	3	1 Low score	not applicable n/a
Offers a range functions / flexibility of use	good diverse range of activity reflecting user needs, setting location and character of the site	range of activity reflecting user needs, setting, location and character of the site	poor, very limited range of activity that does not reflect anticipated user needs and site context	not relevant
Diverse play / sport/ recreational opportunity	a range of challenging play and sport activity provided for a breadth of age and user groups	play and sports facilities provided but limited range	play and sports facilities not provided in locations where such facilities would be appropriate	play and sports facilities not relevant to this type of space and/or location
Offers good places for Social Interaction	offers good spaces and places for social activity that are used by communities and include supporting furniture	offers spaces for social activity	offers none or very limited areas considered safe and usable for social activity	not relevant
High quality facilities meeting user needs	provides a well used site that clearly reflects needs, providing high quality facilities	provides for a range of activities that address need and offers good quality facilities	provides a range of activities that appears unconnected to local need and is of indifferent quality	appropriateness of facilities and need is not relevant
Appropriate facilities for location/ size/use	facilities are appropriate to function and include service elements such as toilets, lit paths, range of play etc	facilities are restricted given the scale and function of the site	facilities are poor or non-existent for this scale and function of site	appropriateness of facilities is not relevant
Facilities well sited for all ages	facilities are well sited offering natural surveillance, readily accessible and suited to all ages	facilities are well sited and accessible but locations may not address all user needs	facilities are poorly sited, restricting access, compromising safe use or access and offer barriers to activity	not relevant
Adaptable to changing needs / use	greenspace offers good flexibility and adaptability for use, capable of accommodating changing needs	greenspace is flexible but any significant change of use would require major change	greenspace is very inflexible unlikely to be able to address changing needs	adaptability of use is not relevant

Community Benefits

Fitness for Purpose Assessment Criteria	5 High score	3	1 Low score	not applicable n/a
Safe and welcoming	site offers safe welcoming image through a range of positive measures such as signage, lighting and sightlines	site is welcoming but issues of safety have potential to impact on more vulnerable user groups	site is clearly neither safe nor welcoming to a majority of users	issue of safety and sense of welcome not relevant
Good levels of natural surveillance	site offers good natural surveillance from surrounding areas and complies with Safe by Design principles	site generally overlooked with main areas offering good natural surveillance	site offers very limited natural surveillance and issues of perceived safety therefore arise	natural surveillance not applicable to this site
Low levels/Absence of anti-social behaviour	site offers no evidence of anti-social behaviour and no evidence of activity likely to establish perceived threats to users	site generally has safe quality but with some limited evidence of anti-social behaviour or mis-use	site shows evidence of persistent antisocial behaviour	anti-social behaviour not relevant to this site
Appropriate lighting levels	appropriate lighting throughout the site with no obvious management or user issues	appropriate lighting at entrances and where appropriate main routes with only minor lighting issues	lighting poor, restricting use	lighting not relevant to this site
Sense of local identity & place	positively contributes to local identity and clear sense of place established by the character or quality of the site	contributes to sense of place and local identity	negatively contributes to sense of place and local identity	local identity and sense of place not relevant
Provide routes to wider community facilities	provides connecting routes to schools, library, community facilities and transport nodes	provides limited connections to community infrastructure	provides very restricted connections to community infrastructure	issues of community connectivity not relevant to this site
Contains distinctive/memorable places	creates a distinctive and memorable quality of place that supports local culture identity	contributes in some areas or parts to distinctiveness	offers no qualities that could be regarded as distinctive or memorable	not relevant
Community involvement in management	evidence or knowledge of active and direct community participation in site planning and site management	community participation through consultation on site planning and management	community consultation not part of the planning and management arrangements	issues of community engagement not relevant