Walk this way

Green Space Strategy

Interim update 21th December 2021

City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Printing and environmental instructions

If hard copies are required please print sparingly, double sided, 12 pt and above and follow the 3R's guidance: Reduce - Reuse – Recycle, in that order. When printing MD2 Consulting Ltd recommend using a conservation grade paper from FSC certified sources.

Contents

Executive Summary

Background

This report is an interim update of the City of Stoke-on-Trent Green Space Strategy. The strategy was fully reviewed in 2017/2018 but since then a decision has been made to pursue the City's Local Plan independently from the adjacent local authority Newcastle-under-Lyme. To ensure that the evidence base is up-to-date, this interim review was commissioned in March 2021 and includes a partial re-audit of sites and a review of the strategy document.

In 2018 we reported that the City of Stoke-on-Trent has a strong tradition of green space provision and management which has evolved over many generations and that it is possible to 'tell the story of the City through its green space' through its historical growth from a series of distinct pottery towns. This is exemplified by the distribution of the main parks, the routes of the canals and former railways and the naturally recolonising brownfield land, which bears testimony to the City's varied industrial past. This legacy is a great story line for the City and can be the envy of other cities. This remains the case.

This interim update of the Green Space Strategy has been prepared to provide the most up to date and effective guidance to direct the work of the City Council and its partners in the future. It has been prepared to accord with national planning policy. The Green Space Strategy incorporates;

- An assessment of local needs for green space;
- An interium audit of existing green space provision;
- Local standards for future green space provision;
- Recommendations for prioritising the planning and management of green spaces.

Seven different types of green space are covered; encompassing Allotments; Amenity and Recreational Green Space (e.g. areas of mown grass in residential areas some of which are used for informal active recreation); Cemeteries and Churchyards; Formal Parks and Gardens; Green Corridors (including canals, rivers and former railway lines); Playgrounds (including equipped play areas and enclosed ball courts), and; Semi-Natural Green Space (e.g. natural grassland, meadows, scrubland and woodland)

Outdoor sports facilities also function as green space but are subject to separate review processes in the form of a Playing Pitch Strategy.

Green Space Audit

Over 600 green spaces encompassing all of the seven different types identified above were assessed in terms of their quantity, quality and accessibility in 2017/18. This audit found that the overwhelming majority of the City's green spaces (80%) are identified as excellent, good and above average standard and that a significant percentage of sites fall into the 'above average' category but are just falling short of good or excellent. These are green spaces that can be targeted for improvements which can often be delivered at a modest cost. In 2017,18

5% of the City's green spaces were found to be of a poor standard and recommended to be considered for major improvements or reconfiguration (including to alternative land uses) where they have been identified as surplus to requirements.

A partial re-audit was undertaken in 2021 to see if there had been any major changes in the previous four years. A total of 63 sites were audited in July 2021 and variances were banded using a traffic light system. Of the sites 63% showed no noticeable change, 30% of the sites moderate change and 7% of the sites a higher level of change.

Public Consultation

A series of online public surveys and stakeholder workshops were held in spring/summer 2017 to identify existing and future needs for the provision of green spaces. This exercise found that whilst the public felt that existing provision was about right or not enough, stakeholders felt that there was some potential to reconfigure or seek alternative uses for some of the poorer quality green spaces and those that are more difficult to maintain and improve. The strategy has sought to achieve a balanced response to these competing needs. Consideration was given to whether this exercise should be repeated in 2021 but it was decided, following the audit, that given the relative low level of major change (<10%) to the sites, that a full review was unnecessary. If consultation was required as part of future City planning, this could be undertaken on a site-by-site basis until the next full review of the Green Space Strategy.

Local Provision Standards

Taking in to account the needs identified from the 2017/18 public consultation and the findings of the green space audit, the strategy includes a series of quantity, quality and accessibility standards for the future provision of green spaces in the city. Standards for the quality of green space provision recommend that a target quality score that sites should achieve in future assessments should be above 80% (the excellent category) and that sites scoring below 50% (poor and very poor categories) should be considered for alternative uses in circumstances where they are surplus to requirements and their improvement would not be cost effective. The accessibility standards are expressed in terms of the distance that people must travel to use green spaces, with respective distances ranging from 100 metres small play areas, 400 metres for allotments and medium sized play areas, 700 to 720 metres for Multi Use Games Areas, Formal Parks & Gardens and Semi Natural Green Space, and a kilometre for large play areas.

Recommendations

The interim strategy update also makes broader recommendations in regard to the planning and management of green spaces in the city. These include that the City Council should increase its role as a facilitator and enabler for community groups to manage green spaces; that there should be a greater focus on improving the quality of green spaces than increasing the quantity; that new green space should be provided in areas that are deficient but can be reduced in areas of over provision; that commercial opportunities within green spaces should

be explored to gain an income; and that the city's green spaces should be able to accommodate a wide range of users and events to ensure that their use can be maximised.

Vision, Aims and Objectives

To guide wider work and ensure that the recommendations of the strategy can be delivered, an overarching vision is supported by seven aims (as well as) nine objectives. The vision is as follows;

To respect the traditions of green space that we have inherited, the legacy of those who created and sustained it through previous generations and understand that we are the custodians of green space only for a moment in time. Our responsibility is to ensure that the City's green space meets the needs of the current generation and points to the future. We will not take decisions that remove the opportunity for future generations to enjoy greenspace in our City.

Introduction

1. Three Green Space Strategy documents have been prepared previously to address green space within the City. These are; the North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy (2007) the City Council's Greenspace Strategy Consultation Document (March 2014) and the City of Stoke on Trent Green Space Strategy (2018). In addition, the interim review of the City of Stoke Green Space Strategy (2021) has been prepared. The interim review does not replace the City of Stoke-on-Trent Green Space Strategy (2018) but it does update its content. This update should be read in conjunction with the 2018 Green Space Strategy document.

2. This interim update of the Green Space Strategy (see figure 1) includes:

   - An assessment of local need
   - Partial audit of green space provision
   - Green space prioritisation
   - Local standard for future provision

3. It should be noted that in the City of Stoke-on-Trent, for continuity purposes and cultural reasons, 'open space' has been referred to historically as 'green space' but these designations are synonymous in this update. Green Space also overlaps with 'green infrastructure' and is a further consideration of the planning process. In planning terms green infrastructure is more closely allied to considerations of ecosystem services and nature based solutions. This interim open space strategy update references green infrastructure but is not a green infrastructure strategy.

4. The North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy (2007) assessed the need for and provision of the following types of green space:

   - Allotments;
   - Amenity green space;
   - Cemeteries;
   - Parks and gardens;
   - Green corridors;
   - Outdoor sports;
   - Playgrounds;
   - Semi-natural green space;
   - Nature reserves;
   - Other.

   Outdoor sports facilities are now covered by a new Playing Pitch Strategy based on the latest Sport England methodology. Green space used for outdoor sports provision is now dealt with separately.

5. The Green Space Strategy (2018) assessed the need for and provision for the types of green space shown below.

    - Allotments;
    - Amenity recreation;
    - Cemeteries and churchyards;
    - Formal parks and gardens;
    - Corridors, rivers and canals;
    - Playgrounds;
    - Semi-natural green space.

6. The changes and groupings made between 2007 and 2017 reflect present-day categorisation and good practice drawn from other studies, as well as national and international typology. Nature reserves are included in 'semi-natural green space'; 'green corridors' now explicitly includes 'rivers and canals'; 'cemeteries' explicitly includes 'churchyards'; and the category 'amenity recreation' is a broad descriptor for green space that provides aesthetic, landscape, recreational and non-sporting uses.   No further changes have been instituted between 2017 and 2021.

7. The interim update of the Green Space Strategy (2021) covers the complete geographical area of the City of Stoke-on-Trent. The preparation of the interim update of the Green Space Strategy has been undertaken by MD2 Consulting Ltd. who are specialists in open space and green infrastructure strategy and town planning.

8. It should be noted that work on the Green Space Strategy (2018) commenced in January 2017, with the audit subsequently undertaken between March and August 2017 by members of the Planning and Transportation Team staff at the City of Stoke on Trent Council.   The consultants provided training support for the auditors and undertook quality assurance (QA) sample audits in September 2017. The training, support and QA inspections aimed to ensure that the process has been consistent and robust.   A re-audit of 63 sites as a statistically significant sample was undertaken in July 2021 by the Consultants directly.

9. A typology of greenspace was developed for the strategy a in 2017 and is continued in the 2021 update. These are;

    - Allotments gardens , community orchards and other urban food growing spaces.
    - Amenity and recreation including amenity grassland provided for informal recreation, incidental green space including transport corridors, housing land and public open space around memorials.
    - Cemeteries and churchyards including burial grounds current and historic, greenspace around places of worship.
    - Formal parks and gardens including urban parks, gardens and formal bedding
    - Green corridors rivers and canals including linear green space and blue infrastructure often have significant heritage interest which allows long distance and circular recreational walking, jogging, sport training, cycling and sometimes horseriding.

- Playgrounds including local areas of play (LAP) local equipped areas for play (LEAP), neighbourhood equipped areas for play (NEAP) and multiuse games areas (MUGA)
- Semi natural green space including nature reserves, country parks, naturally recolonising areas such as former industrial sites, woodlands, wetlands and species rich grassland.

The National Planning Policy Framework

10. The National Planning Policy Framework (last updated 20th July 2021) highlights the importance of open space and the need to positively plan for it. Furthermore, it states that there is a need for a robust and up-to-date assessment of open space, sport and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. Of particular note is that in paragraph 99 it states: *existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

11. The methodology for the strategy review conforms with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Open Space. The NPPF identifies the need for high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation, to make important contributions to the health and well-being of communities.

12. The NPPF also highlights the importance of protecting and enhancing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and access by taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks. PRoW's are often used to access area based green space and the relationship between the two is therefore important.

13. An open space network may also contain designated local green space which is a way to provide special protection against development of green areas which are important to local communities. The local green space designation is for use in Local Plans (LPs) or Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP). Designating a local green space needs to be consistent with local planning for sustainable development in any given area. Plans must identify sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs. Current local green space designation should not be used in ways that may undermine this aim of plan making. That is to say that because an area appears in the Green Space Strategy as a current green space, it does not guarantee that it will automatically continue as a local green space.

14. The Green Space Strategy is intended to guide how the City Council manages its green space asset base to ensure that the needs of the community are met in the most appropriate ways. However, the strategy review addresses land outside Council ownership, with the intention that it is managed in a complementary way. The Council is

uniquely well-placed to co-ordinate the efforts of disparate providers, overall trajectories and coherence in respect of provision. It is anticipated that during the life of the Green Space Strategy, the number of external providers will increase and that the Council will need to invest more in its enabling role to complement its direct delivery of these services. The Green Space Strategy includes an Action Plan, which is a freestanding appendix and acts as a guide to management and planning.

Lifetime of the Green Space Strategy

15. This document is an interim update of the existing Green Space Strategy (2018) and should be read in conjunction with the 2018 document. The intended lifetime of the Green Space Strategy (2018) was upto 2033. This interim update extends the population calculations to 2040. It is recommended that the Green Space Strategy (2018) is further updated during this period circa. 2025/26 or that a new full Green Space Strategy is produced within 10 years of the current full strategy review i.e. no later than 2027/28.

A responsible approach

16. The preparation of a Green Space Strategy is not a task to be undertaken lightly. Those involved shoulder significant responsibility in making recommendations that will affect the quality of life of residents and visitors for the future generations and to fairly represent the intent and good-works of previous generations whose legacy they are dealing with.   These points were not been forgotten when preparing the Green Space Strategy (2018) or in this interim update, and for the most part irreversible actions have been avoided so that future decisions can be taken without prejudice.

Existing service and current provision

Provision

The City of Stoke on Trent Council has a strong tradition of green space provision and management which has evolved over many generations. The historical growth of the city from a series of distinct pottery towns is reflected in the present-day structure of its green space. This is exemplified by the distribution of the main parks, the routes of the green corridors that follow the canal and railway network and the naturally recolonising brownfield land, all of which bear testimony to the City's varied industrial past. It is possible to 'tell the story of the city through its green space' and this legacy is a great story line for the City that other cities will be envious of. There is justifiable pride in the Council's workforce and a commitment to the public service benefits of its work. The bullet points below highlight the strengths of the service as observed in 2017/18.

- The Council maintains c. 85 play areas (playgrounds and other areas) in the City
- The Coucnil supports self-managed allotment sites (c. 25 in the city) and ensures that council site plots are leased out and maintained (c. 55 sites).
- The Council ensures that the cities trees are conserved whenever possible and that work carried out is to a high safe standard.
- The Council looks after countryside recreation sites so that these are safe, accessible and rich in biodiversity.
- There is an events programme for schools and the public around the countryside sites including National Nature Reserve, Local Nature Reserve and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- The City has green flag sites which meet the highest quality standard
- The Council maintain c. 22 closed churchyards, maintain c. 13 bowling greens and cuts and marks c. 23 football pitches.
- The Council keeps weeds to a minimum, including invasive Japanese knotweed
- There is a dedicated grounds maintenance and tractor teams on housing land, public open space and highways.
- There is a contracting team which carries out work on school grounds and generates income.
- The Council has a training, developmental and facilitation role which includes; volunteers in parks and countryside sites, traineeships, a placement for learners not yet ready for apprenticeship, apprentices, NVQs, OCN Horticulture and Machine training to an accredited standard.
- There is a Park Liaison function which includes, applying for funding to help keep the parks sustainable and supporting user groups including fishing clubs, bowlers, friends of groups, tennis leagues to carry out events, organise events themselves for the Council.
- Parks are used as event spaces.
- The Council has successfully secured HLF funding for the restoration of Burslem and Hanley Park

The Council has a hierarchy of management to manage green space. This structure helps to ensure that resources are equitably spread especially in a resource limited environment. It is anticipated that this hierarchy will continue for the foreseeable future until or unless priorities change and/or more money becomes available for public expenditure. At the top of the pyramid are premium parks and fee earning work. The hierarchy is subject to review hence the approach is subject to regular updates.

Hierarchy linked to service standards

1. HLF – Principle Parks – Fee earning work
2. Residential Parks- Highway verge- Playgrounds and Housing land.
3. Non naturalised public open space and closed church yards, (including greenways)
4. Naturalised Public Open Space, Nature Reserves, Countryside sites and Allotments (as per the management plans)

Quantity of existing Green Space

17. The quantity of green space by different types is shown in table 1. The percentage per head of population is shown is based on a population of 256,600 in 2021.

Typology	Count of sites at 2017	Area (ha.) at 2017.	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2021 benchmark of 256,600	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on Standard Method (270,271)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on baseline job growth (275,109)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on higher job growth (285,681)
Allotments	65	70.95	0.28	0.26	0.26	0.25
Amenity recreation	267	300.96	1.17	1.11	1.09	1.05
Churchyard & cemeteries	25	97.21	0.38	0.36	0.35	0.34
Formal parks and gardens	37	203.37	0.79	0.75	0.74	0.71
Green corridor, rivers and canals	66	338.87	1.32	1.25	1.23	1.19
Playgrounds	73	19.66	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07
Semi-natural greenspace	85	904.37	3.52	3.35	3.29	3.17
TOTAL	618	1,935.39	7.54	7.15	7.03	6.78

Table 1: The typology compared to the population in 2021 and population predictions for 2040 based on three criteria; standard method, baseline job growth and higher job growth. Overall, this table presents a hypothetical scenario but a useful insight into provision which feeds into the green space standards for the City of Stoke on Trent.   It should be noted that no amendments have been made to take into account any increases/decrease in green space since 2017/18.

18. An update of the figures from 2017/18 to 2021 (table 3) shows that the City Council is by far the largest provider of green space in the City. If the Council adopts the recommendation to adopt an increased facilitation and enabling role, this should empower other providers, including local community groups, to increase their role in the management of green space over the lifetime of this Strategy.

19. An underlying theme in this Strategy is that the Council is strongly advised to avoid taking irreversible decisions that trade current needs off against the needs of future generations. In practice this may mean that Council owned land is let or leased to other providers with the proviso that the Council should retain the ownership of sites as a fallback position. To paraphrase - *when it's gone its gone forever*.

20. Based on a benchmark population of 256,600 (2021) the current provision of green space is shown in Table 2

Type	Count (no.) Total	Count (no.) owned by Council	Area (Ha) Total	Area (Ha) owned by Council	Current Provision (Total) Ha per 1,000 head	Current Provision (owned by Council) Ha per 1,000 head
Allotments (total)	65		70.95		0.28	
Allotments (owned by Council)		59		67.55		0.26
Amenity recreation (total)	267		300.96		1.17	
Amenity recreation (owned by Council)		234		248.66		0.97
Churchyard & cemeteries (total)	25		97.21		0.38	
Churchyard & cemeteries (owned by Council)		8		79.91		0.31
Formal parks & gardens (total)	37		203.37		0.79	
Formal parks & gardens (owned by Council)		35		199.48		0.78
Green corridor, rivers & canals (total)	66		338.87		1.32	
Green corridor, rivers & canals (owned by Council)		50		184.56		0.72
Playgrounds (total)	73		19.66		0.08	
Playgrounds (owned by Council)		68		16.42		0.06

Semi-natural greenspace (total)	85		904.73		3.52	
Semi-natural greenspace (owned by Council)		62		645.29		2.51
Total	618	516	1,935.39	1,441.87	7.54	5.61

Table 2: This table shows that the City Council is by far the largest provider of green space in the City.

Distribution of Green Space

21. The distribution of green space is shown in figure 1.   Overall, there is a widespread distribution of green space at the city-scale.

22. In respect of green infrastructure there is a notable north - south characteristic to the distribution of green space and a reasonable degree of connectivity between them.   The east-west distribution is less pronounced than the north-south distribution axis.

23. Some semi-natural green space is concentrated around the periphery of the City, whilst parks and playgrounds tend to be focused in more urban locations. In terms of landscape planning and landscape character, this is deemed a typical distribution.

24. Some semi-natural green space is important in maintaining separation of urban settlements and retaining local character and distinctiveness. Green corridors, rivers and canals are for historical reasons a 'signature landscape' that can be used in 'city branding'.

Figure 1 (below): The distribution of green space in the City of Stoke on Trent in 2018 based on a typology comprising eight types. There is a notable north-south characteristic to the distribution of green space. The largest area in hectares is semi-natural green space followed by green corridors, rivers and canals. These types of green space are very important to the maintenance of local distinctiveness of which there is a strong tradition in Stoke on Trent resulting from the coalescence of the Pottery Towns.
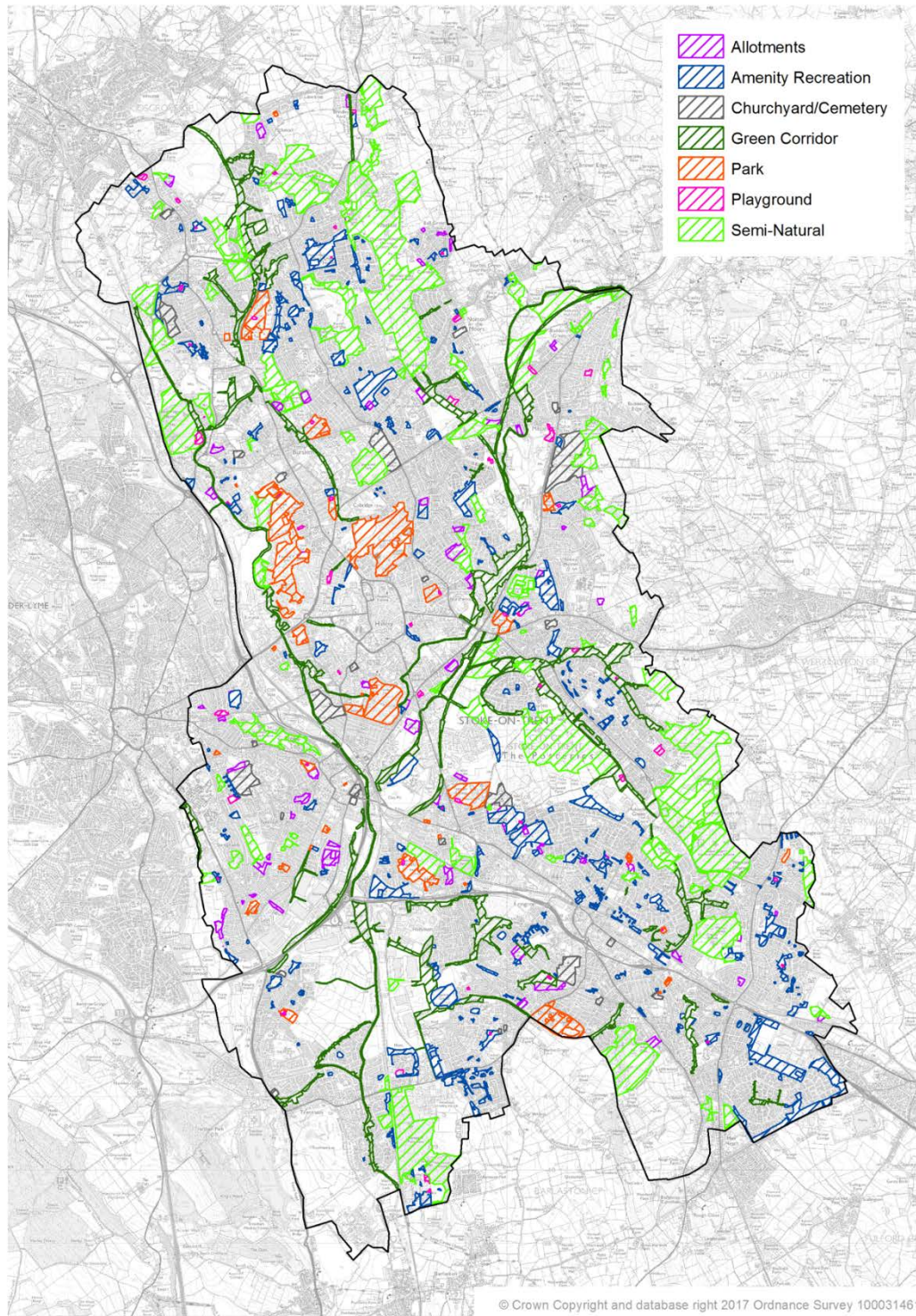
Vision Statement, Objectives & Aims for Green Space

25. The vision statement provides the focal point for this Green Space Strategy and the aims for the Council, its partners and other providers of green space for the life of the Local Plan and perhaps beyond.

26. Much has changed since the original vision statement was set in North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy 2007 (see below). Public spending reductions are a major factor but there are others, such as changing demographics and an increasing focus on health and well-being.

The vision as stated in 2007

27. "Create and promote a balanced network of community-focused, valued, safe, sustainable, accessible, interesting and well-managed green spaces that enhance the quality of life, local identity and economic prosperity within Urban North Staffordshire".

A vision for 2040

28. A new vision was agreed in 2018 and brings together an understanding and respect for the City's green space inheritance – something of great value but also recognises the needs of current and future residents. It is a commitment to 'future proof' green space in Stoke-on-Trent.

    To respect the traditions of green space that we have inherited, the legacy of those who created and sustained it through previous generations and understand that we are the custodians of green space only for a moment in time. Our responsibility is to ensure that the City's green space meets the needs of the current generation and points to the future. We will not take decisions that remove the opportunity for future generations to enjoy greenspace in our City.

29. This is still considered valid until 2040, and is especially relevant given how people have increasingly used local green space during the COVID-19 pandemic. The vision reads. To respect the traditions of green space that we have inherited, the legacy of those who created and sustained it through previous generations and understand that we are the custodians of the resource only for a moment in time. Our shared responsibility is to ensure that the City's green space meets the needs of the current generation and points to the future. We will not take decisions that remove the opportunity for future generations to enjoy green space in our City.

Green Space Aims

30. The Green Space aims for the City of Stoke on Trent are:

- We aim to focus on the quality of Green Space as much as quantity
- We aim to find new opportunities that meet new needs
- We aim to distribute Green Space equitably throughout the City.
- We aim to be an enabler and facilitator as well as a deliverer of services
- We aim to give space to nature as well as people
- We aim to seek innovative ways to fund our work.
- We aim to hand over the City's Green Spaces to the next generation so that they are able to enjoy its benefits as we have.

Green Space Objectives

31. The Green Space objectives for the City of Stoke on Trent are:

- prioritise green space protection and improvements with the resources available to the Council and its partners,
- not lose sight of our historical roots but be relevant to the needs of residents and visitors in the present and the future,
- be evidence based and be consistent with national planning policy and good planning practice,
- recognise that the Council is only one provider and that we must work closely with others in the public, private and voluntary sectors to maximise the benefits of green space for all,
- avoid irreversible decisions that trade our current needs off against the needs of future generations,
- recognise that we have a responsibility for all life in the City, not just human life and that we must protect the natural environment for all the species that make our City their home,
- recognise that the Council's green spaces are a key part of a wider green infrastructure network that crosses our city and extends to North Staffordshire and beyond,
- protect the natural environment to maintain biodiversity and to meet the diversity of our communities.
- enhance property and rental values through the application of our Green Space Strategy

Greenspace Standards

Evidence base and approach

32. The evidence base for the green space 'quantity' and 'access' standards for City of Stoke on Trent is drawn from the following sources. It should be noted that guidelines are non-legally binding and advisory. The quantity and access standards were produced in 2017 and where updated for 2021 this is stated.

- Benchmarking against guidelines, such as 'The Fields in Trust' Guidelines - Guidance for Outdoor Sports and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard;
- Benchmarking with similar authorities: the methodology used to identify similar authorities and sources consulted on their Open Space Standards;
- Reflecting existing provision: background information for the Standards can be found in the North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy Final Report Version 02 – September 2007;
- Reflecting consultation results: a detailed presentation of the City of Stoke on Trent Great Outdoor Survey and other consultation activities undertaken to support and inform the City of Stoke on Trent Green Space Strategy is presented in a separate report. This analysis is based on questions about appropriateness of current levels of provision, preferred methods of travel to each type of provision, and expected travel time. A total of 534 responses (440 adult and 94 young people (ages 5 - 16) were received and analysed;
- Stoke on Trent City Council Green Space Strategy consultation document (May 2014);

Assumptions

33. Throughout the exercise, the following factors and assumptions were used:

- When having to translate national standards expressed on a per household basis reference published rates have been used. For allotments, the National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners' national average of 2.2 persons per household has been used.
- Fields in Trust Guidelines – "Guidance for outdoor Sports and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard". The 2015 guidance backed up by research retains the same headline rates of provision, but draws out new recommendations for accessibility, the application of standards and the minimum dimensions of formal outdoor space. The standards also no longer differentiate between urban and rural areas. Using this current guidance will help to ensure that the provision of outdoor sport, play and informal green space is of a sufficient size to enable effective use; is in an accessible location and near dwellings; and of a quality to maintain longevity and to encourage its continued use.

Fields in Trust guidelines

34. The Fields in Trust Guidelines – "Guidance for Outdoor Sports and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard" recommends that Equipped/Designated Play Spaces be promoted to ensure that (i) the provision of outdoor sport, play and informal open space is of a sufficient size to enable effective use; (ii) is in an accessible location and near dwellings; and (iii) of a quality to maintain longevity and to encourage its continued use. It recommends that Equipped/ Designated Play Spaces be promoted in the form of:

- Local Areas for Play (LAPs) aimed at very young children;
- Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) aimed at children who can go out to play independently;
- Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs) aimed at older children;
- These can be complemented by other facilities including Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks etc.

35. Table 3, below sets out the Field in Trust benchmark guidelines for open space and equipped play areas. These benchmarks reflect the findings of the survey of local standards for open space applied by local planning authorities.

Open space typology	Quantity guideline (hectares per 1,000 pop.)	Walking guideline
Playing Pitches	1.20	1,200m
All outdoor sports	1.60	1,200m
Equipped/Designated Play Areas	0.25 (additional criteria for recommended minimum sizes)	LAP's – 100m LEAP's – 400m NEAP's – 1,000m
Other outdoor provision (MUGA & skateboard parks)	0.30	700m

Table 3: Recommendations from the Fields in Trust guidelines.   With regards to outdoor sports pitches, local standards are no longer accepted by Sport England hence setting a standard is now meaningless.   The City Council has commissioned a separate Playing Pitch Strategy which considers this function of open-space.   This Green Space strategy has adopted the other criteria with respect to equipped/designated play areas and other outdoor provision including MUGA.   Some facilities that are sports related have been picked up under an Amenity Recreation category as the Sport England methodology only focuses on a small range of pitch sports.

36. Accessibility guidelines are provided as walking distance from dwellings. Indicative walking distances can be determined from the accessibility guidelines as set out below.

- 250m   =   2/3-minute walk
- 400m   =   05-minute walk
- 800m   =   10-minute walk
- 1,200m   =   15-minute walk
- 1,600m   =   20-minute walk

37. It should be recognised that when applying these benchmarks, local features and obstacles to pedestrian and cycle movement should be considered. In doing so, accessible and sustainable play and sport facilities will be maximised.

38. The 2007 quantity and access standards covering green space types for the City of Stoke on Trent are summarised in table 4 below. They are drawn from the North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy 2007 which covers the City of Stoke on Trent and the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme.

Green space types	Quantity standard (hectares per 1,000 population unless indicated otherwise)	Access standard (measured in straight line)
Parks and gardens	2.35	Local 400 metres, Neigbourhood 800 metres and District 1,200 metres
Amenity green space	No standard	No standard
Natural and semi-natural green space	3.60	600m
Designated play spaces for children and young people	0.76	LAP 220 metres, LEAP 400 metres NEAP 800 metres
Outdoor Sports Facilities	0.90	1200m
Allotments	No standard	No standard
Green Corridors	No standard	No standard
Churchyard & Cemeteries	No standard	No standard
TOTAL open space (sum from above)	7.61	Not applicable

Table 4: The 2007 quantity and access standards for North Staffordshire including the City of Stoke-on-Trent and the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme. Note that outdoor sports facilities are no longer included. The ordering and nomenclature of green space has also changed.

Nearest Neighbour Comparator Exercise

39. To ensure that the City of Stoke-on-Trent is positioned within a comparative context and to inform the setting of local standards the CIPFA: Nearest Neighbour (NN) model was applied to the City and comparative local authorities elsewhere in England. The comparative local authorities are reached through an algorithm developed for inter-authority comparison and is based on a wide range of determinants.

40. In this analysis, the City of Stoke-on-Trent is compared with 15 of its nearest neighbours and with the adjacent Borough of Newcastle under Lyme.   Hence a total of 16 comparator local authorities have been included in benchmarking green space provision.

41. The authorities are listed below and are ordered according to their NN ranking. Hence No. 1 Rotherham is the nearest neighbour and No. 15 Sandwell is the fifteenth nearest neighbour:

   1. Rotherham;
   2. Doncaster;
   3. Gateshead;
   4. Barnsley;
   5. Wakefield;
   6. St. Helens;
   7. Tameside;
   8. Walsall;
   9. Dudley;
   10. Stockton-on-Tees;
   11. Derby;
   12. Bolton;
   13. Wigan;
   14. Middlesbrough;
   15. Sandwell;
   16. Newcastle under Lyme *(not in the NN exercise but included as an adjacent authority)*

Green Space comparison

42. The City of Stoke on Trent total historic figure of 7.61 for total greenspace quantity per 1,000 population (2007) is second overall in the nearest neighbour comparison but behind the adjacent authority of Newcastle under Lyme, with the requirements adopted by comparator authorities, as shown in figure 2 below. (n.b. six comparator authorities did not have a total figure for open space):

Total Green Space per 1,000 population
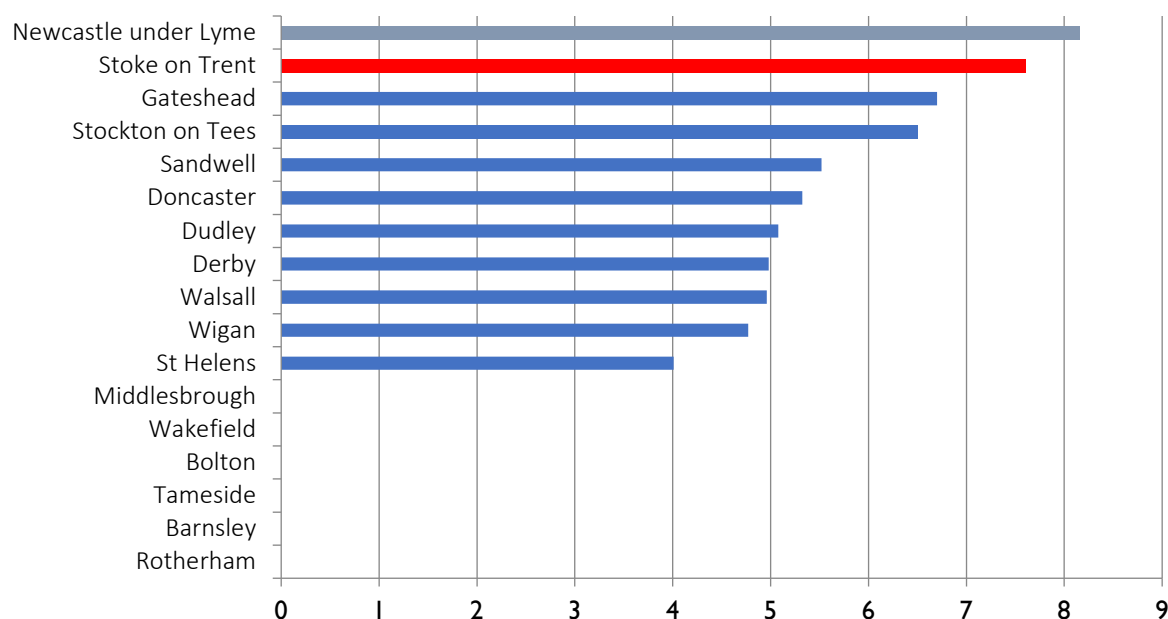
Figure 2: Space comparison based on available standards for the nearest neighbour local authorities. The City of Stoke-on-Trent is at the top of the table in respect of the 2007 standards.

Consultation summary

43. Consultation on the preparation of the 2018 Green Space Strategy took the form of stakeholder workshops (March/April 2017) and an online survey, "the City of Stoke-on-Trent Great Outdoors Survey" (March to August 2017). With respect to quantity of green space, the results of the Great Outdoors Survey for five of the key typologies are shown in the figures below. A new consultation was not undertaken for the 2021 update, hence the results of the Great Outdoors Survey 2017 are represented in figures 3 to 7 below.

Allotments

Figure 3: The Great Outdoors Survey in respect of allotment provision. In summary responders believe that there is 'not enough' or 'about the right' level of provision of allotments in the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

Formal parks and gardens

Figure 4: The Great Outdoors Survey in respect of parks & gardens provision. In summary responders believe that there is 'not enough' or 'about right' provision of parks and gardens in the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

Amenity recreation

Figure 5: The Great Outdoors Survey in respect of amenity recreation provision. In summary adult responders believe that there is not enough provision of amenity recreation in the City of Stoke-on-Trent whereas young people veer towards it being 'about right' or 'more than enough'.

Playgrounds

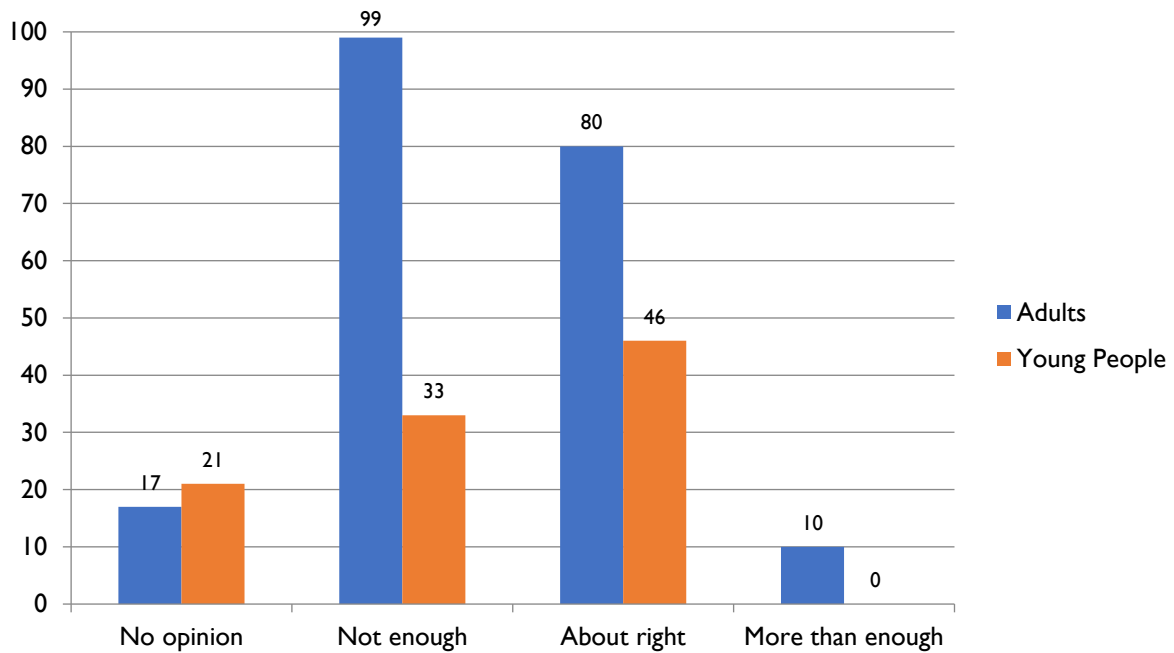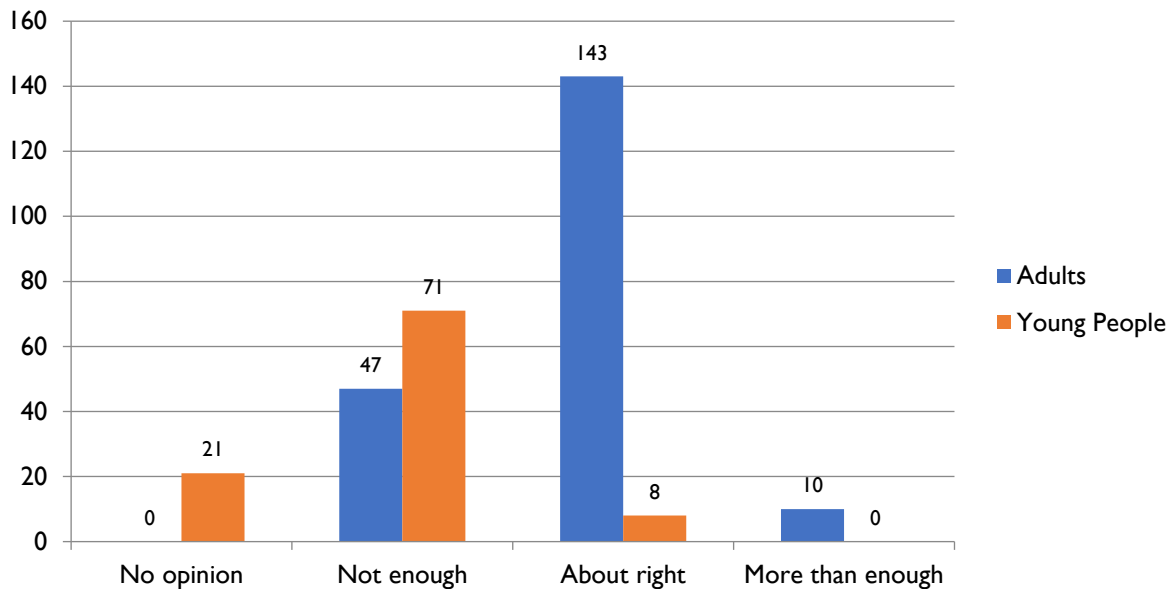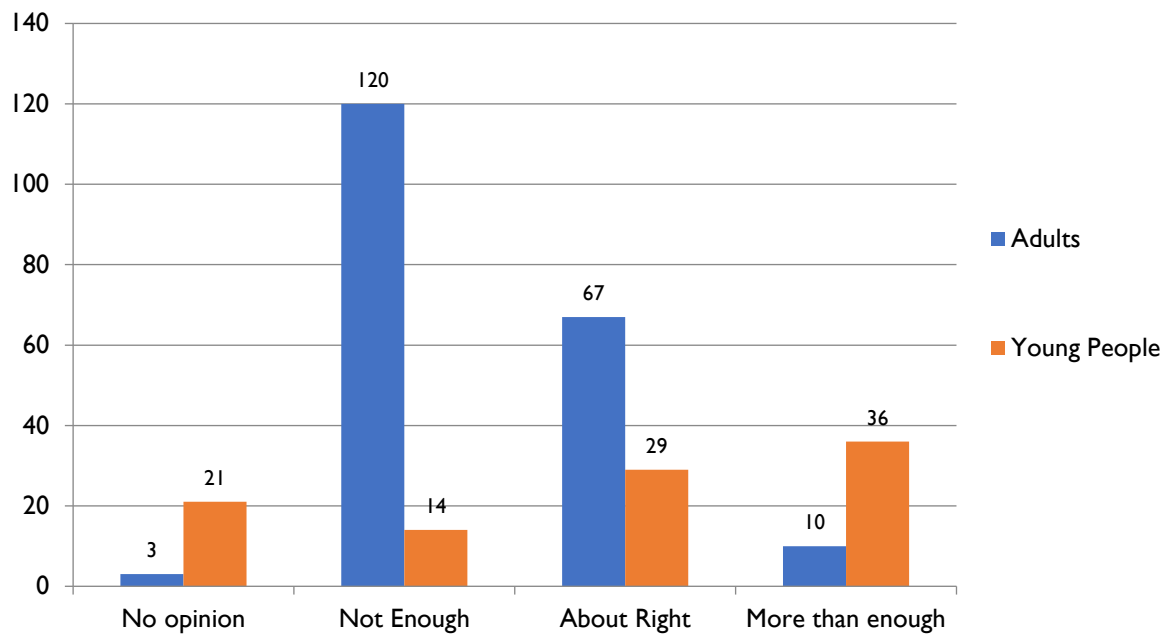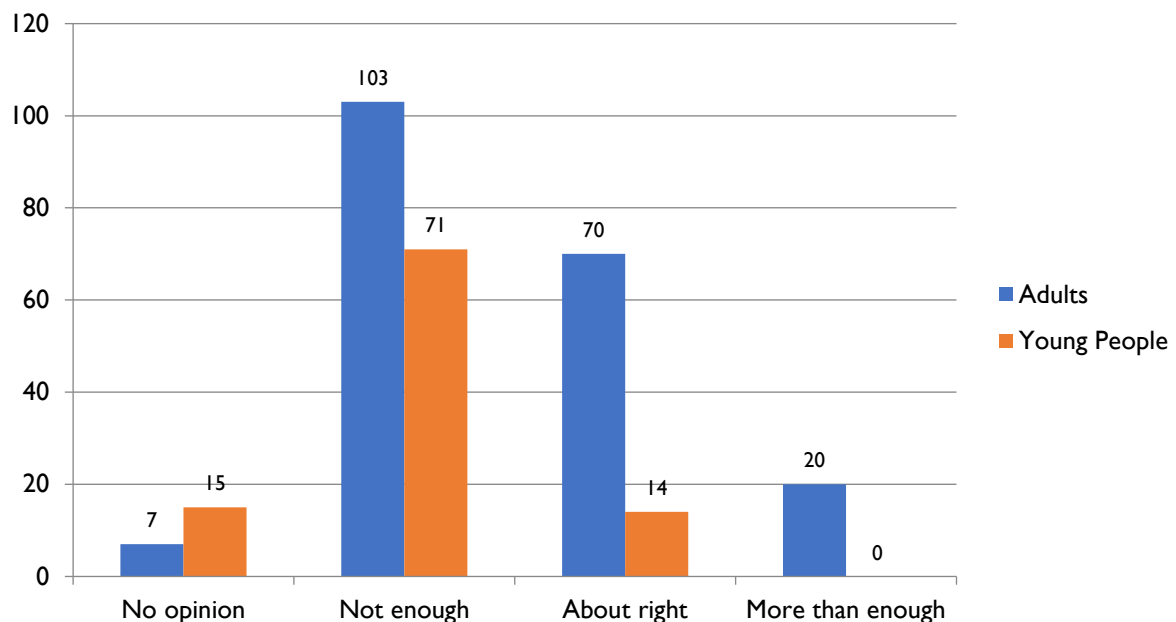

Figure 6: The Great Outdoors Survey in respect of playground provision. In summary responders believe that there is not enough provision in the City of Stoke-on-Trent. The young persons' response is very pronounced.

Green corridors, rivers and canals
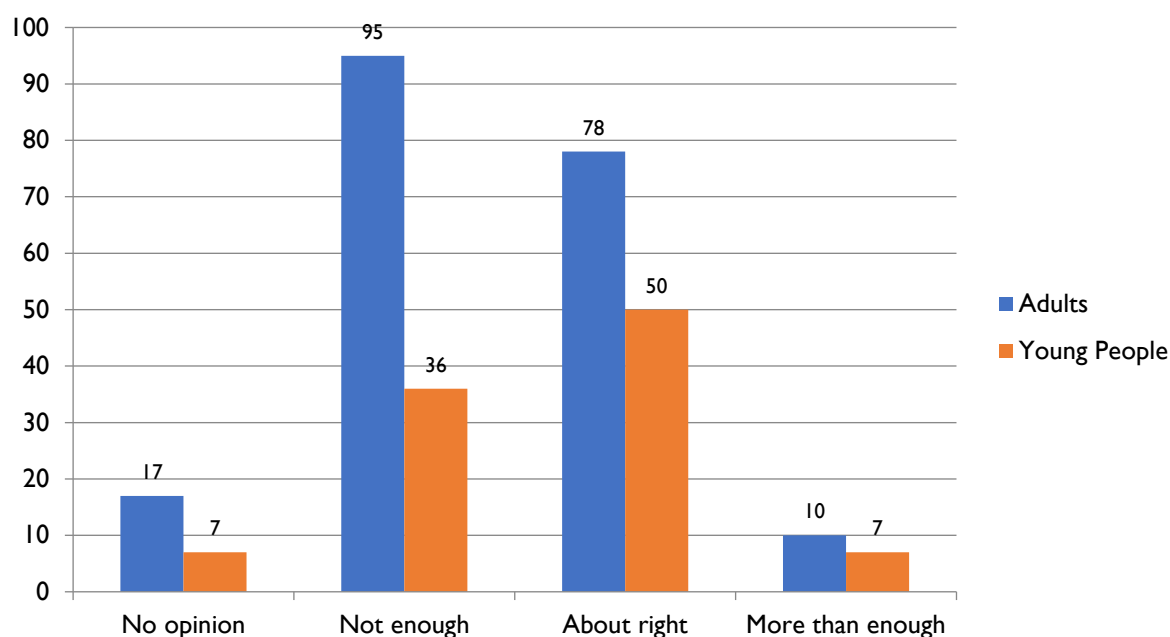
Figure 7: The Great Outdoors Survey in respect of green corridor, rivers and canals provision. In summary responders believe that there is 'not enough' or 'about right' provision in the City of Stoke on Trent.

Green Space Standards

44. The following factors have been factored into the recommended Green Space Strategy Standards 2018 (updated 2021).

- The 2007 standards – noting that these applied to the combined area of the City of Stoke-on-Trent and the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme;
- Improved site recording with the availability of GIS data analysis;
- Actual quantities of green space;
- The National Planning Policy Framework, Planning Practice Guidance and the high-level 'Stronger Together' objectives;
- The nearest neighbour exercise and comparisons with these authorities;
- The Fields in Trust guidelines;
- The audit of sites results;
- The results of consultation especially the City of Stoke-on-Trent Great Outdoors Survey;
- The anticipated growth in population (which will lead to greater demand for green space but also improved opportunities for its creation and management on the back of developer contributions;
- Its role in supporting the wider green infrastructure network;
- Future funding predictions.

45. Table 5 shows the interim recommended Green Space Standards. The following commentary applies to this table:

- **Allotments:** The City of Stoke-on-Trent has good provision for allotments. Nevertheless, there is currently several poor quality or derelict allotment sites and the new standard gives room for rationalisation.
- **Amenity recreation**: no standard was set in 2007 however local authorities generally do set standards for amenity green space. The recommended amenity recreation access standard follows the Fields in Trust guidelines and is 'slightly ahead' in terms of quantity (0.9 compared to 0.6ha/1,000) even so it is a substantial drop from the 2007 actual.
- **Churchyard and cemeteries**: no standard was set in 2007 and there is not a strong case to set a standard in 2017.   Hence future provision should be considered on a site by site basis.
- **Formal parks and gardens:**   The 2007 standard covered North Staffordshire and reflects the fact that the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme has a significantly higher provision in comparison to the City of Stoke-on-Trent. To set a realistic standard for the City alone it has been necessary to consider (i) existing provision, (ii) provision by the nearest neighbour authorities and (iii) the high cost of creation and management of formal parks and gardens. The standard has been set so that an increase in provision would only be required if the higher projected population figures were attained.
- **Green corridor, rivers and canals:**   This is a signature landscape for the City of Stoke-on-Trent and it has good provision in this regard. Many of these areas are heritage assets. However, there is not a strong case to set a standard and the focus should principally be on quality to improve functionality rather than quantity.
- **Playgrounds:** better recording has allowed this Strategy to determine more closely what is a playground and what is incidental to it. Nevertheless the 2007 quality standard was extremely high and unrealistic. New provision is required and should be a focus for future developer contributions. This category is broken down into LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPs in accordance with Field in Trust recommendations.
- **Semi-natural green space:** the City is well provided for in this category meaning that there are possible opportunities for rationalisation based on a site-by-site assessment. The access standard follows the Fields in Trust recommendations however the quantity standard is ahead (3.0 compared to 1.8ha/1,000).

46. Table 6 shows the application of standards at the city-wide scale up to 2040. Note that this table does not reflect neighbourhood deficits.

47. When applying the access standards, consideration should always be given to actual routes rather than using a linear measure.   The reason for this is that, in most situations, the route to a green space requires travelling to crossing points over major transport corridors.

Type (2017 typology)	Area 2017/18 (ha.)	2021 actual, ha/1,000 head of pop (256,600)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on Standard Method (270,271)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on baseline job growth (275,109)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on higher job growth (285,681)	2007 Green Space Quantity Standard -	Recommended 2021 Green Space quantity standard	Access standard (measured in straight line) – note that obstacles such a s major roads should be considered when applying these standards.
Allotments	70.95	0.28	0.26	0.26	0.25	NS	0.24	400m (or 5-10 min walk)
Amenity recreation	300.96	1.17	1.11	1.09	1.05	NS	0.90	480m [open green] & 700m [MUGA]
Churchyard & cemeteries	97.21	0.38	0.36	0.35	0.34	NS	NS	NS
Formal parks and gardens	203.37	0.79	0.75	0.74	0.71	2.35	0.70	710m
Green corridor, rivers and canals	338.87	1.32	1.25	1.23	1.19	NS	NS	NS
Playgrounds	19.66	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.76	0.12	LAP 100m LEAP 400m NEAP 1,000m
Semi-natural greenspace	904.37	3.52	3.35	3.29	3.17	3.60	3.00	720m

Table 5: Recommended green space quantity and access standards 2021.   Access standards are shown in the far right-hand column.

Green Space Type	Existing Provision (250,600 population): Current Provision (ha.)	Existing Provision (250,600 populatio): Provision per 1,000 population	Recommended green space quantity standard (ha/1,000 pop.)	Provision under standard method 2040 = 270,271 — Provision per 1,000 population at 2040 (if supply stays the same)	Provision under standard method 2040 = 270,271 — Total Supply Required under Recommended Standard at 2040 (ha)	Provision under standard method 2040 = 270,271 — Projected surplus (+) or deficit (-) under Recommended Standard at 2040 (ha)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on baseline job growth (275,109) — Provision per 1,000 population at 2040 (if supply stays the same)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on baseline job growth (275,109) — Total Supply Required under Recommended Standard at 2040 (ha)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on baseline job growth (275,109) — Projected surplus (+) or deficit (-) under Recommended Standard at 2040 (ha)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on higher job growth (285,681) — Provision per 1,000 population at 2040 (if supply stays the same)	Tota Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on higher job growth (285,681) — Supply Required under Recommended Standard at 2040 (ha)	Per head of population (hectares [ha.] per 1,000) at 2040 based on higher job growth (285,681) — Projected surplus (+) or deficit (-) under Recommended Standard at 2040 (ha)
Allotments	70.95	0.28	**0.24**	0.26	64.87	+6.08	0.26	66.03	+4.92	0.25	68.56	+2.39

Amenity recreation	300.96	1.17	**0.90**	1.11	243.24	+57.03	1.09	247.60	+52.67	1.05	257.11	+43.16
Churchyard & cemeteries	97.21	0.38	**NS**	0.36	N/A	N/A	0.35	N/A	N/A	0.34	N/A	N/A
Formal parks and gardens	203.37	0.79	**0.70**	0.75	189.20	+14.44	0.74	192.58	+11.06	0.71	199.98	+3.66
Green corridor, rivers and canals	338.87	1.32	**NS**	1.25	N/A	N/A	1.23	N/A	N/A	1.19	N/A	N/A
Playgrounds	19.66	0.08	**0.12**	0.07	32.43	-12.47	0.07	33.01	-13.05	0.07	34.28	-14.32
Semi-natural greenspace	904.37	3.52	**3.00**	3.35	810.81	+94.79	3.29	825.33	+80.27	3.17	857.04	48.56

Table 6: Based on the recommended standards and applied at the city-wide scale this table shows where there are projected surpluses and deficits of land upto 2040. Overall the position is quite strong except playgrounds where there is a deficit in all scenarios.

Audit results

48. For the City of Stoke-on-Trent Green Space Strategy (2018) The audit of green space sites took place between March and August 2017. Most of the audit visits were conducted by City Council Planning and Transportation Team staff. Audit forms were prepared by the Consultants and a training session held.   The training session included accompanied site visits with experienced surveyors from the consultancy team. In total of 612 sites were audited. To quality assure the results, MD2 Consulting Ltd. undertook a number of random visits based on a sample of sites. It was found that there was a good degree of accuracy in recording results. However, it was noted that the site auditors had frequently not addressed the landscape context or landscape impact of sites. Therefore, it is recommended that this is revisited by the Council, possibly by extending the terms of reference of a green infrastructure study to include a landscape assessment.

49. Five categories were identified as an indicator based on previous studies and through an iterative process arising from a literature review
    * 80% and more is an excellent result and sites that fall into this category have very few shortcomings;
    * Sites that score 70% - 79% are very good but will have more shortcomings than the excellent category;
    * Sites that score 60 – 69% are above average but are showing yet more shortcomings than the very good category – this is a target group for quality improvement;
    * Sites that are average 50 – 59% are sub-optimal and whilst not of a poor standard have significant room for improvement;
    * Sites below 50% are of a poor standard and likely have many notable failings, where these are systemic failings identifying alternative uses for these sites may be the best option.

50. Table 7 shows the results of the audit broken down by type. The table requires an interpretation narrative:

    * The clear majority of sites fall into the categories; excellent standard, good standard and above average standard; (80%). This is a good result although there is still room for improvement;
    * A small but not insignificant number of sites are of a poor standard and this is a cause for concern (5%); however, there can be local factors that result in this so care is needed in drawing conclusions. Each site in this category needs a site-by-site investigation. This category needs to be considered for major improvements or alternative uses where it has been identified that they are surplus to requirements;
    * A significant percentage of sites fall into the 'above average' category but are falling short of good or excellent. This is a key target for improvements which can often be delivered at modest cost. Indeed, sites falling into this category can be the result of

failures in only one or two facets of the site and there are generally cost-effective solutions;

- Only one type – semi-natural green space - exceeds 10% in the poor category. This can reflect that some nature-based sites can appear unkempt.
- The results show that there is a clear case for capital investment to improve quality. In the current financial climate, this will be difficult however there are opportunities for invest-to-save and developer contributions;
- The Council is presently doing a very good job in managing its formal parks and gardens & churchyards and cemeteries, but these categories are vulnerable to rapid deterioration if site management is reduced.

51. All the audited sites were recorded using a geographical information system (GIS) and a spreadsheet database created to accompany the Green Space Strategy, which provides more information on each site with an ability to identify aspects which require improvement.

Scoring	Total No. of Sites	Audited 2017	% of Audited Sites	Grading	Allotments	Amenity recreation	Churchyard & cemeteries	Formal parks & gardens	Green corridor, rivers and canal	Playgrounds	Semi natural greenspace
Scores > 80%	-	182	30	Excellent standard	12 (18%)	76 (29%)	13 (48%)	17 (45%)	16 (25%)	24 (33%)	25 (29%)
Scores 70 - 79%	-	137	22	Good standard	14 (22%)	53 (20%)	5 (20%)	7 (22%)	20 (30%)	22 (30%)	16 (19%)
Scores 60 - 69%	-	169	28	Above average standard	18 (28%)	83 (31%)	5 (20%)	9 (22%)	17 (26%)	19 (26%)	17 (20%)
Scores 50 - 59 %	-	91	15	Average standard	10 (15%)	38 (14%)	3 (12%)	4 (11%)	11 (16%)	7 (10%)	18 (21%)
Scores < 50%	-	33	5	Poor standard	6 (24%)	15 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	9 (11%)

Total	618	612	100	-	60 5 not audited	266 1 not audited	25	37	66	73	85

Table 7:   The results of the 2017 audit of green space sites in the City of Stoke-on-Trent.   Audits were conducted using a standardised form compliant with the requirements of planning practice guidance (PPG).   The results are broken down by type and score.   Note that rounding applies to percentages. The difference in sites audited and sites total is due to access limitations.

52. A representative sample of sites was audited in 2021 using the following methodology:

    a. 63 sites were selected by random sampling using an anonymised EXCEL spreadsheet.

    b. The random sample was then purposively reviewed to ensure that all typologies were present. This proved to be the case and no further changes were required based on this.

    c. The random sample was further purposively reviewed for geographical distribution. Again the distribution appeared sufficient to ensure that there was no obvious bias in the sampling. This was achieved by identifying the location of the sites on a map.

    d. The audit took place over five working days by the same two experienced surveyors.

    e. The audits were undertaken during the month of July 2021 which is an optimal season for open space auditing. In most cases photographs were taken on site.

    f. Manual recording was undertaken on site and then entered onto a spreadsheet which also contained the 2017 audit results. The comparison was then made leading to an analysis based on the traffic light system.

Score Difference Range (+ or -)	Description	No. of sites	% of sites	Score decreasing	Score Increasing
0 to 10	**No noticeable change**	40	63	17	23
11 to 20	**Generally lower or higher scoring across the categories reduced/increased the overall average - no significant differences**	19	30	12	7
>20	Slight variation increasing/decreasing the quality scores has increased/reduced the overall average - overall quality is better or worse	4	7	2	2
Total	-	63	100	31	32

53. Based on the traffic light system consultants compared the data sets between these two dates (see above). It was considered that the green and yellow categories were sufficiently similar to require no further investigation.

54. Four sites showed a variation greater than 20% , these were equally plus and minus. Of these:

   a. Site number 38 (Mill Hill Crescent Active Recreation) was considered to have been over scored in 2017.
   b. Site 293 (Widecombe Road Plots) was considered as having been underscored in 2017 and offers good amenity green space and links to adjacent Greenway.
   c. Site 333 (Mercia Crescent, Cobridge) appears to be suffering from some misuse, play equipment needs painting and surfaces repaired or replaced.
   d. Site 464 (Open Space at Lordship Lane) appear to have received a low score in 2017 and there was evidence of improvement although this site is not without its deficiencies.

Green Space Strategy

55. The interim update of the City of Stoke Green Space Strategy 2021 has revisited the strategy presented in 2018.

High Level Strategy

56. Adopting a Green Space Strategy for the period 2021 – 2040 requires an ability for the Council to be flexible and respond to downward or at best static pressure on finance. The Council is the main provider of green space in the City of Stoke on Trent but not the only one. Of 619 sites scoped in the 2017 audit, 105 (17%) are owned by another provider; hence the authority should aim to be a coordinator as well as a provider of services.

H1: Develop the Council's role as an 'enabler & facilitator'. This does not imply that the direct services role should cease but rather that these roles should be complimentary. Whilst the enabling and facilitation role increases, the direct services role should be maintained at its current level. The Council should set out to coordinate the roles performed by other providers (public, private and voluntary) to encourage a joined-up approach to the creation and management of green space at a city-wide scale.

H2: The Council should strongly commit to the green infrastructure approach and produce an accompanying Green Infrastructure Strategy which dovetails with its neighbouring authorities and places ecosystems services provision and management firmly on the policy agenda of the City.

H3: Adopt the Standards set out in the interim update to the Green Space Strategy and embed them in the Local Plan.

H4: Maximise the opportunities for new green space provision and management of it (along with management of existing provision) through developer contributions. The Council should be robust in its development management function to ensure that developers do not renege on agreements.

H5: Make 'quality' the highest priority, followed equally by 'quantity' and 'access' as second priorities.

H6: Maximise the commercial opportunities of Council owned green space but not at the expense of free access for those of the least means. Examples include franchises (cafes, craft and active sports micro-shops), product placement and advertising.

H7: Ensure that there is an equitable distribution of green space across the city. This may involve rationalising one facility to allow new provision elsewhere.

H8: Avoid irreversible decisions on the principle that 'when its gone its gone forever'. This does not imply that all green space is sacrosanct. There will be losses and gains during the life of the Strategy.

H9: Undertake a further mid-term review in 2025/26 or conduct a full update of the Green Space Strategy by 2027/28.

Quality of Green Space Strategy

57. The quality of sites in Stoke on Trent is above average to excellent. This is a strong foundation for maintaining quality. There are good reasons to maintain high quality:

- Site usage, as measured by the number of visits and repeat visits, is higher when the site is of a good quality;
- A greater mix of people use sites of good quality, hence there is less social exclusion;
- It is a lower cost to maintain a site in a good condition than to let it decline and then invest a large amount of money to return it to a good quality;
- Good quality sites are more likely to secure the interest and involvement of volunteers in its maintenance and in running events;
- Good quality sites are a tourism asset and hence contribute to the visitor economy;
- Quality allows the City Council and its partners to seek recognition in the form of awards and grants. This in turn builds 'pride-in-place' in the community.

58. 'Fields in Trust' have issued quality guidelines and these are recommended as the principles of quality management. The list below is an embellishment of these:

- Parks should be of 'Green Flag' status. This should include not only premium parks but all formal parks and gardens. This is a litmus-test of the Council's resolve to place quality above quantity;
- Green Space should be appropriately landscaped;
- There should be positive (as opposed to reactive) management in place;
- Green Space sites should include the provision of paths;
- Fear of crime or harm should be designed out.

59. A similar award, to the Green Flag is the Green Pennant, which is available for community managed open space and participation. The checklist for 'Green Flag' ('Green Pennant' is similar, except the marketing) and is recommended as an ongoing checklist of quality.

- A welcoming place;
- Healthy, safe and secure;
- Clean and well maintained;
- Sustainability;
- Conservation and heritage;
- Community involvement;
- Marketing;
- Management.

60. When prioritising quality in the Action Plan, a framework of Safer, Cleaner and Greener has been used. The audit results for 'does it feel safe' has been used as a proxy indicator for 'safer' and the audit results for 'maintenance' for 'cleaner and greener'.

Q1: The recommended strategic target for quality is 80%. Sites below a threshold of 70% are a priority for further assessment as follows:

- o Step 1: understand why the site is below target, this is a role for the land owner, planners and site managers. This step will generally involve a further site visit to check that the scoring is still correct (or has risen or deteriorated further).
- o Step 2: decide on a corrective course of action for example: (i) Site requires investment – seek funding, (ii) Site has several limitations which need overcoming – resolve limitations, (iii) Site is not valued or in the wrong place – consider reconfiguration or change to an alternative use.
- o Step 3: Carry out courses of action and/or.
- o Step 4: Ensure that these sites are audited when an open space audit is next carried out.

- o The above average category (60 – 69%) has significant opportunities for improvement to a higher category normally at low-cost and should be the first target for qualitative improvement. Sites falling into the poor standard category should be further investigated followed by an in-principle decision as to whether it is financially realistic to retain the site or seek an alternative use. Site management regimes should be sufficient to maintain a green space site within its existing quality category.

Q2: 'Green Flag' and 'Green Pennant' awards should be sought whenever possible for key green space sites. Key green spaces are those which are a major focus for visitors and include urban parks, countryside sites and equipped play areas

Q3: The landscape context and landscape impact of sites has not been adequately addressed in the 2017 green space audit. It is recommended that this is revisited by the Council by extending the terms of reference of a green infrastructure study to include a landscape scale assessment.

Quantity of Green Space Strategy

61. The City of Stoke-on-Trent has average to good provision of green space.   However, the result of the Great Outdoors Survey (public consultation exercise 2017) show that responders believe that in many cases there is insufficient provision. However, a significant minority also believe it is about right. Very few responders believe that there is an over provision.

62. The 2017 consultation responses have been a significant factor in formulating the recommended Standards.   However, spending limits are also a significant factor and have been considered. The results of spending limitations mean that the Council should aim to manage public expectations principally by encouraging local communities to take a more

direct role in management, using reclassification and repurposing as necessary to reduce management costs and accept that the authority's position is respect of comparison with its statistical nearest neighbours will decline during the life of the Strategy.

63. The overall quantity standard has dropped from 7.61ha/1,000 head of population (2007) to 4.96ha/1,000 head of population (2017). A re-audit of 63 sites as part of of the interim review suggest that the quality standard has changed only modestly since 2017.

64. However, offsetting this is that the 2007 standards are misleading since by including the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme in 2007 they appear much higher than actual and give the City a 'false' Standards uplift – this is particularly the case in terms of formal parks and gardens. In respect of playgrounds significantly improved recording using GIS has allowed a much more accurate measure to be taken.

65. The combined impact of these is that the 2007 Standard should have been nearer 5.38 ha/1,000 head of population. In which case the drop from 5.38 to 4.96 ha/1,000 head of population is more modest although an overall downwards trend is clear.

66. A recommendation is that future green space audits should always be City specific, albeit there are instances where provision can be shared across municipal boundaries and the 'duty to cooperate' also applies. Note that the same specificity does not necessarily apply to green infrastructure studies since natural systems frequently cross municipal boundaries.

67. In respect of the quantity of provision it is necessary to state that the Council is not free of constraints on what can or cannot be rationalised, when this proves necessary. Any reduction in quantity must be justified on a case-by-case basis and be in general alignment with either existing legacy planning policies or the new Local Plan when it is approved.

68. It is inevitable that there will be some losses and some gains in terms of green space during the life of the new Local Plan. Normally any losses should take place in underused, wrongly located or uneconomic open space and gains made in green space required as part of new developments or because of the need to provide land for nature based solutions to combat global change (e.g. flood management etc.) or meet the needs of communities.

69. The recommended standards are mixed and highly focused. In some cases, the recommended quantity standards are aligned to existing provision – which in practice means that new development should fund the marginal increases that population growth brings to these typologies.

70. Realistically expansion of green space is only likely to occur on the back of new development through developer agreements, external 'grant' funding or through 'invest to save' policies. Hence:

- The first quantity objective is to maintain the percentage of greenspace per head of population as close to the recommended standards as possible;
- The second quantity objective is to expand the quantity per head of population in the provision of playgrounds;
- The third quantity objective is to seek rationalisation that allows the Council to re-invest in quality.

U1: Every effort should be made to maintain the quantity of green space in line with the recommended standard and considering population growth models and

(i) economic viability.
(ii) planning policy; and
(ii) sustenance and improvement of the City's green infrastructure network.

U2: Rationalisation and reconfiguration (including for alternative uses), when considered, should be the subject of careful site planning and local consultation (including site master-planning notably where an existing area is to be split).

U3: Opportunities for creating new green space where there are deficiencies should be seized through new development and a formula for assessing this adopted in the new Local Plan based on strategic recommendation T1 in this Strategy. The Council's Development Management function should ensure that developers fully meet their agreements in practice.

Access to Green Space Strategy

71. The recommended access standards apply across the whole of the City. Distance standards are shown as a linear distance but when making planning decisions, the route to a greenspace type should also be considered. In practice, very few routes follow straight lines and users will normally follow pavements, green corridors and cross busy roads at traffic lights.

72. The needs of different users also need to be factored-in, both in terms of the distance standard but also in respect of internal circulation patterns. Path surfaces should be unobtrusive, cost effective to maintain and provide multi-purpose use, wherever practicably possible. As a priority, these routes should provide access for people that might not otherwise be able to use a site due, for example, to a disability. National and international guidelines are available on surfaces and access systems and are readily available on the internet. Infrastructure is necessary at major sites for disabled persons parking and access.

73. Site entrances and exits are an important part of access. They function as 'gateways' and should as far as possible be conveniently located subject to amenity constraints of nearby residents and safe ingress/egress in relation to adjacent roads. Site entrances are also natural locations for signage and site interpretation, including circulation route maps showing how to access key features. Whenever it is possible, site entrances and exits

should be close to public transport nodes and link to green corridors which also facilitate access to sites by bicycle.

74. Green corridors, rivers and canals are also linear sites and in large part, linear-access to these is an experience the public desires. Examples include exercising dogs, jogging, cycling and travelling to other destinations, such as shops and offices off the public road. Access points to these are 'gateways' as much as the entrance to a public park is, and hence requires similar infrastructure including disabled parking. Green corridors need to be safe-by-design but they also present opportunities for urban 'wildness' which provides close to nature experiences in urban areas including exploratory play for children and foraging for wild foods such as brambles and elderberry.

75. Public Rights of Way (PRoW) are important in allowing people to access areas which might not otherwise be available to them such as agricultural land and semi-natural green space.   The key PRoW objectives are to (i) keep rights of way accessible and open, (ii) the definitive map up to date, (iii) surfaces and entry and egress points in good condition and (iv) good signposting. There is significant further work to be done on PRoW for instance the definitive map is not up to date. There is approximately 1,300 Km of PRoW's in Stoke-on-Trent and a significant amount still to be added. Some of these have been established not only through use but also by common law dedication. Of the routes to be added deeds of dedication are needed where these do not already exist and putting these routes on the definitive map also brings land management issues. Funding of PRoW's is a challenge although not one that is unique to the city. Furthermore, the promotion of PRoW's is a key issue and in respect of promotion there is significant room for improvement. Furthermore, a new PRoW Improvement Plan is a statutory requirement for the Local Transport Plan (LTP). It should be noted that there is strong fit between PRoW's and green infrastructure.

76. During the lifetime of the Green Space Strategy the use of 'smart' devices to navigate and measure distance travelled, calories expended, and market events and facilities will continue to increase. Indeed since 2017 there has been a significant uptake in wearables for these purposes. The City Council is advised to keep new technology under review and coordinate access to green space with apps & mobile mapping. However, virtual access should be approached with caution; for instance, 'augmented-reality' may detract from the enjoyment of greenspace or lead people into situations of harm. Indeed the 'deep' benefits of green space in respect of health and wellbeing is only attained through physical and sensory access (sight, sound, smell, touch etc.)

A1: Distance standards should be applied to all new developments as a consideration in decision making. This should address how people access sites in practice i.e. via pavements, major road crossings, public transport. Notable gaps in accessibility should also be used in tandem with typology to drive decisions on appropriate greenspace creation in new development.

A2: At 'gateways' to major sites e.g. formal urban parks; a whole spectrum approach should be taken to access provision to enable as many users as possible to access sites. This normally implies car parking, public transport links and secure cycle parking. The needs

of special groups (such as those with disabilities, parents with buggies etc.) should be considered when planning access to and within key sites. Internal access and circulation within key sites should as far as possible be robust but unobtrusive.

A3: The Public Rights of Way (PRoW) system needs to be updated including presently outstanding provision, the definitive map brought up to date, better promotion and the completion of a PRoW improvement plan.

A4: The application of new technology should be developed and appropriate provision made to encourage access to green space with apps & mobile mapping.

A5: Linear access along green corridors, rivers and canals should be considered as part of the City's transport infrastructure and included in transport plans.

Financial Strategy

77. Budget restrictions in local government are anticipated up to and beyond 2025/6. Since green space functions delivered by local authorites in England are mostly non-statutory, these services are vulnerable to spending restrictions. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how important access to local green spaces is to local people and this realisation is important to capitalise upon. Income generation potential is unlikely to wholly bridge the gap; although commercialisation should be part of the financial strategy.

78. In the short-term, budget restrictions are inevitable. However, the precautionary principle should be applied here, so it is recommended that the Council makes informed decisions which consider the needs of future generations and are based on the evidence provided within this strategy.

79. There are many models available to the Council in respect of its own green space including leasing, licencing and other legal mechanisms to bodies such as Charitable Incorporated Companies (CICs), Community associations and Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOs). Since 2017 there has also been a move in some local authorities to set up 'Parks Trusts' to manage municipal green space. Whilst such organisations may bring benefits it has also been argued that they can lead to a democratic deficit by placing the control of public land into the responsibility of a board of trustees and hence beyond the ability of the electorate to make change. Any such move needs to be carefully analysed and the advantages and disadvantages should be transparent to the electorate.

80. The City Council should use this Green Space Strategy review to address the overall greenspace asset base using the three Framework Plans (2018), new Standards (2018), Audit spreadsheet (part updated 2021) and the Action Plan etc. A smaller asset base is the likely consequence but one which has the benefit of enabling reinvestment into sites which provide a higher profile and greater public benefit. Where a green space is identified as surplus to requirements and reconfiguration or a change of use is intended, then a consultation process is required prior to its transfer to an asset management plan.

81. Increased commercialisation will go a long way to offset budget reductions and will generate increased activities. There are numerous ways to achieve this. Some of the most popular and replicable are:

- Marketing franchising opportunities such as (i) cafes and restaurants (ii) sport and active recreation minor retail outlets (of a scale suited to the sensibility to the space) – such as skate board, rock climbing and bouldering, BMX and mountain biking etc. (iii) paid for attractions (e.g. high ropes courses); (iv) markets such as street food, flea markets, art markets etc.; (v) music and theatre including promenade events and festivals;
- Sponsorship of open space by companies who can promote their marketing information at key visual points and can also use the open space for corporate events ranging from entertaining business guests through to staff development.

82. In respect of commercialisation, the Council is recommended to employ a self-financing Green Space Commercial Manager [or team] (the maintenance/growth of a team should depend on commercial success) with annual targets to meet.

83. The Council will need to organise to meet future challenges with respect to its green space services. The characteristics being:

- Entrepreneurial in generation of income and creative in delivering services in new ways;
- More commercial in making its services available to others and attracting money generating activities into its open space;
- Significantly increasing its role as an enabler, facilitator and commissioner of services;
- Adept at partnership working;
- Strong on marketing and communications;
- Dedicated to attracting grants and funds from outside the area, which are secured through competitive processes.

84. Capital reinvestment in facilities is needed to maintain quality.   Where monies are not available in the short term, an opportunity exists to temporarily reclassify some sites to different, lower cost forms of management (for example from a park to amenity recreation) or to repurpose sites in such a way as to remove time expired equipment (for example converting a LAP to MUGA). In respect of play equipment, signage and seating, it is recommended that these are normally replaced after 15 years.

85. The Council should practice full cost recovery when offering services both internally and externally. The full cost of an activity or output or project is the direct costs of the activity and the appropriate portion of all other costs of that service.

F1: Address budget reductions and consequent reduction of services but seek to partially offset these by increased commercial activity. This includes employing a target-driven self-financing Commercial Manager or team. The Council should maintain a good

understanding of total cost and practice 'full cost recovery' in delivering services and site usage. The Council should also ensure that Management is entrepreneurial in its approach and offer skills training in this as required. Overall this involves positioning the service department as an entrepreneurial enabler and facilitator.

F2: The Council should avoid irreversible decisions notably to allow for future expansion when the economic cycle changes. It is acceptable to transfer land management of municipal green space to alternative providers but with the City Council retaining the ownership of sites. It may also be necessary to reinvest capital to maintain quality and if this is not available reclassify sites or repurpose according to typology limitations.

F3: Seek alternative uses for sites no longer fit for purpose, noting the constraints found elsewhere in this Strategy, to reduce the asset size. Whenever possible reinvest funds generated from the new use into green space improvements. Where developer contributions are involved apply in the following order:

- Meet local need caused by the Development in question.
- Improve the quality score of existing green space assets according to local and city-wide need.
- Reinvest capital to replace time expired equipment and facilities.
- Provide new green space in typologies where the Council is deficient in respect of Standards.
- Provide better green infrastructure connectivity and enhance ecosystem services.

F4: The Council should require developers to have mechanisms in place where residents pay directly for the green space created as part of the development and that this responsibility is transferable on house-sale. It is essential to have an appropriate, robust and automated collection mechanism that provides value for money for future residents.

Green Space Events Strategy

86. Green space such as urban parks, allotments and countryside and nature sites (semi-natural green space) are highly suited as event venues. They are already used extensively and this is expected to increase during the life of the Green Space Strategy. The Council has already responded to this directly by supporting, organising and/or making available municipal green space including on a commercial basis. Events can perform a wide range of functions; some of the most important include:

- Introducing new users to sites which in turn may lead to independent repeat visits. There is some evidence in research that this can lead to increased participation from hard to reach groups;
- Perform an educational and training role especially in:
  - o raising understanding of the facilities available in each open space;
  - o environmental education;
  - o family and 'fun' events which deliver social cohesion;
  - o demonstrating handicrafts and the work of micro-businesses;

- o introductory sessions on new activities that people can participate in;
- o growing plants, saplings and learning about planting and basic horticulture;
- o venue for skills training especially manual dexterity, horticulture and urban forestry.
- Festivals, theatre, music and arts performances which attract large regional and national audiences and support the visitor economy;
- Lead to greater awareness of local authority services and support local studies;
- Increase community pride in the City;
- Attract visitors from outside of the City hence providing a 'show-casing' opportunity and economic benefits through visitor spend;
- Providing a social function especially for children and families whose economic means do not allow them to holiday away from home.

E1 - Maintain events as a key feature of municipal and other green space use whilst accepting that in a resource limited environment efficient approaches are required. Since events organisation and provision directly by the Council and through third parties will be an ongoing activity creative thinking at the management level will continue to be needed throughout the life of the Strategy. The City Council's main contribution to events is often access to green space, publicity support and the training and insuring of volunteers as required and this should continue.

E2 – Events that might become a nuisance to residents should be subject to careful planning and mitigation. However, any restrictions should not be so extreme as to force organisers of major events to look elsewhere since the City may then lose the economic benefits of visitor spend.

Diversity of Provision Strategy

87. Maintaining a diversity of provision in the City of Stoke on Trent is necessary if the needs of the whole community are to be met. This includes having a distribution of greenspace sites that can meet a wide range of interests. In many cases this requires little more than access to land, water or air without undue restrictions. It may be beneficial to consider site provision for specific community interests under the Council's 'duty to cooperate' as suitable sites may exist close to the city boundary.

88. The high-level typologies used in this Green Space Strategy are an amalgam of different sub-categories. Understanding the sub-categories is vital to the management of the City's green space resource as the sub categories can impact heavily on the overall diversity of provision. The main planning objective is to ensure that the sub-categories feature in decision making as on their own the typology driven standards are a 'blunt instrument'. A range of sub categories is shown below; note that this listing is intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive; the semi-natural typology is especially diverse.

ALLOTMENTS - Community orchards, street planters, urban share cropping.

AMENITY RECREATION - meadow grassland, road verges, roundabouts, roof gardens, ornamental hedgerows.

FORMAL PARKS AND GARDENS - bowls, tennis courts memorials, boating lakes, multiuse games areas (MUGAs), formal gardens and bedding, ornamental green space outside buildings.

GREEN CORRIDORS RIVERS AND CANALS - off road cycleways, public rights-of-way, bridleways, green routes to school, street trees and boulevards

PLAYGROUNDS - neighbourhood equipped areas for play (NEAP), local equipped areas for play (LEAP), local areas for play (LAP), multiuse games areas (MUGAs), skateboard ramps, high ropes courses.

SEMI-NATURAL GREENSPACE - urban woodland, wetlands and marshes, species rich grasslands, country parks, woodland glades, habitats for protected species e.g. bats, invertebrates and amphibians, moorland fringe, naturally regenerating brown fields, green roofs and green walls, wild food foraging, hedgerows and the shelterbelts, fishing ponds.
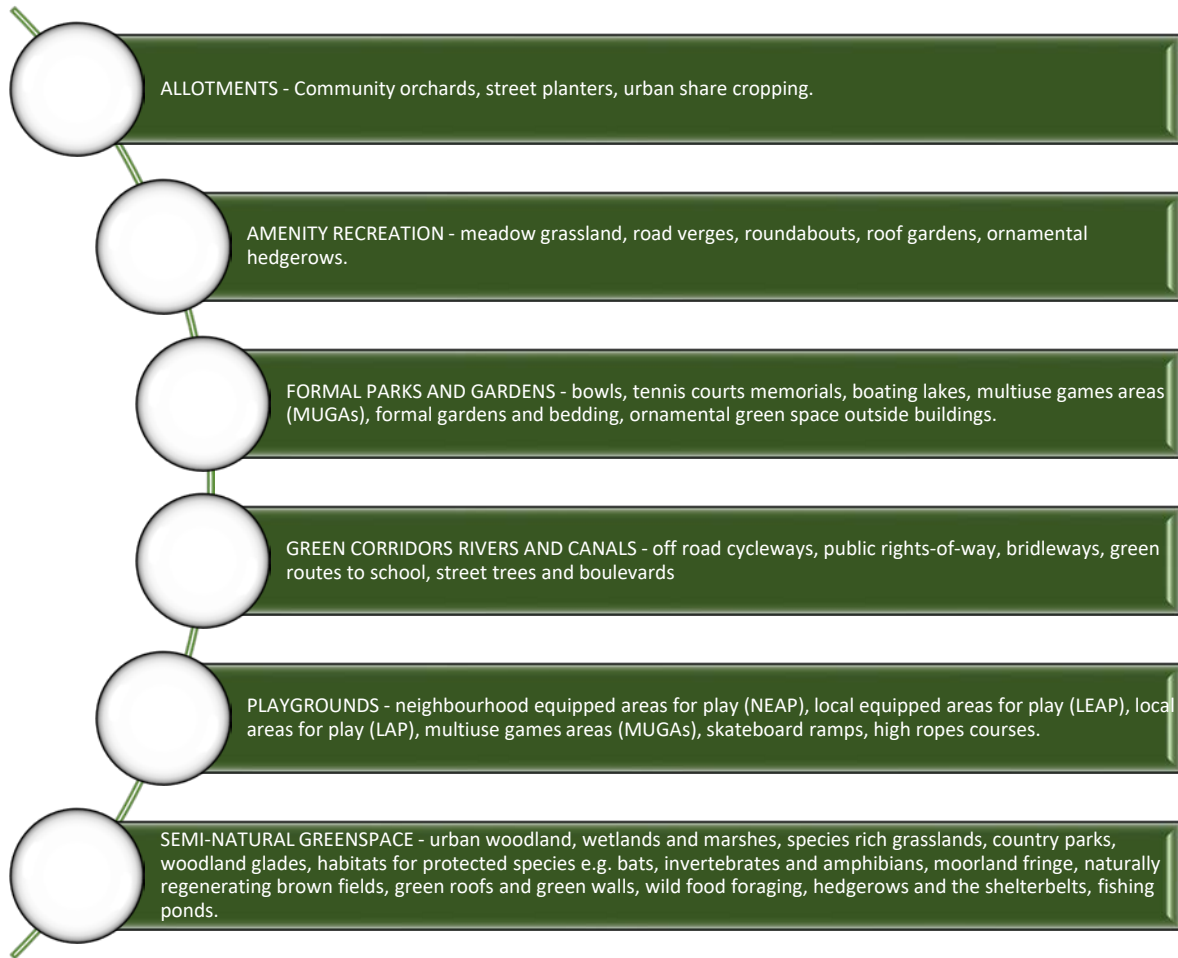
Figure 8: The high-level typology standards for green space should be viewed as an amalgam of subcategories. Some of the subcategories have numerous components to them most notably semi-natural green space. When considering the application of standards in planning processes, the type of subcategories present needs to be factored into decision-making. In principle, having a multiplicity of the subcategories is beneficial in greenspace terms, as it provides for a wider variety of public benefits. Conversely, a wide diversity presents management challenges as it requires the service department to be able to draw on numerous skills. In some instances, the subcategories fit equally well into more than one typology as is the case with multi-use games areas.

89. Other examples of diverse provision include recreational uses within cemetery and churchyard sites. A specific example of this is the part of Stoke Minster churchyard to the south of Church Street. The last burial took place here in the early part of the 20th century and since then the site has progressively taken on a more informal recreational role. Its informal recreational use is therefore providing the local community with much needed amenity space, however It is still classed as a closed burial ground in line with relevant legislation.

Hobby interests

90. Some types of green space are well understood and there are clear processes in place for identifying these and having appropriate management in place; however, this does not always extend to hobby interests. To illustrate this and the diversity of hobby related activities, some examples of popular interests that require access to green space might include park-runs, orienteering, pond-dipping, trim-trails, bird watching and cycling.

91. A key factor in providing for hobby activities is the ability for good vehicle parking as some of these hobbies require equipment that is heavy and difficult to manoeuvre. The Council service department should keep an up to date record of sites that can be used for hobby purposes and make this information available via the Council website. In respect of organised events, there should also be a 'responsible person' at the Council for organisers to contact. Where the hobby interest is delivered through an Association or otherwise organised group, the Council should ensure that the organisers hold insurances for that purpose including third party cover.

Urban Food

92. Whereas allotment provision is well understood and provided for there is growing interest in other forms of urban food production (urban agriculture). An underlying theme of these is that they are normally shared activities with potential for social and community development as well as food production. Indeed, the food production may only be a small component of any initiative.

93. Two notable areas of urban food development are 'community orchards' and the use of 'public space for urban planters' as promoted by for example, the "Incredible Edible" Initiative. Most of these urban food 'alternatives' are "ground-up" and community-based, although many local authorities have engaged with them based on their public health and educational benefits. This is an area where the enabling and facilitation role of the Council could be important over the lifetime of the Green Space Strategy.   Support could involve:

• Access to small areas of Council owned greenspace for community groups to develop new urban food initiatives;
• Encouragement of new start up's and support in applying for external grants;
• Support and guidance from the authority on the positioning and use of food growing planters in the 'street scene';
• Training support and small grants.

Horse-riding

94. Horse riding is a popular recreation activity with specific needs. Access to circular routes and off-road open space are notable requirements.   The British Horse society (BHS) provides a range of guidance for users and local authorities. They report that a range of evidence indicates the clear majority (90 percent plus) of horse riders are female and

more than a third (37 percent) of the female riders are above 45 years of age. Horse riding is especially well placed to play a valuable role in initiatives to encourage increased physical activity amongst women of all ages. The BHS produces standards and specifications of structures and surfaces which are recommended as good practice.

Cycling

95. Cycling is increasing as a recreational and commuting activity. Cyclists can conflict with other users of greenspace; hence it is not unreasonable for the authority to seek to regulate cycling in Council owned and operated greenspace. However, regulation should be used with care so that it is not a discouragement to the uptake of cycling which is a beneficial health and well-being activity. Key sites should feature bicycle stands ideally with CCTV security to discourage theft. Designated cycling routes are appropriate in larger greenspaces as well as specific challenging courses for BMX. For the most part cycling should be actively encouraged in the green corridor, rivers and canals typology unless there are notable conflicting reasons; these may be localised. As with other forms of access circular routes are highly valued and when opportunities exist, these should be created.

Community, charity and fundraising events

96. Green space is used extensively for a range of events.   For the most part, the Council will wish to support these activities as generously as it can; however, where there are direct costs to the Council in providing support (such as the presence of staff or access to facilities) it is reasonable for these costs to be recovered from the organisers. The Council may wish to apply a discretionary discounted rate (even up to 100%) which can be used at a site managers' discretion. Park runs have become a major phenomenon in recent years and the media has reported that some local authorities have been struggling with its popularity.   Given that this is a contribution to health and well-being and fits well with the Council's 'stronger together' objectives, the authority should support these and similar initiative which are linked to public health improvements.   It should be noted that community, charity and fund-raising events normally have good participation from the organisers and their volunteer members, hence the impact on Council services may be negligible.

Faith

97. Green space is used by faith groups for activities such as Easter, Christmas, Eid and Diwali. These are a focus for wider celebrations as well as for specific communities. This is an area of use that the Council will wish to support and it is recommended that it is approached in the same way as that for community, charity and fundraising events.

Biodiversity

98. There is a need to create and maintain biodiverse areas. Former industrial or housing areas that have been vacate for a long time may have developed valuable natural

vegetation and should be protected from redevelopment whenever possible, even though they may be registered as brownfield land.

99. Biodiverse areas provide food for wildlife and support foraging. There is currently great interest in foraging to the extent that it has become a problem is some areas (e.g. Bristol). However, foraging for wild food and craft materials is to be applauded, hence the need for areas where people can gather without undue constraint.

100.   Setting aside areas of amenity green space for wildflower meadow management is increasingly popular and can create a positive image for the City and potentially save maintenance costs through reduced cutting although the extent of savings can be exaggerated.

Youth Provision

101.   Youth provision is one of the most challenging in planning as it is known to cause conflicts with other users notably through littering, graffiti and bad-language. However, problems are often over-inflated and the positive benefit to young people in terms of outdoor activity, developing social skills and avoiding criminal activity is of great significance. Ideally street workers/volunteers should support activities on the ground. The types of provision that cater for youth include: (i) Skateboarding, (ii) BMX, (iii) Table Tennis, (iv) Hang-out shelters and (v) Basketball hoops.

102.   Linked to youth provision is the role of green space in providing safe routes to school. This raises several management issues such as safe access points to green corridors, joining up existing provision (which will also benefit Green Infrastructure connectivity) visibility and safety. Since green space is already extensively used this should be considered within the framework of transport planning as well as green space planning and there is benefit in mapping existing routes across green spaces that are used extensively as school routes. This could be added to a green infrastructure study.

D1: Maintain a wide diversity of green space types, plan and provide for hobby and minority interests. In some cases, this can be delivered on a regional basis with adjacent local authorities.

D2: When considering the restructuring, repurposing or alternative use of a site, it is necessary not only to consider the high scale typology and the Standard applying to that typology, but also the impact on the sub-categories as identified in figure 12.

D3: Support urban food initiatives beyond the conventional allotment garden (noting that allotment gardening remains very important) as a contribution to the health and well-being of the community. In particular, this can involve changes to the urban 'street scene'.

D4: Ensure that the Council maintains its Public Rights of Way network to the best condition possible (surfaces, signage etc.) within the limits of resources available to the authority. Maintain an up to date definitive map.

D5: Ensure that the requirements of horse riding in the City is not overlooked and that, where appropriate, off road provision is made. Use BHS standards to guide good practice. With respect to cycling provide bicycle lock-up's and stands at key sites. Use regulations sparingly where cycling is inappropriate but otherwise encourage this form of transport notably on Green corridors and along rivers and canal banks.

D6: With respect to biodiversity, foster visual impact (e.g. wild flowers) and meet the demand for foraging. Place a high-value on established brownfield land as nature areas. With respect to youth ensure that the needs of teenage youth are met in greenspace and tie these in with community development programmes and social services. Explore the use of volunteer workers to support positive interventions (noting the need for suitable protection for potentially vulnerable age-groups).

D7: Support and encourage the use of greenspace for community, charity and fundraising events but also seek to recover costs where there is a notable impact on Council services. Offer discretionary discounts where and if appropriate.

D8: Map green routes to school, and ensure these are considered with transport planning as well as green space planning.

Volunteer Strategy

103.   Volunteers are already involved in green space within the City. They have a key role to play which extends beyond the obvious roles which lie in site care, events and general oversight. Volunteering also builds a 'sense of ownership', builds skills, enables a knowledge exchange between the young and the old (intergenerational), reduces isolation of individuals and provides health and well-being benefits. In other words, greenspace not only needs volunteers, but volunteers also need greenspaces. The most common form of volunteering is through groups such as 'friends of parks' etc. but there are various opportunities to extend this into conservation volunteering, woodland management, tree-wardens (see Tree Council for more information) and organising and supporting a larger number of events.

104.   The City Council already has staff active in support of such activities which is an important service and which reflects a major theme of this strategy that the Council expands its enabling and facilitation role in respect of green space management. Whilst additional revenue costs may be involved, the positive gearing ratio is very considerable, both in terms of the financial offsets made and the opportunities created. Creativity is needed in delivering support to volunteers for instance; (i) in recruiting a wider range of participants especially from non-typical social milieu; (ii) finding new ways for volunteers to be involved; (iii) providing training support so that volunteers are competent in a wider range of tasks; (iv) providing insurance cover for volunteer activities; (v) accessing college students and employers for volunteer participation. Whilst these activities may already be in place, as there are considerable opportunities for further development.

V1: Volunteer involvement is critical to the successful management and development of the City's green space assets over the lifetime of the Green Space Strategy. Whilst the

Council is already successfully involved it is an area for further investment with potentially large returns. Targets should be set for the number of volunteers involved and expanded upon annually. The approach to volunteering should not be undertaken in isolation from the offer/support available through other organisations, of which TCV, Groundwork, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust are amongst those who might assist in this regard. The approach to volunteering should also involve developing skills, supporting inter-generational activities, reducing social exclusion and supporting health and wellbeing. In respect of these linking with NHS service providers, GPs, offender rehabilitation and community & neighbourhood services are desirable attributes.

Communications Strategy

105.   There are a wide-range of audiences who need to be communicated with in respect of greenspace. This can be segmented as shown below.

Internal audiences
- Members including ward councillors;
- Directors and senior managers;
- Other service departments (with a view to identifying synergies);
- Forward planning and development management;
- Purchasers of direct management services;
- Delivery staff at all levels of service.

External audiences
- Wider community;
- Residents groups;
- Friends of and other organized volunteers;
- Charites and other users of greenspace for events;
- Businesses that offer services to the Council;
- Adjacent authorities.

106.   Communication is a two-way process. The Council as a service provider needs to be able to communicate cost-effectively but also should be a listening authority and be seen to action items when necessary. Simply taking an action is however not enough as the Council must also communicate that an action has been taken.

107.   The use of social media and electronic services is replacing the use of print media. However, print media is not entirely redundant. The Council should be adept at communicating with its various audiences using both print and electronic media. Given the scale of development of electronic communications, this is an area which is constantly changing and will need to be regularly updated.

108.   Interpretative signage is important and site audits have shown that there is room for improvement. Signs need to be cleaned and/or replaced regularly and should contain information on 'how and why a given green space' site is being managed. This latter point can lead to better understanding amongst users and avoid unnecessary time being expended on answering queries.

C1: Maintain good communication internally and externally using the audience segmentation as a guide. In doing this use should be made of both print and electronic media. Given the rapid development of electronic media, this needs to be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains up to date and effective.

C2: Interpretative signage is important and should be maintained in good condition and replaced or repaired as necessary. Badly damaged and highly defaced signage should be removed as it is generally worse than no signage at all since it creates a sense that a site is unkempt. For the most part, interpretative signage should be informative on a site but also explain 'why and how' a site is managed to avoid unnecessary queries being made to Council officers. There are lower cost options for signage which allows for regular replacement (e.g. paste on posters) obviating the need for high expense. This latter approach is valuable in areas which suffer from a high degree of anti-social behaviour.

Development Strategy

109.   There is a need to develop appropriate new Local Plan policies to be used where new development is proposed. Upon adoption of the new Local Plan, the new policies will replace any legacy policies. In devising the new policies, attention must be given to the pros, cons and overall effectiveness of the legacy policies, which need to be adapted, updated, redrafted and improved as necessary into the new policies to reflect the aims and objectives of current national planning policy guidance. There are several current drivers intended to achieve sustainable development, notably the current national planning policy focus upon housing led regeneration, which will lead to new residential development on some green spaces. It will also lead to the creation of new green infrastructure e.g. for SuDS, as well as possibly the better management of existing green space.

110.   Council maintenance and capital budgets are generally declining, such that new ways must be found to maintain new green spaces. This should be recognised and reflected in the drafting of new planning policies and associated planning agreements. Moreover, there is a need to facilitate delivery of new greenspaces to meet the green spaces standards set out in this Strategy, notably (but not exclusively) in respect of playgrounds, parks & gardens.

111.   The Council's Development Management function should ensure that new green space provision should be integral to a development and not provided by developers as an afterthought or on left over pieces of land. Credence must also be given to the potential connectivity between new green spaces, existing green spaces and the wider green infrastructure network.

112.   In circumstances where there are clear surpluses in green space provision, in terms of quantity relative to location and/or typology, it is appropriate to consider reallocation of

land for the provision of new development, in whole or in part and subject to development viability. This is however subject to the application of Local Plan policies for the protection of the natural and historic environment, the maintenance of coherent and connected green infrastructure, and ecosystems services provision. This also links in the NPPF to green infrastructure and the Council should have robust evidence based Green Infrastructure policies in its new Local Plan. This will help the City Council to deliver its required housing numbers to meet its evidence based targets whilst taking account of the impact on ecosystem services. Land may of course be given over to non-residential uses when circumstances indicate or dictate there is a proven market need or demand. A freestanding appendix called 'Using the Green Space Strategy in Development Management and Planning as a Compliance Tool' accompanies the strategy interim update.

113.   There are two advisory provisos to the reallocation of green space land:

- Green spaces with development potential will have to be assessed, screened and analysed for development constraints that have potential to prevent or seriously compromise new development, unless suitable mitigation or required infrastructure proves possible; and crucially;

- That a suitable public relations strategy is developed and articulated which explains the need and logic of the approach, because removal of or development on greenspaces can be highly sensitive.

Applying the Standards

114.   The green space standards are central to the future planning and provision of facilities linked to development. The standards have been used to identify:

- areas of quantitative deficiency or surplus;
- deficiencies in accessibility;
- quality deficiencies.

115.   The quantity, quality and access standards should be used to guide the level of developer contributions to ensure that adequate provision is made for green spaces because of development. For providing playgrounds the guidelines on type from 'Fields in Trust' should be used (see table 14). Since opportunities to provide additional greenspace are limited, it will be necessary in some cases to substitute the provision of new greenspace with a financial contribution. Financial contributions should be used to invest in existing greenspaces to make them more useable, to increase the range of offerings within each open space, and to improve their capacity to support ecosystem services as identified in a green infrastructure strategy.

Scale of Development	Local Area for Play (LAP)	Locally equipped Area for Play (LEAP)	Neighbourhood Area for Play (NEAP)	Multi-use games area (MUGA)
5 - 10 dwellings	√			
10 – 200 dwellings	√	√		Contribution
201 – 500 dwellings	√	√	Contribution	√
501+ dwellings	√	√	√	√

Table 8: Fields in Trust guidelines for the provision of areas of play should be used.

116.   To secure financial contributions, the Council could use all or any and in combination the complementary planning mechanisms available at the time.

117.   The Council's approach, when deciding whether all or some of the contribution are secured via planning obligations, should be to prioritise what can be secured in terms of providing new green infrastructure, fostering greenspace connectivity, developing green space which are manageable and significant, as well as by better managing existing green spaces. This might be resolved by defining a range of 'strategic projects' drawing from a green infrastructure strategy or areas where green space is 'below standard'. Alternatively, this might be considered on a type-by-type basis. Given that the green space standards show that at a city-wide scale (noting that local deficiencies may exist in parts of the City) it is possible to identify a hierarchy:

a)   New green space provision where there are city-wide or localised deficiencies as identified by application of the greenspace standards and/or enhancement of existing facilities to deal with increased footfall and usage by new residents)
b)   Green infrastructure connectivity improvements (includes for example creating tree lined avenues and green corridors)
c)   Others.
d)   Better management of existing green space.

118.   Applying the standards also requires determining the type of development to which the standards apply. The selection of types of development the standards should apply to/ will need to be informed by the scale, location and range of new developments anticipated for the new Local Plan period. For example, if the Council anticipates significant large commercial/business developments, it would be desirable to ensure such developments contribute to the City's overall green infrastructure by (i) featuring an adequate tree canopy cover in the parking area, while (ii) contributing to other green infrastructure provision which might be used by their customers or employees (e.g. amenity recreation and green corridors so that employees and customers can access the development on foot or by bicycle).

119.   It is not felt necessary to recommend a 'design guide for new green space provided by development' as there is ample third-party guidance available to the Council. However, the following general guidelines are recommended should the Council proceed with the production of an SPD:

- New provision should as far possible be consistent with good ecological as well as recreational approaches.   For the latter, the guidelines produced by 'Fields in Trust' should be used.
- The Strategy has shown that there is a city-wide deficiency in the provision of parks & gardens and playgrounds.   The design of these should focus on minimising maintenance costs in the longer term.   Expensive bespoke play equipment should be avoided in favour of robust and readily replaceable equipment. In respect of parks and gardens; pocket parks (pocket ecoparks) should be favoured and these can be designed to be as nature based as possible and avoid expensive to maintain hardstanding or overly intricate design.
- Whilst roadside green space should be specifically excluded from developers' green spaces provision, the Council can consider creative sustainable urban drainage schemes to be included but only if they realise both ecological and recreational potential including Biodiversity net-gain (BNG).

120.   With management budgets under pressure, local authorities must address the prospect of maintaining green space to agreed standards differently. New green spaces will no longer be able to be realistically maintained exclusively by the public purse, because budgets will not likely be sufficient to even maintain existing green space resources in future. Since there is a drive towards housing based regeneration to promote economic recovery and to meet housing need; one option is to introduce private maintenance agreements for new green space provided as part of new residential development schemes. This is effectively a supplementary annual charge payable by the owners/occupiers of new residential estates and should be introduced 'in perpetuity' to ensure beneficial long term management. These should also be subject to transfer to new owners under deeds of title.

121.   Section 106 agreements secured via developers are the logical mechanism to secure and implement private maintenance agreements, backed up by appropriate legal provision in sales or letting documentation. Monies must come from private owners/occupiers and agreements must be transferrable upon sale or transfer of a property. However, additional information should be provided to prospective and actual purchasers to make it clear that this requirement is obligatory and necessary and will require a dedicated supplementary monthly, annual or term contribution to be paid. If the Council decides to adopt schemes for maintenance, then cash contributions should be the minimum sought, but should be sufficient to cover a period of at least 20 years.   It should be noted that S106 and private maintenance arrangements paid for by private

owners of property (see paragraph 117) are seperate approaches and could be used together.

122.   It will be important to ensure that robust means are implemented to collect contributions (e.g. through direct debit) and agreement on who or what types of organisation will be responsible for undertaking the works. Ideally, contributions should be coordinated by a charitable trust or dedicated residents' association with a legal charter. Maintenance needs to be delivered to a set standard which must be produced and agreed prior to formal completion of new green space; works should be tendered to suitably qualified organisations or contractors; and regular independent inspections undertaken to ensure standards are being maintained, again paid for as part of the global agreement. This can include play area inspections, which require frequent visits. Independent organisations undertaking and monitoring maintenance must provide evidence of their regime to the organisation responsible for organising maintenance.

123.   It should be noted that private maintenance agreements are not without criticism as residents can object to the concept of why they are paying a fee for green space management that non-residents can enjoy. Accordingly, agreements drawn up should seek to provide appropriate information, explanation and qualification.

124.   An SPD is recommended as the optimum way to address the implementation of private maintenance agreements. This may, for example, set out the method for delivery or provision of new green space; inspection of them, as well as the standard to which they will be maintained. It is important to note that delivery and maintenance/inspection are likely to be two separate but related issues.

125.   A cost model for contributions can be used by the Council to seek developer contributions appropriate to the needs of the Green Space Strategy. A cost model should take account for inflation using the Bank of England RPI rates.

T1: In respect of on-site provision within new developments, the following recommendations are made as good practice measures for the City of Stoke on Trent:

For residential; 0.012 hectares per dwelling of greenspace shall be provided for the total number of dwellings, irrespective of type or tenure; notwithstanding

That such greenspace will be provided in areas of not less than 0.1 hectares regardless of development size;

- **Roadside landscaping will not be counted as greenspace towards this requirement;**
- **In locating greenspaces within new developments, due consideration should be given to the incorporation of features of ecological interest,**

linkages with existing footpaths and greenspace networks and the need to avoid the prospect of nuisance or amenity issues affecting neighbouring residential properties;

- Where appropriate, a satisfactory scheme for the provision of greenspace in an alternative location will be acceptable.

T2: A cost model for off-site contributions will need to be agreed by the Council. The resulting cost schedule should be indexed to inflation and account for both capital and maintenance costs over a defined period. For on-site provision, cash contributions towards maintenance should be the minimum sought, unless development viability allows for more. Amongst other authorities investigated through desk study, the sums required to cover maintenance costs range from 10 to 20 years. Given the financial situation that local authorities face, there is a strong argument in favour of seeking private maintenance contributions from owners/occupiers which are transferrable upon sale. It will be important to ensure that robust means are needed to collect contributions (through direct debit) and agreement on who is responsible for undertaking the works.

T3: For offsite contributions, an equivalent figure be sought to that in strategy T2 above.

T4: An SPD is recommended as the optimum way to address the implementation of private maintenance agreements. This may, for example, set out the method for delivery or provision of new green space, as well as the way that it will be maintained. It is important to note that delivery and maintenance are likely to be two separate but related issues.

Investment Strategy

126.   It is anticipated that resources for green space investment will remain limited until at 2025/6 and possibly beyond. In a resource limited environment, the potential for investment is highly limited but not impossible. Realistic instances of investment opportunities include:

- Recycling of funds released from rationalisation;
- Funds generated through new development;
- Local authority 'invest-to-save' funds;
- Grants from external organisation including National Lottery funders;
- One-off grants from governmental sources;
- Sponsorship from business;
- Successful commercialisation of key green space assets.

127.   The investment strategy is a, listing-in-priority-order, of how funds should be deployed. The proposal to increase the enabling and facilitation role of the service department is not included in the list as it is a revenue cost. It is assumed that existing management funds are sufficient to retain the standard of current green spaces above the 80% quality threshold, even though this is undoubtedly a challenge.

V1: Sites in the 60 – 69% range are the top priority for new investment – for the most part the quality of these sites can be raised at moderate cost.

V2: Provision of new sites by typology where provision is below the standard of quantity or access.

V3: Greenspace that provides (or could provide) enhanced green infrastructure connectivity and enhanced ecosystem services including protection of neighbourhood communities from climate change impacts.

V4: Sites where a capital investment could significantly reduce ongoing revenue running costs and/or increase income earned from a site (for example through investment in commercial ventures).

V5: Sites where a funding opportunity presents itself (although this does not appear at the top of the list they should almost invariably be taken in a resource limited environment).

V6: Sites new/or existing which attract or retain significant new economic investment in the City, for example through attracting more tourists to stimulate the visitor economy.

V7: Refreshment of facilities that are nearing their end of life e.g. play equipment.

V8: Improvements to path networks, parking, on-site interpretation, shelter, provision for youth.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Performance indicators

128.   The Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy 2007 recommended 35 key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor progress.   It remains good practice for local authorities to adopt KPI's.   Nevertheless, in a highly resource limited environment, it is appropriate to have KPIs that reflect progress without being unduly onerous in respect of staff time.   Six KPI's were proposed for the City of Stoke-on-Trent Green Space Strategy 2018 and these remain valid in 2021.

a)   Number of green spaces with 'green flag' or 'green pennants';
b)   The amount (in £) of externally secured resources (*volunteer time should be included too and this can be applied at rates used by the Heritage Fund as a benchmark figure*);
c)   The overall site audit scoring having not declined at the next green space audit;
d)   The percentage of users satisfied with site conditions;
e)   Given the challenges ahead it is recommended that the Council contract the services of a green space enabler to conduct an annual development visit to the service department to discuss progress and recommend changes and adaptations to circumstances
f)   That the Action Plan is used as working document and updated annually.

Summary of key points and other recommendations

129.   The following key points are not in a priority order.

a.   The Council should enhance its role as an 'enabler and facilitator' in respect of the management of green space.
b.   There is a close fit between the objectives of the Green Space Strategy and the Council's other social, health and economic policies.   This close alignment of these should be advocated at all levels of the Council.
c.   The Council should retain a wide diversity of provision to meet community needs including those of minority groups. Whilst the Standards are important the subcategories need to be considered in major decisions.
d.   The Council is only one provider of green space. The Green Space Strategy is intended to assist the decisions made by all providers.   The Council is uniquely well-placed to coordinate efforts.
e.   Green space that is of a poor standard and with little chance of quality improvement within the life of the Strategy should be reconfigured or repurposed for an alternative use unless doing so has a negative impact on distribution or the quantity and access standards.
f.   The Council should avoid irreversible decisions that could prejudice the needs of the next generation.   Green space land may be leased or licensed to other users but the Council should retain ownership to retain its position as organisation of last resort.
g.   There is a remarkable 'story line' in the City's green space which describes how the City formed from the Pottery Towns. 'Telling the story of the City through its green space' could be a major theme for the City. The City's green corridors are its signature landscape.
h.   In terms of health and wellbeing and tackling many social problems an investment in green space spending is significantly cheaper than most alternatives and is longer lasting. There is rationale in the Council increasing its per capita spend in green space.
i.   The Strategy places green space quality over green space quantity.   However, this does not diminish the standards for quantity and access set out in this strategy.
j.   There is a need to have evidence based Green Infrastructure polcies dovetailed with the Green Space Strategy to ensure that the requirements of planning practice guidance are met and that the green space of the City provides for the needs of all species and optimises the ecosystem services that ensure that the City optimises its resilience to global change.
k.   There is a need to enhance the site audit with a landscape assessment and mapping of green space routes used to and from schools.
l.   The Council should employ the services of an external green space enabler to conduct an annual development visit to the service department to discuss progress and recommend changes and adaptations to circumstances.
m.   A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on 'Greenspace and Development' evolving out of this Green Space Strategy report would be valuable in framing the new Local Plan.

n. The Council should commercialise as much as is practical its green spaces with the proviso that this is not taken to an extent which prejudices access for the least able (financially) or ruins the asset itself.

o. The Council should adopt a development contribution model and apply these to Development Management decisions based on the recommendations set out in the Green Space Strategy.

p. The Council should be vigorous in seeking external funds for capital investment.

Acronyms and other terms used in this document

Acronyms and terms	Defintions
Action Plan	A freestanding appendix to the Green Space Strategy.
Biodiverse/biodiversity:	The variety of natural life.
BMX:	Bicycle motocross.
Brownfield:	Previously developed land.
CIL:	Community Infrastructure Levy.
CIPFA:	The Chartered Institute for Public Finance & Accountancy.
Core Strategy:	Compulsory local development document.
FiT:	Fields in Trust.
Framework Plans:	Three technical appendices to the Strategy review that apply the Standards at a local level.
GIS:	Geographical Information Systems (Mapping Tool)
Great Outdoors Survey:	Public consultation undertaken in 2017.
Green Flag/Green Pennant:	Nationally recognised quality awards.
Green Infrastructure	Green infrastructure is a network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which can deliver a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Green infrastructure is not simply an alternative description for conventional open space. As a network it includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, but also street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include streams, canals and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls.
Ha or HA:	Hectare.
HLF:	Heritage Lottery Fund
KPI's:	Key Performance Indicators
LAPs:	Local Areas for Play
LEAPs:	Locally Equipped Areas for Play
NEAPs:	Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play
Local Plan	Statutory document which sets out a vision and a framework for the future development of the area.
MUGA:	Multi Use Games Area
NHS:	National Health Service
NPPF:	National Planning Policy Framework
NN:	City and Local Authority Nearest Neighbour Comparator Exercise
NSALG:	National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners
PPG:	Planning Practice Guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Replaces planning policy guidance notably PPG 17
PRoW	Public right of way
S106:	Planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

Acronyms and terms	Defintions
SPD:	Supplementary Planning Document
TCV	Trust for Conservation Volunteers

MD2 Consulting Ltd
www.md2.org.uk