

Appendix 1a

Darlington Open Space Strategy 2007 - 2017

February 2007

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accessibility

The ability of people to move round an area and to reach places and facilities, including elderly and disabled people, those with young children and those encumbered with luggage or shopping.

Best Value

Best Value arrangements exist to secure continuous improvement in the performance of functions by public service organisations. Continuous improvement seeks to balance quality and cost considerations, and is achieved with regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, the equal opportunities arrangements, and sustainable development.

Biodiversity

The number and variety of organisms found within a specified geographic region.

Cabinet Member

Elected member with specific portfolio responsibilities for particular Council services.

Capital and Revenue Funding

Specific types of funding generally related to expenditure on ‘one-off’ projects (capital) or maintenance (revenue).

Community Strategy

A strategy prepared by local authorities to help deliver local community aspirations, under the Local Government Act 2000.

Conservation

Wildlife habitat, open space, historic, or recreational resources. For example, land may have a high conservation value if it contains habitat for endangered species or if it has open space in a highly developed area.

Core Strategy

A Development Plan Document setting out the spatial vision and strategic objectives of the planning framework for an area, having regard to the Community Strategy.

Demands/Needs Assessment

Analysis of current and predicted demand.

Design Guide

A document providing guidance on how development can be carried out in accordance with the design policies of a local authority or other organisations often with a view to retaining local distinctiveness.

Design Guidelines

An expression of one of the basic design ideas at the heart of an urban design framework, design guide, development brief or a development.

Friends Groups

Local community group with interest in local park or open space.

Landscape

The character and appearance of land, including its space, form, ecology, natural features, colours and elements and the way these components combine. Landscape character can be expressed through landscape appraisal, and maps or plans. In towns ‘townscape’ describes the same concept.

Local Area Agreements

Agreements between the Council at the Constituency level and other service providers setting out how local services are to be provided.

Local Development Framework

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is a non-statutory term used to describe a folder of documents, which includes all the local planning authority's local development documents. This is replacing the existing Local Development Plan.

Local Distinctiveness

The positive features of a place and its communities which contribute to its special character and sense of place.

Planning Policy Guidance

Documents embodying government guidance on general and specific aspects of planning policy to be taken into account in formulating development plan policies and in making planning decisions.

Public Rights of Way

Those paths and tracks recorded on the Definitive Map and having a right of access on foot (footpath), horse back, cycling and walking (bridleways) and byways (or BOAT's) (access for all).

Section 106 Agreements

Section 106 Agreements enable the Local Authority to secure provision or improvement of existing infrastructure necessary to meet the needs of the occupiers or users of new development.

Strategic Open Space/Sports Facility

An open space or sports facility that is of major importance and has the ability to be used by the whole of Darlington.

Supplementary Planning Document

Planning document which provides additional guidance in support of a Development Plan Document.

Surveillance CCTV

The discouragement to wrong-doing by the presence of passers-by or the ability of people to be seen from surrounding windows.

Sustainable Development

Defined by the Brundtland Commission (1987) as 'Development which meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to achieve their own needs and aspirations'. The UK's strategy for sustainable development "A better quality of life" was published in May 1999 and highlights the need for environmental improvement, social justice and economic success to go hand-in-hand.

Urban Design

The art of making places. Urban design involves the design of buildings, groups of buildings, spaces and landscapes, in villages, towns and cities, and the establishment of frameworks and processes which facilitate successful development.

Foreword

The open spaces within our Borough are an important element of what makes Darlington an attractive place to live, work and visit. They are places for everyone to enjoy and visit, encouraging healthy lifestyles and providing places to meet and relax.

Open spaces will only fulfil these purposes and be valued by the local community if they are good quality and fit for purpose. Over the last few years, in response to local community wishes, we have made considerable progress in improving the quality of open spaces, with important open spaces like South Park and North Lodge Park restored to their former glory and smaller sites enhanced with play equipment and other facilities. Several new local nature reserves and community woodlands have also been designated, helping to bring nature back into town, whilst a new park, West Park, has been created for the growing number of households in that area to enjoy.

This Open Space Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan present our ideas about what the future priorities for investment in open spaces should be. They highlight North Park and the Denes for significant investment but also draw attention to the investment needed to improve the quality of all our open spaces and the need to reconsider whether open space is an appropriate use where sites are of little value or may even be the source of problems for local communities.

Councillor John Williams
Leader of the Council

Finding Out More

If you have access to the Internet, you can download or view a copy of this document, its appendices and all the background documents at www.darlington.gov.uk/planning, by following the links to the Open Space Strategy.

اگر آپ کو یہ کتابچہ انگریزی کے علاوہ کسی دوسری زبان میں
درکار ہو تو برائے مہربانی ٹیلیفون نمبر
پر فون کر کے حوالہ نمبر بتائیں۔

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੋਂ
ਬਿਨਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ,
ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਨੰਬਰ
ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਰੈਫਰੈਂਸ (ਹਵਾਲਾ) ਨੰਬਰ ਦੱਸੋ।

यदि आप यह प्रकाशन अंग्रेज़ी के अलावा अन्य भाषा
में चाहते हैं तो कृपया संदर्भ नम्बर (रेफरन्स नम्बर)
बताकर निम्नलिखित पर संपर्क करें।

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यदि आपनार ईशरेज़ी छाड़ा अन्य कौन भाषाय এই
প্রকাশনাটির দরকার থাকে, তাহলে
নম্বরে ফোন করান এবং সূত্র নম্বর উল্লেখ করান।

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The Open Space Strategy Vision

To provide, protect and enhance a variety of high quality, accessible open and green spaces throughout the Borough, linking with the cultural and natural heritage of the area that are:

- Well designed and maintained
- Sustainable
- Safe
- Promote health, well being and enjoyment,

improving the quality of life for residents and visitors to the Borough

INTRODUCTION

Darlington's Open Spaces

1. Parks and other open spaces are a big part of what makes Darlington an attractive place to live and work. There are about 900 hectares of open space within or on the edge of the main urban area alone, amounting to almost 10 hectares (ha) per 1000 people.
2. Traditional parks and hard landscaped areas, such as the recently restored Grade II South Park and the Market Place are at the heart of urban open space provision. These formal spaces are complemented by an informal network of open spaces, wild spaces and nature reserves that follow natural features, such as the River Skerne and Cocker Beck valleys, together with neighbourhood open spaces meeting specific needs, such as equipped children's play and allotments. School playing fields make a significant contribution to the overall amount of urban open space, whilst golf courses, sports clubs and community woodlands do so at the urban fringe.
3. Outside the main urban area, many rural settlements have traditional village greens at their heart. The larger villages of Middleton St. George, Hurworth and Heighington also have allotments, children's play areas and playing fields and access to natural and semi-natural open space by way of dedicated sites and the rights of way network.
4. Some key facts about Darlington's open spaces that can be drawn from the audit findings¹ are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Key Open Space Audit Findings

QUANTITY AND LEVEL OF PROVISION	
Total Area of Open Space (urban area and 3 largest villages)	923 hectares
Total Area of Open Space within and on the fringe of the main urban area	859 hectares
Total number of open spaces over 0.1ha	310
Urban Open Space/1000 urban population	10 hectares
Open Space/ 1000 population	9.8 hectares
Open Space/ 1000 population in Pierremont ward (the lowest level)	0.91 hectares
QUALITY AND VALUE	
Number of high value sites	154 (72%)*
Number of low value sites	23 (11%)*
Sites of below average (1 or 2 star) quality	75 (35%)*
Sites of above average (4 or 5 star) quality	41 (19%)*
ACCESSIBILITY	
Urban population within 300m walk of an area of informal open space	99 %
Accessible Open Space/1000 population	9.4 hectares
Accessible open space /1000 people in Park West ward (the highest level)	30.33 hectares
Accessible Open Space/1000 population in Northgate ward (the lowest level)	0.77 hectares
SPECIFIC TYPES OF OPEN SPACE PROVISION	
Allotment sites	27
Equipped Children's Play Areas within the urban area.	26
Designated Local Nature Reserves	7
Nationally recognised parks and gardens of landscape or historic interest.	3

* percentage of all surveyed sites

Why Are Open Spaces Important?

5. Good quality parks and open spaces make an important contribution to local quality of life and well being. They provide places to meet, exercise and play and places to learn about nature or just enjoy a pleasant environment. They are venues for affordable

¹ Audit limited to the main urban area and the villages of Middleton St. George, Hurworth and Heighington and their fringes.

recreation and provide opportunities for young people to undertake creative play and ‘hang out’, away from more sensitive living space. Ideally, green areas wherever possible should contain spaces aimed at serving a number of functions (the principle of multifunctionality) rather than designated in a single dimensional way providing for one aspect of the strategy. A spacious green environment can also boost the image of an area, helping to attract new investors, visitors and residents alike, whilst key sites are often the focus of civic pride and help to define a place.

What is the Council’s Role?

6. The Council has recognised the importance of open spaces and in recent years, demonstrating its commitment to open spaces through direct financial investment and support for externally funded schemes such as the restoration of South Park, North Lodge Park and Skerne Valley and the creation of the first new park in Darlington in over 100 years at West Park. The Council’s support has led to the designation of 7 local nature reserves covering 60 hectares, with a further 3 proposed over the next 2 years, the management of 128 ha of urban fringe land as community woodland, 7 new sports pitches at Haughton Education Village and the provision of 7 multi-use games areas for community sport and recreation.
7. Through this strategy and associated action plans, the Council’s commitment to open spaces will continue. Whilst the focus of the strategy is on driving up the quality of existing open spaces, planning for a number of major new open spaces is already well advanced:
 - a. a new park is to be provided as part of Central Park development;
 - b. new playing pitches are to be provided at West Park for Mowden Rugby Club;
 - c. a new community woodland is to be provided in association with housing development at Merrybent;
 - d. three new Local Nature Reserves in the next 1-2 years.
8. At the same time, the Council has to have regard to its ability to continue to fund the management and maintenance of open spaces to the quality that local people expect. Whilst in many instances, it can attract significant funding from external sources to support open space, much of this requires match funding from the Council itself. There may, therefore, be occasions when the disposal of surplus open space is appropriate, to support the maintenance to an acceptable standard of the remainder of the open space resource.

Why Prepare a Strategy Now?

9. This strategy will become the key document guiding the Council’s protection and enhancement of parks and open spaces. Its preparation also introduces new, non-statutory, planning policies on open spaces, pending replacement of out-dated ones in the adopted Borough of Darlington Local Plan in the new Local Development Framework.
10. By adopting this strategy, the Council will have:
 - a. clear and transparent guidance and priorities for improving its parks and open spaces, developed with the involvement of the local community;
 - b. evidence of local leadership on and commitment to parks and open spaces, to underpin bids for external funding for their improvement;
 - c. clear links to and co-ordination with the Community Strategy, Corporate Plans and the emerging Local Development Framework;
 - d. evidence and policies to underpin the negotiation of ‘planning gain’ for open space provision in association with new development;
 - e. the basis for the development of investment-backed annual action plans.

11. The strategy has been prepared now, to guide the allocation of resources for open space provision and enhancement. The Council has been awarded significant sums of money by the Government to spend on physical works to parks, open spaces and play areas, through the ‘Greener, Safer, Cleaner Communities’ funding stream, and the Local Area Agreement. There are also resources available to build more community engagement into open space projects and the opportunity for an effective programme to be established in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, including Groundwork, who have recently expanded their West Durham operation into Darlington.

What Does the Strategy Contain?

12. This strategy highlights a range of issues affecting open spaces in Darlington Borough, addressing open spaces in general and setting out approaches for the provision and management of a range of specific types of open spaces, such that provision is balanced across the Borough and tailored to meet community aspirations. It sets out a range of policies and actions that will help to secure better local open space provision and includes targets to help us measure our success in achieving the strategy’s aims.
13. The strategy has been developed from an audit of open spaces of 0.1 ha or more, within or on the fringe of the main urban area and the three largest villages of Middleton St. George, Hurworth/Hurworth Place and Heighington. These sites may be in public or private ownership, with public access varying from unlimited access (e.g. informal recreation sites) to no public access or unauthorised access (e.g. landscaping strips alongside the East Coast main railway line). Table 2 sets out the definitions of the types of open spaces included in this strategy.

Table 2: Open Space Type Definitions

Open Space Type	Definition and purpose
Park or garden	Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events. Offer a range of informal and formal recreation attractions, usually of higher than average quality
Informal recreation	Spaces for informal activities close to home or work. Often not formally laid out. May also contribute to the character and appearance of an area.
Natural and semi-natural green spaces	Includes urban woodland. Support wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education awareness.
Provision for children and young people	Areas designed for play and social interaction involving children and young people. Includes youth provision (such as kick about areas, skateboarding and fishing) and equipped children’s playgrounds.
Outdoor sports facilities	Includes playing pitches and provision for athletics, bowls, countryside and water sports. Includes many school sites. Excludes hard surfaced ball courts and Multi-use Games Areas
Green corridors	Spaces for walking, cycling or horse-riding, whether for leisure or travel, and opportunities for wildlife migration.
Landscape amenity space.	Open spaces for the enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas. Includes landscaping strips to screen development.
Allotments	Opportunities for people who wish to grow their own produce to do so.
Cemeteries, etc.	Includes churchyards and other burial grounds. Areas for quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, but also often with high biodiversity value.

Civic Spaces	Hard surfaced pedestrian areas that provide a setting for community buildings, public demonstrations and community events.
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What Does the Strategy Not Contain?

14. As the strategy is about open spaces, it does not encompass indoor sport and recreation facilities. The Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 also requires a needs assessment to be carried out for these elements. Without this work, it will be difficult to justify seeking developer contributions towards the provision of new or improved sport and recreation facilities, or to safeguard from development sites that may be required to meet indoor sport and recreation needs. This work will be carried out separately, as part of wider work to review cultural provision generally.

What Information and Considerations Underpin the Strategy?

15. This strategy is underpinned by the following information and considerations:
 - a. *open spaces audit*: an audit of over 300 open space sites was carried out during 2004 and 2005. Using both desk-based resources and site visits, a database has been established, providing information on things like site size, primary and other purposes, quality and value, public access and other relevant site-specific information, e.g. conservation area or local nature reserve designations. A full list of the information collected is listed in Appendix 1 and more detail about the findings is in Section 2 below.
 - b. *public consultations*: public attitudes and opinions about open spaces have been collected from a variety of sources. Views expressed about open spaces during community engagement on other documents (e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy) have been considered alongside the results of a 1000 sample telephone survey of Borough households and calls made to the Environmental Services Customer Helpline. A specific event was held to engage young people in late 2003 and open space issues were debated by Darlington Assembly in summer 2005. A draft of this document was published in late 2006 as part of the continued community engagement, comments invited on it and a concurrent programme of events and publicity arranged to stimulate debate. More details on the community engagement that has been carried out before publication of the draft is given in Appendix 2 and some key messages from people are given in Section 2 below. A separate document sets out the representations made on the draft document, the main issues raised and how they have been addressed in the finalised strategy.
 - c. *demographic information*: the main sources of information used were published ONS data such as from the Census 2001, experimental ward population estimates 2002 and the Index of Deprivation. This was supplemented by age structure projections and additional data on the priority wards provided by the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit. A separate document 'Open Space Strategy: Demographic Profile' sets out all this data and the main findings are set out in Section 2 below.
 - d. *planning policy*: adopted Borough of Darlington Local Plan policies R4 and R6 set out the amount of open space that the Council seeks in the main urban area and villages, and the amount that should be provided in association with new residential development. In addition, Policy E3 identifies land in the urban area that is to be protected from development except where it would bring benefits to the open land system as a whole.

However, national and strategic planning policy guidance has changed since the Local Plan was adopted, so in preparing this strategy, account has been taken of the revised Government guidance set out in PPG17: Open Space Sport and Recreation (2002) and PPS 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005), and the relevant Regional Spatial Strategy policies. The key message of these more up-to-date documents is that the Council must now prepare local open space standards based on a needs assessment of all types of open spaces and that the standards should encompass quality and accessibility as well as the quantity of open space. Furthermore, the importance of open spaces to biodiversity needs to be recognised and the Government expects the Council to maintain and enhance biodiversity.

- e. *other plans and strategies*: this strategy has been prepared in the context of a range of other plans and strategies prepared by the Council, so that in meeting its objectives, it can help to deliver benefits for other related service areas and community themes. The vision and objectives within the Open Space Strategy cannot be delivered in isolation and will require the involvement of other agencies and the local community as partners. Particular care has been taken to tie the strategy into Darlington Partnership's Community Strategy, Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Crime, Disorder and Substance Misuse Reduction Strategy and to link closely to the County Durham Biodiversity Action Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework and Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy.

This strategy also provides the context for the preparation of more specific related strategies such as the Playing Pitch Strategy, the Countryside Strategy, the Strategy for Play, Tree Strategy, and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Figure 1 indicates the key linkages with other plans and strategies.

- f. *national policies, advice and best practice*: the open space needs assessment methodology set out in the Government's Companion Guide to PPG17 has been followed in the preparation of this strategy, with some adjustment to take account of CABI Space's more recent 'Green Space Strategies: A Good Practice Guide'. The preparation of this Open Space Strategy will help the Council to deliver under the Government's high profile initiative to create cleaner, safer and greener communities. Both the (then) ODPM and the government agency CABI Space have also produced guidance and advice to help shape best practice on the location, design and management of open spaces.
- g. *service delivery arrangements*: from July 2006, a range of environmental services, such as street cleaning, grounds maintenance, arboriculture and parks management that are provided by the Council are being delivered on an area basis under a new initiative called Street Scene. Under Street Scene, the Borough is split up into 5 sub-areas. These coincide with school clusters and the delivery of an increasing range of Council services, presenting the opportunity for joined-up initiatives in each area.

Each Street Scene Team Leader has an overview of the open space problems, issues and opportunities within the sub-area and their input and local intelligence will be crucial in shaping the priorities within the action plan. The five Street Scene areas are set out below, whilst the coverage and key open space facts for the urban part of each area is shown in Figure 2:

- Darlington North-West
- Darlington Central
- Darlington North-East
- Darlington South-East
- Darlington South-West

Figure 1:Key linkages with other key plans and strategies

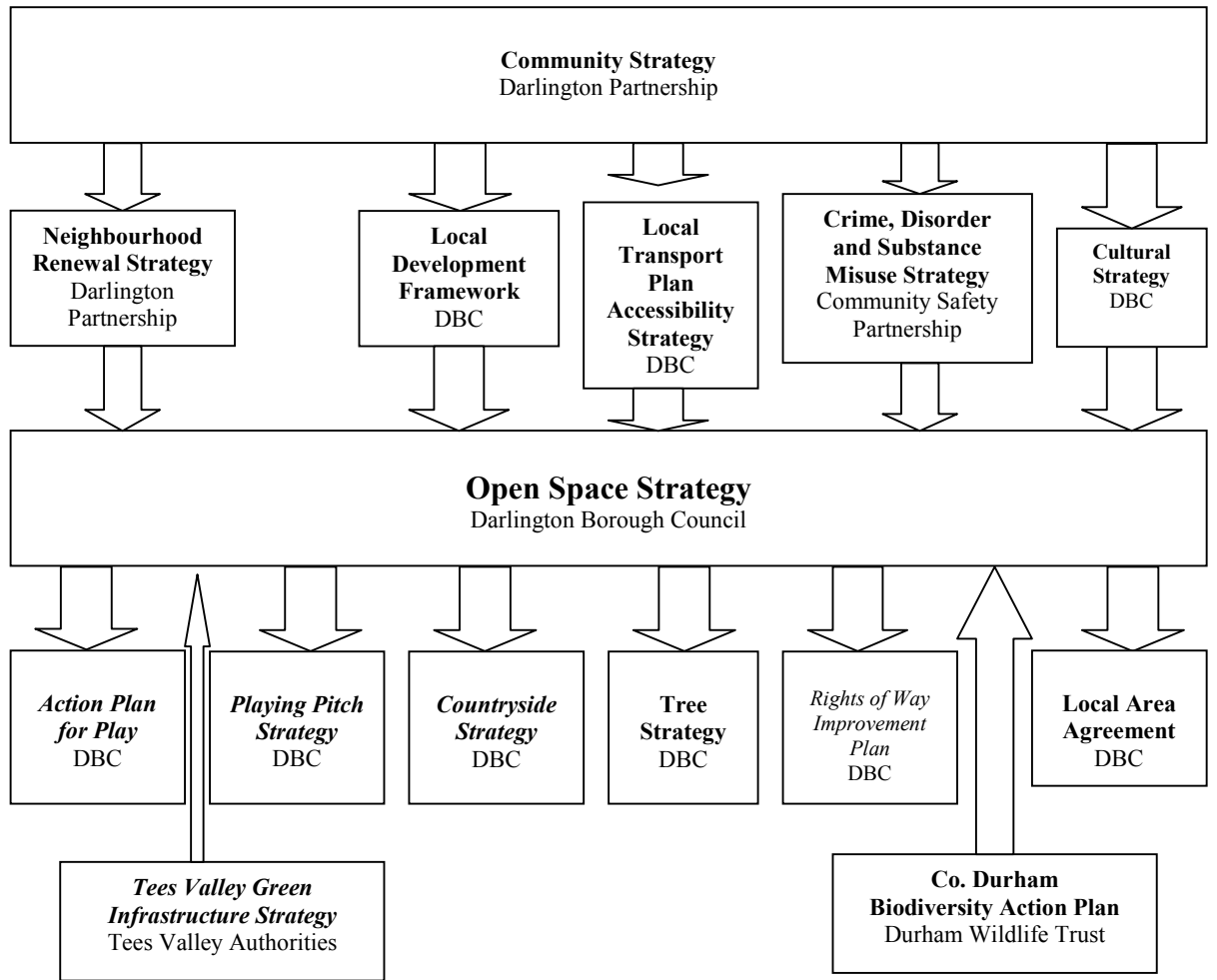


Figure 2: Key Open Space Issues By Street Scene Urban Area and the Villages

<p>Northwest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low amounts of open space per person. • A high proportion of low value sites, and few higher quality sites. • Lack of children’s play at Faverdale/West Park • Recent completion and hand-over of award winning West Park, but other key sites also need investment • Off-road routes, like the Black Path, provide good links between open spaces. 	<p>Central</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest amounts of open space per person. • Poor access to children’s play in the Harrogate Hill area. • Recent significant enhancement of North Lodge Park. • Strategic potential of North Park. • Relocation of Beaumont Hill Schools. • North Cemetery nearing capacity. 	<p>Northeast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high proportion of low value sites, and few higher quality sites. • Children’s equipped play sites are not evenly distributed. • New, high quality sports pitch provision with community access at Houghton Education Village. • Relocation of Springfield School. • Two new community woodlands at Skertingham and Great Burdon on the urban fringe. • No allotments at Red Hall.
<p>Southwest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most open space per person, but many sites are inaccessible. • Dominated by large sites like the recently refurbished South Park, but few smaller, doorstep sites. • Limited play spaces for children and young people. • A high proportion of good quality open spaces. • A new community woodland at Merrybent. • Is remaining space at West Cemetery sufficient ? 		<p>Southeast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some areas with very low amounts of open space per person. • Little access to natural/semi-natural open space across northern parts. • Few higher quality sites in this area. • New playing pitches in place at Darlington College Houghton Road. • High quality parkland, play areas and informal open spaces planned as part of the Central Park redevelopment. • Relocation of Hundens Lane allotments
<p>Large Villages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More limited range of provision than in the urban area, but some unique resources, like the Water Park, Middleton St. George. • Higher proportion of good quality open spaces than the main urban area. • Higher amounts of open space per person than in the main urban area. • Lack of public access to several open spaces in Hurworth • Good access to the countryside via the public rights of way network. 		

How has the Strategy Been Prepared?

16. The strategy has been developed by a Steering Group made up of representatives from the Borough Council’s Environmental Services, Leisure and Arts, Planning, Countryside, Estates and Children’s Services, together with representatives from the local community and Darlington Primary Care Trust. It takes account of the findings of a sustainability appraisal and equalities impact assessment, in addition to the consultation already referred to.

THE SITUATION IN 2006

Key Issues

17. The key issues that the Open Space Strategy addresses can be drawn out by looking at the existing open space provision and identifying where this differs from what is required to meet the community's needs and expectations for the foreseeable future. This section does that, under the following broad headings:

- a. Quantity of open space: overall and by type
- b. Quality and value of open spaces
- c. Distribution: the location of open spaces and patterns in type, quality, value and accessibility of provision
- d. Accessibility
- e. Open Space Type
- f. Villages
- g. Securing Funding for Open Spaces

The information is drawn from the sources identified in paragraph 15. The responses to earlier considerations that informed the consultation draft (para 15b) are highlighted in the boxes.

Quantity of Open Space

18. There are 960 ha of open space on 310 sites of 0.1 ha or more within and on the fringes of the main urban area of Darlington and the Borough's three largest villages. This is equivalent to 9.8 ha open space per 1000 people for the Borough as a whole and 7.1 ha per 1000 people for the urban area only².

People have told us that they want levels of current provision levels maintained. The public generally like having open spaces nearby, ranking them the 7th most important factor in making a neighbourhood a good place to live³. Some cited a 'feel good' factor associated with having green and leafy environments close by, and consider that the network of open green spaces as a key factor in quality of life, essential to sustainable development and biodiversity, and in maintaining the area's appeal.

19. Almost a third of all open spaces are primarily for informal recreation, whilst just over 20% are primarily outdoor sports facilities. On the basis of total site areas, open spaces that are primarily outdoor sports facilities account for just under a third of all open space, with natural and semi-natural green space making up just over a quarter of the total. Table 3 shows the quantity of open space by open space type.

Table 3: Breakdown of All Open Space By Primary Open Space Type

Open Space Primary Purpose	Number of Sites	Total Site Area (Ha)
Parks and gardens	12	55.4
Informal recreation	101	140.6
Natural and semi-natural green spaces	30	247.6
Provision for children and young people	16	9.21
Outdoor sports facilities	67	297.9
Green corridors	20	109.3
Landscape amenity space.	21	25.8
Allotments	27	34.9
Cemeteries, etc.	13	38.8
Civic Spaces	3	1.7
ALL OPEN SPACES	310	961.24

² excluding urban fringe community woodlands and golf courses.

³ Community Survey 2005.

20. Many sites perform more than one open space function, e.g. the primary purpose of South Park is as a park or garden but it also acts as an outdoor sports facility, a children’s play area and is used for informal recreation. Similarly, nature reserves, community woodlands and public rights of way are often chosen by people for running and safe family cycling. Taking into account the subsidiary functions of open spaces, we find that 60% has some informal recreation function, 42% functions as natural and semi-natural green space and 36% as outdoor sports facilities.
21. The main issue around the current level of open space provision is whether it is sustainable, in terms of the amount of resources required to maintain all the open spaces to the standards that the community expects. Insufficient resources for management and maintenance of a large pool of sites can result in too many poorly maintained areas that in turn, can attract people engaging in antisocial behaviour, rather than being the attractive valued environments that people want to keep.
22. The amount of open space of each type may also be an issue, given the projecting ageing of the Borough’s population. It is projected that more than one in four of the population will be over retirement age by 2021⁴ and that within the working population, there will be substantially fewer under 45s and significantly more over 45s. Older age groups generally make less use of open spaces such as sports pitches and proportionately more use of facilities such as allotments. They also particularly appreciate places for quiet enjoyment, such as parks, churchyards and attractive informal recreation areas, such as nature reserves.

Quality and Value of Open Space

23. The quality and value of 214 sites was assessed⁵, using a star rating system for quality (1* being the lowest, 5* the highest) and a high, medium or low rating for value. The quality assessments took account of things like the presence/absence of litter bins and seating and the condition of the grass, landscaped areas and furniture, whilst the value assessments took account of things like the scarcity of other open spaces in the locality, evidence of use/abuse and whether the site was important for other reasons, e.g. containing protected trees or providing the setting for a listed building. Full details of the quality and value assessment criteria and methodology are set out in a separate document⁶.
24. Just over a third (35%) of sites are currently 1* or 2* quality, but only 19% are rated 4* quality or above. Only 23 sites (11%) are considered low value and of these, 13 are of only 1* or 2* quality. Most assessed sites (72%) are considered to be of high value, though this reflects the decision to regard all the sites in wards with high residential densities, e.g. Bank Top, Northgate, Pierremont, as being of high value, because of the higher number of potential local users and the relative scarcity of open areas in these neighbourhoods. Table 4 below summarises the results:

Table 4: Number of Sites by Quality and Value Assessment Results

Value	Quality				
	*	**	***	****	*****
Low	6	7	10		
Medium	2	20	13	2	
High	9	31	75	36	3

25. Sites that are of low quality (1* or 2*) and low value are unlikely to be making much of a positive contribution to local quality of life and well being and where a sense of neglect

⁴ using the current retirement ages.

⁵ School sports fields and allotments were not included – a different assessment framework is required.

⁶ DBC Open Spaces Quality and Value Assessments: Criteria and Methodology Note.

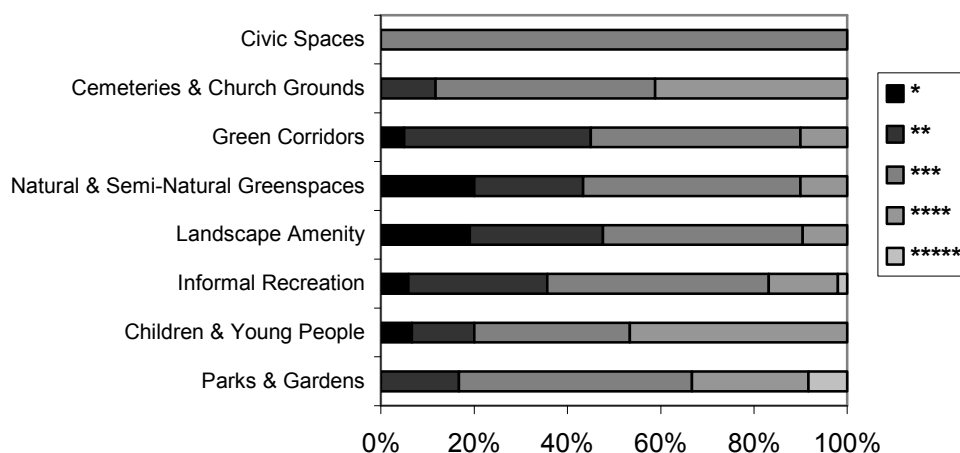
pervades, the opposite can be true. Table 4 shows that one in six sites (16%) fall into this category, with a further 10 sites also being of low value.

26. Table 4 also highlights that almost one in five sites (18.7%) are considered high value, yet are of below average (1* or 2*) quality.
27. The quality of open spaces also varies between types. Where 43% of all primarily natural and semi-natural green spaces and 36% of primarily informal recreation sites are rated 1* or 2* (below average) quality, the figures are 17%, 16% and 19% for parks and gardens, cemeteries and children’s play areas respectively, indicating much higher overall quality amongst the latter types. Table 5 shows the number of below average sites by open space type and the sites of below average quality and low value are listed in Appendix 3. Figure 3 outlines the wider picture.

Table 5: Number of Poor Quality (1* and 2*) Sites by Open Space Type

OPEN SPACE TYPE	No. sites of 1* or 2* quality and low value	No. sites of 1* or 2* quality and medium or high value
Parks and gardens	0	2
Children and young people	1	2
Informal recreation	10	26
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	2	11
Green corridors	1	8
Cemeteries and churchyards	0	1
Landscape amenity	1	9
Civic spaces	0	0

Figure 3: Quality Distribution by Open Space Type

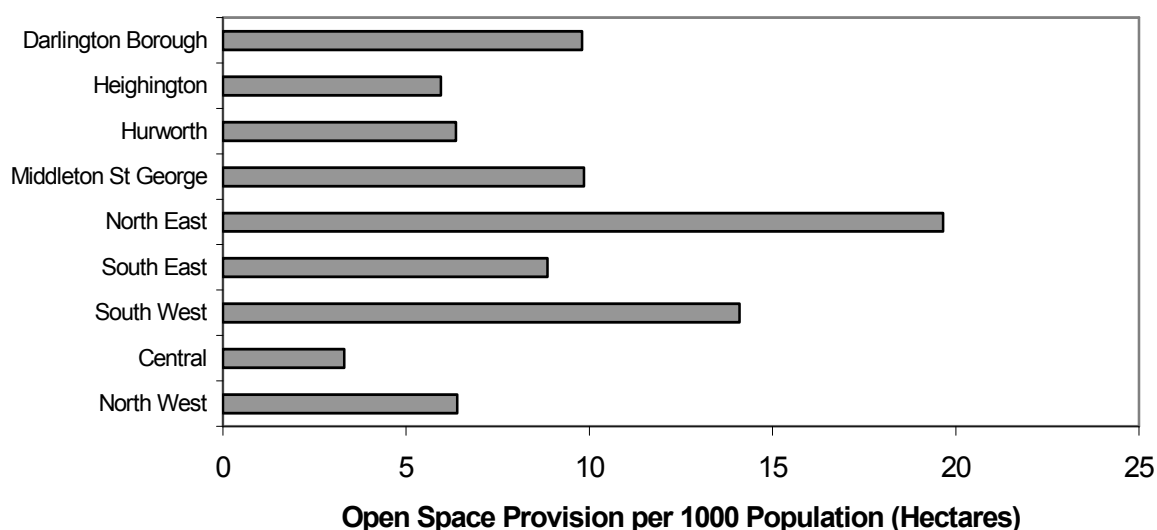


28. The key issue regarding quality and value is therefore that a significant minority of the Borough’s open space sites are probably not making much of a positive contribution to local quality of life and amenity, and that limited maintenance and management is suppressing the potential of too many high value sites. Maintaining and improving quality is an issue for a high proportion of the Borough’s many semi-natural and natural green spaces and informal recreation sites.

Distribution of Open Spaces

29. There is considerable variation in the distribution of open space. It is most plentiful in the sub-areas of Darlington Southwest and Darlington Northeast, due to the presence of golf courses and community woodlands and most limited in the Central sub-area, where provision is just 3.3 ha per 1000 people, compared with an average of 10 ha for the urban area⁷. The variation in quantity of open space by urban sub-area and village is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Spatial Variation in Open Space Provision



30. There is very little open space in some urban wards. The poorest levels of provision occur in Bank Top, Pierremont and Northgate wards, where there is less than 1.5 ha open space per 1000 people.

31. Nor are specific types of open spaces evenly distributed. This is because a few large sites within each open space type attract users from across the town, rather than from one particular sub-area. For example, provision in Darlington Southwest is dominated by South Park, West Cemetery, Blackwell and Stressholme Golf courses, civic spaces are only found in Darlington Central (town centre and railway museum) and open space provision in Darlington Southeast is dominated by playing fields (Hundens/Eastbourne Sports Complex).

32. Turning to the quality of sites, there are lower proportions of high quality and top quality sites in Darlington Northwest, Southeast, Northeast and in Middleton St. George; the variation across the town is illustrated by the fact that only 50% of sites in Darlington Northwest are rated 3* quality or above, compared to 84% in Darlington Southwest. Looking at individual wards, several priority wards⁸ have relatively few good quality open spaces; 50% or less of open spaces in Cockerton West, Lingfield and Haughton East are 3* (average) quality or above, whilst Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield do not have any sites of 4* or higher quality.

33. There is also considerable variation in the availability of open spaces for public use across the area. There is only 2.8 ha of accessible⁹ open space per 1000 people in Darlington Central, compared to 13.6 ha in Darlington Northeast. Lack of public access is a

⁷ Including urban fringe open space.

⁸ Priority wards are the 11 wards in the Borough that score worst on the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation.

⁹ Includes sites with unlimited access, access by informal or formal agreement or for members/tenants only.

particular limitation on authorised use of open space in Darlington Southwest and in Hurworth, arising from both the private nature of facilities located there, e.g. the MFC football training facility and from the lack of authorised access to school grounds, e.g. Hurworth Comprehensive and Mowden Infants and Juniors.

34. The key issues around the distribution of open spaces are therefore:
- a. significant under provision in several parts of the town, often coinciding with the areas of greatest need;
 - b. problems of access arising from the concentration of certain types of open spaces in certain parts of the town;
 - c. inequalities in the quality of local open spaces generally, depending on where you live;
 - d. the impact that public access or otherwise to school playing fields is having on the overall level of accessible open space.

Accessibility

35. There are three elements to the accessibility of open spaces:
- a. how easy it is to get to open spaces;
 - b. whether access onto the site is controlled or not, e.g. by agreement, membership, cost;
 - c. local knowledge and perceptions of sites and what they have to offer, including events, guided walks, information and interpretation.
36. There is generally good proximity to open spaces across the town, though some types of open space are only provided where there is an opportunity (e.g. green corridors along the becks) or where specific needs (e.g. landscape buffer) arise. Through the Local Transport Plan, steps are being taken to ensure that pedestrian access is maintained or improved to all key destinations including open spaces and that the design of routes minimises barriers to movement (e.g. unnecessary use of gates), incorporates safety measures, e.g. lighting and meets the needs of people with disabilities.
37. Almost all the urban population is within 300m (equivalent to just under 5 minutes walk) of at least one accessible informal recreation site and the compact nature of the town makes it relatively easy to travel across it to reach other sites. 82% of the urban population is within 1000m (15 mins. walk) of a park and 83% of the urban population under 12 is within 666 m (10 mins. walk) of an equipped play area. The adopted Local Plan sets out access standards for equipped children's play sites, whereas more recent Government guidance suggests setting standards for a wider range of open space types.

70% of people told us that a walk of up to 15 minutes to their local green space is reasonable, whilst a telephone survey in 2003 found that 94% of people thought a walk of 5-10 minutes to a green space was either about right or very accessible¹⁰.

Some people felt that main roads are a barrier in getting to open spaces, especially children's play spaces, whilst some felt distance was more of a barrier to older people. Several mentioned that there should be more public open spaces in areas where there is very little private garden space.

38. Proximity to open space contributes to overall physical and mental well-being and attractive open spaces close to where people live can play a part in helping to reverse the growth in obesity, by encouraging healthy lifestyles. The people of Northgate, Cockerton West, Bank Top, Eastbourne, Houghton East and Lascelles wards have the poorest

¹⁰ NEMS survey 2003

health¹¹, so providing good quality open spaces in these wards could achieve most. Proximity to open spaces will also be more important where fewer people have access to a car. In Darlington, 40% or more households are without a car in the wards of Bank Top, Central, Cockerton West, Lascelles, North Road and Park East.

39. Table 6 shows restricted access to over a third of all open spaces, mostly outdoor sports facilities and allotments. There are good management reasons for this and in the case of sports facilities, it is also because a significant proportion of provision is private clubs. More information on access to playing pitches is provided in the Playing Pitch Strategy.

Table 6: Access Arrangements to Open Spaces by Open Space Type

Primary Open Space Type	No. Sites	Access Arrangements		
		No access or access unauthorised	Formal or informal agreement, and members/tenants only	Unlimited access
Parks & gardens	12	0	0	12
Children & young people (equipped play and youth provision)	16	1	0	15
Informal recreation	101	1	2	98
Landscape Amenity	21	7	7	7
Natural and semi-natural greenspaces	30	5	0	25
Green corridors	20	0	0	20
Outdoor sports facilities	67	23	37	7
Allotments, etc.	27	0	27	0
Cemeteries, etc.	13	0	3	10
Civic spaces	3	0	1	2
ALL	310	37	77	196

Open Space Type

40. Issues of quality, quantity, distribution, accessibility and management vary considerably between open space types. The following bullet points highlight the key issues that arise for each:

- a. *Parks and gardens*: All parks, except Sugar Hill Park, are considered high value but their quality varies considerably from 5* rating (North Lodge Park) to 2* rating (Brinkburn Denes and Sugar Hill Park). All are currently afforded protection from development in the Local Plan. Some urban fringe locations like Red Hall are currently quite remote from any park.

Most people¹² expect to travel for 15 minutes to this type of open space, with many choosing between a visit to the park and a range of other leisure destinations. For family orientated or larger destination parks, the provision of toilets, adequate parking was felt to be important.

- b. *Informal recreation*: This is the most plentiful type of open space but it is relatively scarce in Darlington North. Over a third (38%) of urban sites are low (1* or 2*) quality and 13 sites are of low value. Almost everyone in the town is within 600 m of a local or strategic open space and most are within 300 m of some informal open space; the exceptions are parts of Bank Top, College, Park West, Mowden and Harrowgate Hill wards.

Most people expect to travel for 15 minutes to this type of open space, though in 2003¹³, 5-10 minutes (300m) was felt to be the acceptable travel time. One respondent felt there was not enough informal recreation space and that provision is not balanced across the town.

¹¹ Index of Multiple Deprivation.

¹² 75% or more of questionnaire responses, Dec. 2005

- c. *Natural and semi-natural green spaces:* Just over half (55%) of sites that are primarily natural and semi-natural green space are 3* (average) quality or above, with the best sites all 4* rated e.g. Drinkfield Local Nature Reserve. 90% of the urban population is within 1000 m (15 minutes walk) of a nature site, though there is limited access to larger sites from Bank Top eastwards, and several gaps in accessibility to the smallest ‘doorstep’ sites, e.g. College ward and North Road/Harrowgate Hill. Only some of the identified nature sites are currently protected in the Local Plan.

Most people expect to travel for 30 minutes to this type of open space. Some suggested linking sites together and with the countryside, encircling the town with trees and introducing nature sites around factories to complement the ‘manicured’ frontages. Others noted the education value of nature sites, the importance of all trees and small green areas in supporting biodiversity and the desirability of including trees and natural habitats within new development sites.

The Woodland Trust and Tees Forest want to see reference to and targets for an accessible countryside/woodland at the urban fringe, with protection and enhancement afforded to open spaces according to the Government’s Planning Policy Statement 9 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

- d. *Children and Young People:* the 34 urban sites include equipped playgrounds, kick about areas, fishing and skateboarding facilities. Of these, 26 are equipped play sites, with 4 to 6 sites in each urban sub-area. However parts of the West End, Faverdale, Harrowgate Hill, Whinfield, Victoria Road, Neasham Road and Skerne Park are more than 400 m (9 minutes walk) from any play site, with youth provision (10 kick about areas, 3 fishing sites and a skate park) following a similar pattern. There are also 7 multi-use games areas where access is by formal agreement, often with a fee. Only the Coombe Drive kick about is regarded as low value and only 4 sites (Hundens Park, the rear of Eggleston View, east of McMullen Road, Coombe Drive and the Denes) are below average quality. ROSPA safety assessments complete the picture of playground quality and further information on this is included in the Council’s concurrent Play Strategy.

Most people expect to travel 15 minutes to these open spaces. People consistently regard the provision and improvement of children’s play areas and places for young people as a priority over parks and other open spaces but the levels of satisfaction with local provision is low (30.8% very or fairly satisfied) compared with parks and open spaces generally (73.2%)¹⁴. Areas thought to be lacking included West End, Albert Hill and at Skerne Park.

The growing popularity of fishing at Brinkburn and Maidendale was mentioned, but more equipment that provides an element of danger in a controlled environment, e.g. off-road motor biking, is sought, with lighting to allow use of all youth facilities in the winter.

Concerns were raised about the misuse of play areas for anti-social behaviour, e.g. drinking and drug use and some intolerance of play by neighbours, e.g. complaints about noise and requesting ‘no ball games’ signs when only a few children play football.

The Local Plan currently only requires contributions towards new or improved equipped children’s’ play provision. The highest numbers of children are found in Park East, Harrowgate Hill, Pierremont, Eastbourne, North Road, Northgate Houghton West and Cockerton East wards.

¹³ NEMS telephone survey, November 2003

¹⁴ Community Survey 2005

- e. *Outdoor Sports Facilities:* there are 67 of these sites, of which 56 are within the urban area. 33 of the urban sites are school playing fields, many with officially no access or access only by formal or informal agreement, whilst 9 sites are private clubs; more details on these are given in the Playing Pitch Strategy. The 3 golf courses are all of average quality and high value, complementing golf provision at Hall Garth and Dinsdale Golf Club, whilst Newstead Riding Stables is the only such facility serving the urban area, and as such, should be regarded as of high value.

Most people expect to travel 30 minutes to these open spaces. Several are concerned about the loss of football pitches and playing fields, feeling that their social and health value is unrecognised. More community use of school playing fields is sought, both for league matches and informal recreation/kick about; the latter is being eroded as sites are increasingly fenced in. There was also a specific request for a playing pitch or kick about facility at Skerne Park.

Agents acting for the landowners at Feethams consider it unrealistic to expect redevelopment for open space use.

Sport England indicated that the concurrent playing pitch strategy should provide locally derived standards of playing field provision, to inform the Local Development Framework in allocating new land for playing pitches as appropriate.

Some, but not all of these open spaces are currently protected by policies in the Local Plan.

- f. *Green Corridors:* 20 out of 22 green corridors (linear open spaces with a footpath cycleway or bridleway running through) are in the urban area, accounting for 20.1% of all urban open space. Only Tees Riverside/Broken Scar is considered to be a strategic link, forming part of the long distance Teesdale Way footpath; the remaining sites are either local links (12 sites) between neighbourhoods, or 'doorstep' links within neighbourhoods (9 sites). Quality varies from 4* at Tees Riverside/Broken Scar and the riverside footpath at Middleton One Row, to 1* at the former D&S railway trackbed at Haughton Road.

Most people expect to travel 30 minutes to this type of open space. One respondent asked if the intention is to link all open spaces together and how they will fit in with walking and cycling networks.

The provision of green corridors is currently given support in the Local Plan but not all are afforded protection from development. Many form part of walking and cycling networks that have been identified for improvement and development in the Local Transport Plan and through the 'Town on the Move' project, to improve accessibility for young people, as well as health and sustainability objectives.

- g. *Landscape Amenity:* the 21 sites in this category, together with many smaller sites too small for inclusion in the audit, help improve the living environment e.g. by providing a noise, visual or wind buffer or enhance the image of the area. All except three (ALDI depot frontage, Faverdale, east of Moray Close and junction of Thompson Street East and Salters Lane) are of high value but almost half of them are below average quality. Some, but not all, landscape amenity spaces are protected from development in the adopted Local Plan.

- h. *Allotments*: 21 out of 27 allotment sites serve the main urban area, equating to 23.2 ha or 0.34 ha per 1000 people in the main urban area. Provision is only 0.13 ha/1000 people in Darlington Central, though the concentration of high density terraced housing in this area may indicate a higher than average needs. However, almost all the urban population is within 15 minutes walk (1000m) of an allotment site, with exceptions being the urban fringe ends of Red Hall, Lingfield, Branksome and High Grange and parts of College and Park West wards. Lack of private open space is not a particular issue in any of these locations, indicating possibility low need for allotments in these locations.

Most people expect to travel for 15 minutes to this type of open space.

It is a statutory requirement for local authorities to provide allotments within 1200 m of every home, if petitioned. Allotments are getting increasing recognition for the role they can play in supporting healthy and sustainable lifestyles and the Council monitors demand by reference to waiting lists. All allotments are protected in the Local Plan by Policy R19, which only allows their loss if a compensating area of an appropriate size and in a suitable location is provided, or it can be shown that no local demand exists.

- i. *Cemeteries, etc.*: The 17 sites in this category also include churchyards and other religious grounds, e.g. St. Clare's Convent. They are not generally owned by the Council, though it does have a management obligation on closed burial grounds. The 3 public cemeteries (East, West and North) account for 76% of all the urban open space in this category. Only 2 sites (Elm Ridge and Ravensdale Road/Blackwell Lane) were not considered of high value, and only the Holy Trinity Churchyard on Woodland Road was rated less than 3* quality. Seven sites, including East Cemetery and West Cemetery were rated 4* quality, but North Cemetery was only rated 3* quality. Most sites have unrestricted access, making this type of site an important part of the stock of accessible green space for quiet enjoyment and they can also be a haven for wildlife.

Most people expect to travel for 30 minutes to this type of open space. With the exception of Eastbourne Cemetery, they are generally felt to be well maintained and in good condition.

These open spaces are afforded some protection from development in the adopted Local Plan. There is expansion land at West Cemetery but North Cemetery is nearly full and no work has been done to identify sites for alternative, e.g. woodland burials.

- j. *Civic Spaces*: there are 3 hard surfaced areas for pedestrians that provide a setting for civic buildings, public demonstrations and community events: the Market Place, High Row and the grounds of the Railway Museum. All are currently rated high value and 3* quality, though access to the railway museum site is limited to paying visitors to the museum and community events.

Most people expect to travel for 30 minutes to this type of open space

The Local Plan identifies the Market Place and High Row (part of the current Pedestrian Heart Project) for pedestrian area improvements, whilst the railway museum grounds are protected for uses related to the area's railway and industrial history.

Villages

41. The presence of a range of open space sites within or on the fringe of the three largest villages of Middleton St. George, Hurworth and Heighington indicates good accessibility for residents to open space opportunities, though the variety and degree of access can be more limited than that in town. The amount of open space in Middleton St. George is at a similar level to that in the town overall and whilst the levels in Hurworth and Heighington are lower, they are still higher than the levels in ten of the urban wards.
42. Responsibility for the management and maintenance of open spaces in the villages is split between the Borough Council (where it owns land) the Parish Council and independent organisations, e.g. the Board of Hurworth Secondary School. There are some unique sites, e.g. Hurworth Grange and the Water Park at Middleton St. George that make a valuable contribution to village open space, whilst the proximity to the countryside and the rights of way network mean dedicated nature sites may be less of a priority than in the town. The level of allotment provision is higher than in the town and whilst there is adequate equipped children's play, access to open spaces for pitch sports and kick about is more limited, especially in Hurworth, where neither the school playing fields of Hurworth Primary school nor the Secondary school are open out of hours.
43. Open spaces within the villages are not identified on the Local Plan Proposals Map, nor are they protected from development by Policy E3. However many have been protected from development because of other characteristics, e.g. they are an essential part of the character or appearance of a conservation area, or they are school playing fields or village greens.

Securing Funding for Open Spaces

44. The main source of funding for the provision, management and maintenance of open spaces is currently the Council's own resources. These support a programme of physical improvement works on an ongoing basis and cover the costs of the workforce to carry out improvement and maintenance work. However, there is a limit on the amount of money that can be made available for open spaces in the face of pressure for resources from other Council services, and the disposal of surplus open spaces needs to be considered as a way of maintaining and enhancing the quality of the open space resource as a whole.
45. In addition to the above, some of the money for capital (physical works) schemes can be sought from the specific Government programmes and from sources funded through the National Lottery. For example, the new open space facilities at Holgate Moor were part funded through the Countryside Agency's Doorstep Greens initiative, whilst the works at North Lodge Park have been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Money is also available from funding streams targeting other primary objectives, such as health or environmental restoration e.g. the Landfill and Aggregates Levy Funds for Biodiversity projects and funds for open space activities, nature education programmes, and for green exercise and healthy walking.
46. Also of significance are the contributions to the provision or improvement of open space made in association with new development. The new park at West Park was secured as part of the planning permission for the wider area and a new parkland area is part of the planning permission for the Central Park redevelopment site. At the smaller scale, developers of schemes including ten or more family dwellings are required to make a contribution to the provision or enhancement of equipped children's playgrounds, e.g. upgraded provision at Middleton St. George. Developers also make contributions (known as commuted sums) towards the ongoing management and maintenance of play equipment and any areas of open spaces within the development that they want the Council to adopt.

47. The local community also makes a significant in-kind contribution towards the management and maintenance of open spaces, through their involvement as volunteers helping to look after countryside sites such as Geneva Woods and Drinkfield Marsh and increasingly, through their involvement as part of the Friends Groups associated with the more formal parkland sites.

Summary of Key Open Space Issues Raised

48. Arising from the above, the main open space issues that this strategy addresses are as follows:
- a. maintaining the amount of open space that people want to the quality that the community has come to expect;
 - b. poor levels of provision in several parts of the town, often coinciding with the areas of greatest need, in terms of lack of private open space, poor health and low mobility;
 - c. marked differences in the quality of local open spaces generally, depending on where people live;
 - d. a minority of sites are not positively contributing to local quality of life and amenity;
 - e. geographical gaps in the provision of specific types of open spaces;
 - f. limited maintenance and management is suppressing the potential of too many high value sites;
 - g. poor quality across, particularly, semi-natural and natural green spaces and informal recreation sites;
 - h. the impact that public access or otherwise to school playing fields can have on the overall levels of accessible open space;
 - i. any accessibility issues arising from the concentration of certain types of open spaces in certain parts of the town;
 - j. to capitalise on the biodiversity potential of the entire open space resource;
 - k. lost opportunities for open space provision and enhancement in association with new development;
 - l. the evolving open space needs of an ageing population;
 - m. planning for future burials provision;
 - n. protection and enhancement of open spaces within villages;
 - o. the need to dispose of surplus open spaces to help maintain a sustainable level of funding for open spaces.

MOVING THINGS FORWARD

Vision and Aims

49. Having regard to what people have told us, and taking account of the other priorities of the Council and its partners, the vision for open spaces that emerges is:

The Vision

“ to provide, protect and enhance a variety of high quality, accessible open and green spaces throughout the Borough, linking with the cultural and natural heritage of the area that are:

- well designed and maintained;
- sustainable;
- safe; and
- promote health, well being and enjoyment,

improving the quality of life for residents and visitors to the Borough ”.

50. Central to the realisation of this vision will be the involvement of the local community. Through engagement with them, the Council aims to achieve the following:

The Strategy's Aims

- to provide a sustainable amount of high quality, accessible open spaces across the Borough to meet the changing needs and expectations of local people, now and for the foreseeable future;
- to provide a variety of open spaces and facilities within them that, where appropriate, are equally accessible by all;
- to secure improvements in the design and management of open spaces, so that they are attractive and safe for everyone, their biodiversity is enhanced, and the Borough's distinctive history and culture is conserved;
- to build and sustain strong relationships with the local community and other agencies to help shape change on open spaces.

51. The strategy's vision will be realised by the implementation of a range of projects that are set out in the accompanying action plan. These will satisfy the strategy's aims and accord with the strategic direction that is explained through the policies, key actions and opportunities outlined in the remainder of this section.

52. The strategic direction is made up of a number of related components:

- a. General approach and direction;
- b. Protecting and caring for our existing valuable open spaces;
- c. Setting standards for how much, how good and how close by we want our open spaces to be;
- d. Sub-strategies outlining the approach to the provision of specific types of open spaces, such as parks or equipped children's play areas;
- e. The approach for securing new open spaces, and contributions towards the improvement of existing open spaces, in association with new developments;
- f. Making room for biodiversity;
- g. Approach for the villages.

53. The policies will contribute in terms of planning guidance until the Council adopts documents forming part of the new Local Development Framework. The more strategic policies relating to, for example, the network of open spaces and overall standards of

provision, are likely to be considered through the Core Strategy document, with other policies through the Development Policies document and other documents. For the programme of LDF document preparation, please see the current Local Development Scheme at www.darlington.gov.uk/planning.

54. The Council will continue to seek commuted sums from new housing developments for the enhancement of existing equipped play areas in accordance with the existing adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance until this is replaced by a Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning document, and/or other documents, within the Local Development Framework.

General Approach and Direction

55. The overall thrust of this Open Space Strategy set out in Policy 1 below is to sustain open space provision at slightly below the current level, but with the focus on making quality improvements, adjusting the type and location of open spaces to address geographic inequalities of provision, tailoring the type of provision more to identified local needs and looking at alternative uses for some surplus, low value open spaces. Over the medium to long term, by better balancing resources available to the quantity of open spaces that need improving and maintaining, there will be more higher quality open spaces of the type local people want, in locations that they can readily get to. An exception to this overall approach may be needed at the urban fringe where the creation and management of large areas of additional open space in the form of community woodlands or nature reserves can be achieved at very little cost.
56. This general approach will bring additional resources to open space within or serving the priority wards. This focus is in response to the audit findings which highlighted that in these areas, shortfalls in open space are often the greatest, the density of housing with little outside private space the highest and low income and levels of car ownership (and hence, ability to access more remote open spaces) the highest.
57. The approach also acknowledges that short-medium term priorities may change to take advantages of one-off additional external funding opportunities.

Policy 1: General Approach

In planning for the provision, management and maintenance of open spaces, the Council will concentrate on addressing existing geographic inequalities in the quantity, quality and accessibility of open spaces and in cherishing the Borough's most valuable open spaces.

It will seek to identify the role individual open spaces play or could, with appropriate management play, in preserving or enhancing levels of biodiversity in the Borough.

It will also take into account the important role played by open spaces in providing sustainable transport corridors, separated from main highways.

With its partners it will continue to make the urban fringe countryside more accessible to the public as well as becoming more bio diverse and of a higher landscape value.

It will also work in partnership with local people and others to capitalise on the opportunities that new funding streams and new developments may present to secure further additions or enhancement to the Borough's open space resource.

Protecting and Caring For Our Existing Valuable Open Spaces

Locally Important Open Spaces

58. The mosaic of different open spaces within the built up area and Borough's villages are a key contributor to the quality of life enjoyed by Darlington residents and visitors alike.

Policy 2 provides a robust planning basis for protecting the most valuable core elements of the open space mosaic from inappropriate development, for championing the preservation and enhancement of their visual amenity, biodiversity and particular local characteristics.

59. Locally important open spaces will in due course be identified on the LDF Proposals Map.

Policy 2: Our Most Important Open Space Resources

A comprehensive framework of high quality open spaces will be identified within the Borough. Within this framework, Locally Important Open Spaces will be protected and managed to meet the sport and recreational needs and sustainable travel needs of local people close to where they live and to maintain and enhance the visual amenity, biodiversity and local distinctiveness of the Borough as a whole.

Locally Important Open Spaces include:

- a) Parks and cemeteries
- b) Local Nature Reserves
- c) Green wedges and corridors, such as the River Skerne corridor
- d) Paths within the Borough forming part of the Teesdale Way
- e) Community woodlands
- f) Darlington Railway Museum and undeveloped sections of the Stockton & Darlington Railway trackbed
- g) The Market Place and High Row in Darlington town centre
- h) Village greens
- i) Strategic outdoor sports provision

Protecting Existing Open Spaces From Development

60. Locally Important Open Spaces (LIOSs) are the core elements of the open space network, therefore Policy 3 affords them stronger planning policy protection than does Policy 4 for all other types of open spaces. LIOSs include the sites listed in Policy 2 together with sites of at least 4* quality and/or high value and the core playing pitch sites.
61. Policies 3 and 4 permit developments that will enhance open space and increase its value to people or nature, and set out the open space characteristics that the Council wants to conserve. They set out the exceptional circumstances when the other development of open spaces may be permitted. Successful operation of these planning policies depends on the audit information being kept up to date, i.e. less than 3 years old. The Action Plan attends to this issue.
62. Policy 5 seeks to retain valuable open space qualities, where development in open spaces is permitted.

Policy 3: Locally Important Open Spaces

Development will only be permitted on Locally Important Open Spaces if either:

- the development is ancillary to the existing open space use; or
- the development of a small part of the site will enable the enhancement of the remaining open space, and there is no identified shortfall in the amount of any type of open space for which the open space could appropriately be used;
- and the development can be achieved without inflicting material net harm on;
- the historic character of a conservation area with specific regard to traditional village greens or;
- the visual relief afforded by the open space network as a whole or;
- the biodiversity and conservation value of the site and the part played by the site in providing wildlife with a green network across the borough is not compromised and can be mitigated for;
- the openness and greenery of the locality;
- the internal continuity of the open space system, or its linkages with the open countryside.

Only in the most exceptional circumstances will alternative provision of open space, that is equivalent or better in terms of size, quality, biodiversity potential, usefulness, attractiveness and accessibility, be permitted.

Policy 4: Criteria for redeveloping existing open space and safeguarding open space functions

The redevelopment of all or part of an existing open space which is not a locally important open space will only be permitted if:

- it has been clearly shown in a robust and up-to-date needs assessment that the open space is surplus to all open space, sport or recreation provision requirements, or by its nature, is unsuitable to meet any identified deficiency in open space, landscape amenity, biodiversity, nature conservation, sport and recreation provision, sustainable travel need, or
- alternative equivalent or better provision in terms of size, usefulness, landscape amenity and potential for biodiversity is at least as accessible as the existing open space to the population it serves or potentially serves; or
- the redevelopment of a small part of the site would contribute to the achievement of the standards set out in other relevant policies elsewhere in the strategy.
- the open space does not contribute significantly to the effectiveness of a wildlife corridor or does not offer a strategic opportunity to preserve and enhance biodiversity levels in the area.

Policy 5: Safeguarding open space functions and securing new or improved provision

Where the redevelopment of open space complies with Policy 3, schemes must be designed to sustain or enhance:

- any strategic function the open space performs; and
- the overall visual amenity of the locality; and
- any contribution that the site makes to local biodiversity objectives.

This may be achieved by retaining elements of the existing open space or by making compensatory provision

Setting Standards for Open Space Provision

63. Setting standards will provide certainty about the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space that people can expect across the Borough and will provide the basis for assessing what level, location and quality of open spaces should be sought as part of new developments. The Council's proposed standards are set out in Policy 6 below.
64. The quantity standard is slightly lower than the existing level of provision. This acknowledges that the overall amount of open space is a highly valued characteristic but at the same time allows for some limited disposals of low value/poor quality open spaces and for instances where population growth and additional open space provision may not quite occur in step, e.g. on large sites such as Central Park.
65. The accessibility standard is already achieved but improving on this is difficult in all areas, as there are often very few opportunities to secure new open spaces in the most densely built up areas, such as Bank Top ward, which need them most.
66. There are in principle, no limits on the quantity of the urban fringe provision in Policy 1.
67. The quality standard has been set high enough to drive up the overall quality of open spaces. Eleven of the 214 assessed sites will need to be improved to 3* quality and 12 sites to at least 4* quality. At least 1 additional site in Darlington SW will need to be improved to 4* quality, and 2 sites in Darlington NW to be improved to 3* quality.

These improvements could be achieved by landscaping works, or additions of things like bins, seating, enclosure and paths, depending on the type of open space.

68. More detailed standards for specific open space types are included in the policies set out below.

Policy 6: Overall Standards of Provision

Within the main urban area, the provision of open space will be maintained and improved to achieve the following overall standards:

- 6.5 ha of open space per 1000 people, of which 6.2 ha per 1000 people is accessible;
- an accessible open space of at least 0.1ha within 300m of 99% of dwellings;
- 70% of open spaces to be 3 star (medium) quality or above, with at least a quarter (25%) to be 4 star (good) quality or above, such that the proportion of medium and good quality sites in each urban sub-area is within 15% of the proportions for the main urban area as a whole.

Outside the main urban area, the existing levels of open space provision will be maintained and the quality improved, such that 70% of sites are maintained at 3 star (medium) quality or above, with at least a quarter (25%) maintained at 4 star (good) quality or above.

Strategies for Specific Types of Open Space Provision

The Strategy for Parks Provision

69. South Park, North Park, West Park and the Denes are the key open space sites serving the urban population and are identified as fulfilling a strategic role. There is no similar large space to the east of the main railway line where a strategic park could be provided but since this area contains a high proportion of wards where issues like low car ownership, low income, poor health and limited access to private open space are prevalent, proximity to an open space is considered more important than in some other parts of the town and the focus is consequently on providing good quality, smaller sites closer to where people live.
70. Sugar Hill Park is also targeted for investment so that it can fulfil a role such as North Lodge, Green and Bushel Hill Parks. It is currently of poor quality and value and serves an area (Cockerton East and West) where there is a higher incidence of low car ownership, low income and poor health.
71. These proposals are explained in Policy 7 below and illustrated in Figure 5.

Policy 7: Parks Provision

The existing open spaces of South Park, North Park, West Park and the Denes will be managed and enhanced as strategic parks, providing a range of facilities and attractions for all the borough's residents and visitors alike.

In the eastern part of the urban area, the following sites will be targeted to fulfil the role of good quality local parks and informal recreation areas:

Short/medium term

- Lascelles/Eastbourne Park
- Red Hall Recreation Area
- Land next to Maidendale Community Centre
- Land to the rear of Gouldsmith Gardens, Haughton
- Salters Lane North/Lytham Road, Harrowgate Hill

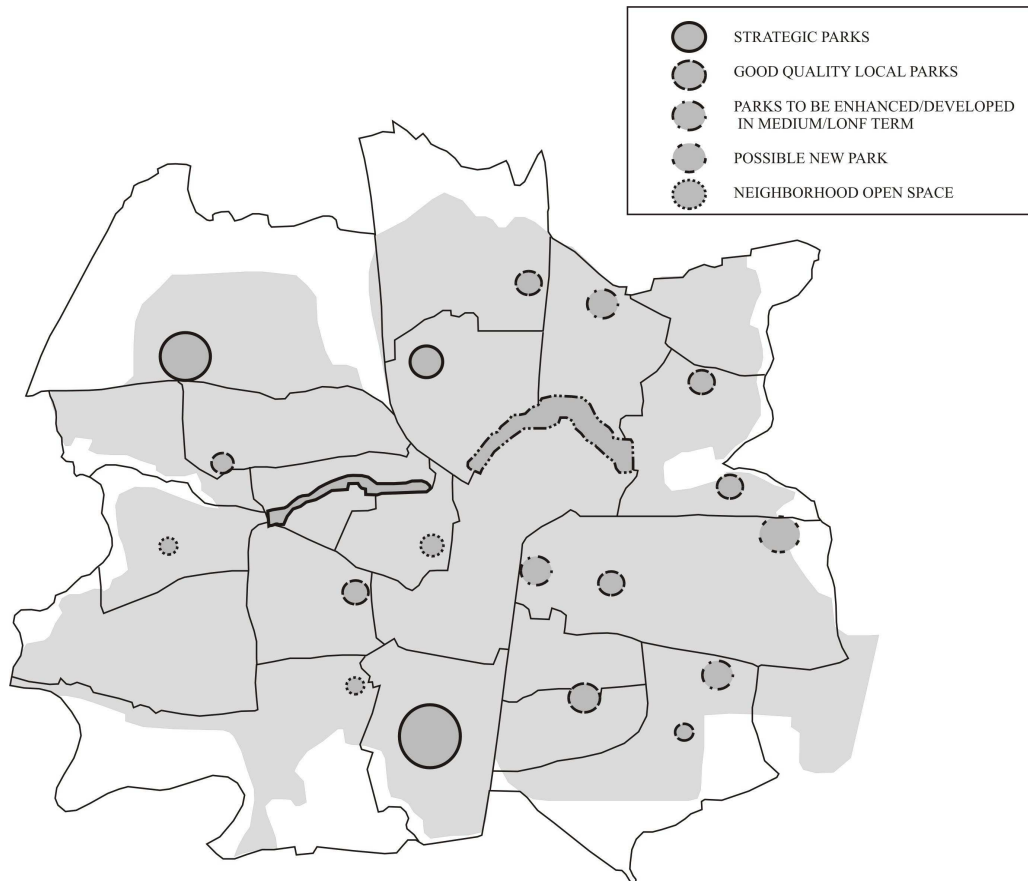
Medium/long term

- Tommy Crooks Park
- Skerne Valley, Haughton West
- Springfield Park
- Parkland proposed at Central Park
- Possible park provision if houses approved at Lingfield Point.

Sugar Hill Park will also be enhanced as a good quality park serving its immediate neighbourhood.

The remaining existing parks (North Lodge Park, Green Park, Bushel Hill Park) will continue to be managed so that they fulfil their role as important neighbourhood open spaces.

Figure 5: Proposed Strategy for Parks Provision



72. The overall quantity of open space laid out as parks is about right and significant progress towards meeting the proposed standard (see policy 8 below) will be made if Springfield Park and Skerne Valley are improved to the extent they can be considered primarily as parks. Because of the intensity and variety of their use, the quality standard has been set higher than for any other type of open spaces, whilst the accessibility standard (15 minutes) exactly matches the time people told us they felt it was reasonable to walk to their local park.

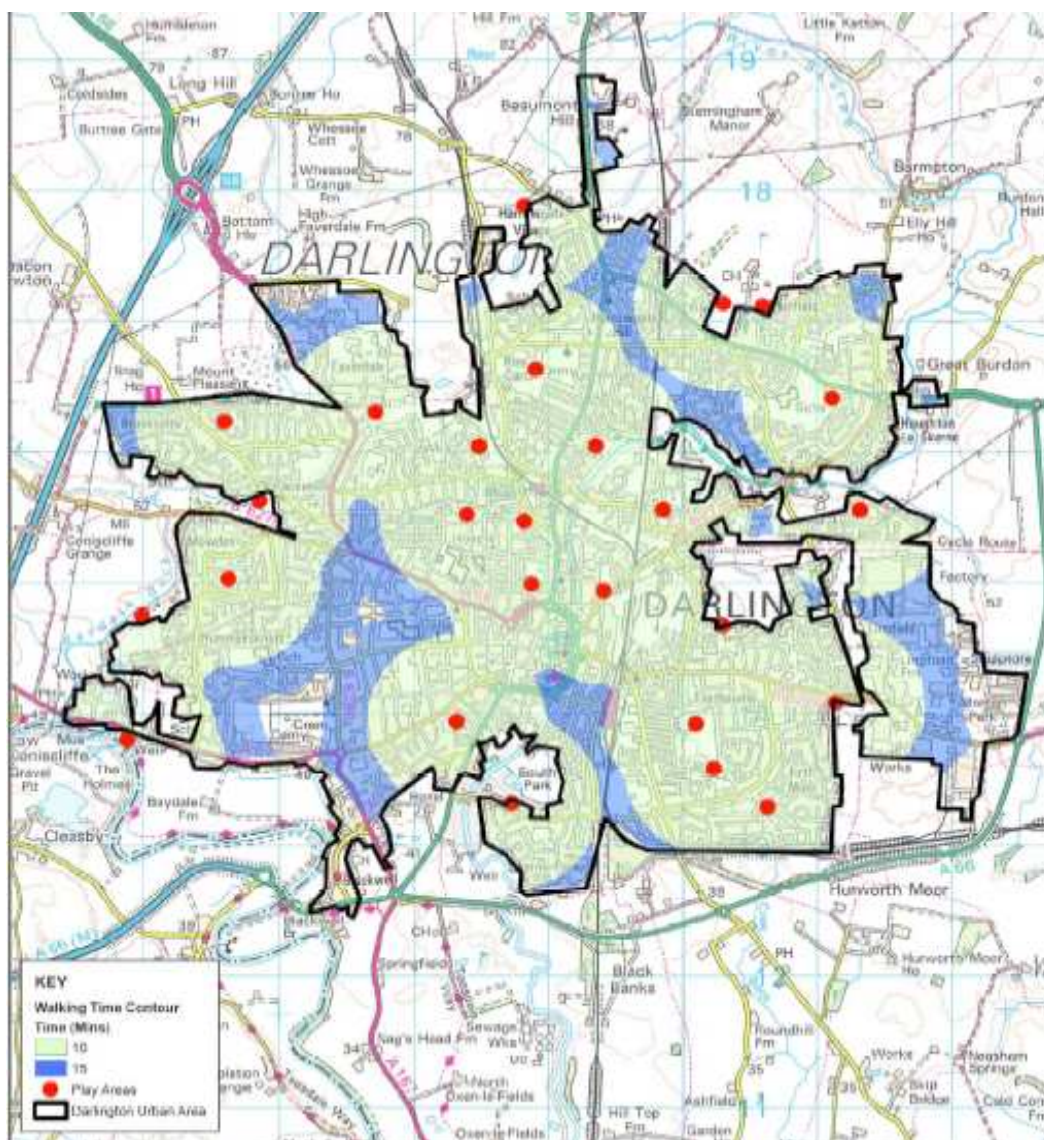
Policy 8: Standards for Parks Provision

Public parks and gardens will be provided so that there is 0.85ha/1000 population within 15 minutes (1000m) walk of 99% of the population, and so that all sites are of at least 4* quality.

The Strategy for the Provision of Open Spaces for Children and Young People

73. The focus in providing open spaces for children and young people is to ensure that they are safe, clean and attractive facilities close to where children live. The best equipped play sites will be located within South Park and North Park, attracting occasional visits from residents across the Borough. Elsewhere, the emphasis will be on providing a more limited range of equipment, suitable for toddlers upwards, at locally accessible sites and to manage those sites so that they are safe, clean and attractive for use. Wherever possible, the exact nature of provision at these local sites will be made in consultation with the local community and young people. Figure 6 shows how far children have to walk to equipped play sites within the urban area.

Figure 6: Areas within 10 minutes and 15 minutes walk of an equipped play area



74. An additional 2 equipped play sites must be provided to meet the quantity standard set out in Policy 9 (below). The search for potential sites will concentrate on the areas of Faverdale, Skerne Park, Harrowgate Hill, Haughton South, College/Hummersknott, as this will also help to address existing gaps in local provision. Some of the existing duplicate provision at Springfield Park/Sparrow Hall Drive will also be utilised to address shortfalls elsewhere in the town.

Policy 9: Equipped Children’s Play Areas

A two-tier hierarchy of equipped play provision will be established as follows:

- Strategic play sites: South Park and North Park
- Local play sites: all other equipped play sites.

The Council will seek to provide 1 equipped play site for every 450 children under 12 years old, and to locate the sites so that 85% of children under 12 years old are within 10 minutes walk (666 m) of a site.

The type of play provision at each site will be regularly reviewed, and wherever possible, adjustment made to reflect the wishes of the local community.

The quality and safety of equipment will be inspected regularly to ensure compliance with the appropriate standards, and the management regimes will include for the most frequent cleansing regime.

The Council will work with residents to address any anti-social behaviour or fear of crime issues on a case-by-case basis.

75. Older children can walk or cycle a bit further than the under 12s to reach suitable outdoor recreation facilities. Also, having an attractive recreation area close to where young people live can help them to keep occupied, and reduce their levels of anti-social behaviour.
76. The Council's approach therefore is to provide a young persons recreation site (e.g. kick-about, skateboarding or fishing) within 15 minutes walk (1000 m) of almost all homes in the main built-up area and to improve the quality of these sites. These will generally be within existing informal recreation areas, parks or in the case of fishing, within natural and semi-natural green spaces. The Council will need to provide an additional four sites to meet the proposed quantity standard in Policy 7 and improve the quality of three existing sites to meet the quality standard. The areas of search for new provision will be concentrated in locations that are current lacking any provision, such as Faverdale, Skerne Park, Harrowgate Hill, Haughton South and College/Hummersknott.
77. The Council is also working to increase the range of facilities available, taking account of the input of young people into specific schemes. A dedicated skateboarding area is being installed at South Park and a four-cross (downhill cycling) track is planned at West Park. These will complement the multi-use games areas being provided across the urban area and temporary events like the mobile climbing wall and skateboarding in the Market Square.

Policy 10: Recreation Areas for Young People

Good quality open spaces with facilities specifically attractive to young people will be secured across the urban area, within easy reach of people's homes, in consultation with young people and the potential neighbours of the sites.

The Council will seek to provide 1 recreation area of at least 3 star quality for every 500 young people under 17 years old, and to bring 99% of the population within 15 minutes walk (or 1000m) of a young people's recreation area.

The nature of the provision will be regularly reviewed, taking account of any feedback from young people, local residents and community safety personnel.

The Strategy for Outdoor Sports Facilities

78. Due to the recognised mental and physical well-being and health benefits that taking part in outdoor sport can bring, a key element of the strategy for outdoor sports facilities is that sites should not be too far from people's homes. In Darlington, the lack of public access onto many school playing fields and private club sites can often be as much of a barrier to use, so the strategy for publicly-owned sites is to focus on improving the levels of public access to sites, as much as it is to address any geographical gaps in provision (Policy 11 below).
79. Playing pitches are a very specific element of outdoor sports provision, and are the subject of a separate related Playing Pitch Strategy. It is sufficient for this document to set out only the overall level of provision that the Council wishes to achieve (Policy 12 below). This standard implies the retention of all existing pitches, including the 2 pitches on the former Beaumont Hill School sites and the 1 pitch at the former Springfield Primary School.

Policy 11: Outdoor Sports Facilities

The Council will work towards securing outdoor sports facilities within 1000m of every home in the urban, and will work with local schools to secure greater community access in the evenings and at weekends to school playing fields, and with private sports clubs to increase the opportunities for general public use of their facilities.

Policy 12: Playing Pitch Standard

Playing pitches will be maintained and improved to achieve 1.05ha of accessible playing pitches per 1000 people for the Borough as a whole.

The Strategy for Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces

80. The strategy for natural and semi-natural green spaces builds on the significant progress that has been made in establishing, promoting and enhancing Local Nature Reserves, accessible community woodlands and other natural and semi-natural green spaces in recent years. It seeks to tackle the gaps in the local hierarchy of sites, to increase community involvement and interest in the management and maintenance of key sites and to protect and enhance the intrinsic local biodiversity. In partnership with the Tees Forest, it also seeks to increase the amount of community forest at the urban fringe, to increase sustainable access to quality countryside, to raise the quantity and quality of wildlife habitats within the Borough and in turn, to increase public awareness of the natural world.
81. The Countryside team will also work closely with Community Services to introduce and maintain more semi-wild areas within existing landscaped areas, and with Planning colleagues to secure the retention and provision of natural and semi-natural green spaces as part of new developments. Wildlife is important in all open spaces and a move to incorporate more semi-wild areas in more managed landscaped areas will increase overall biodiversity, Policy 13 will help achieve this aim.

Policy 13: Semi Wild Areas

The Council will ensure that existing landscaped areas where appropriate will be managed as semi-wild areas. Further to this, the Council will seek to secure the retention and provision of natural and semi-natural green spaces as part of new developments.

82. The Skerningham/Barmpton Lane area is identified as a location where a strategic countryside site could be developed, due in part to the area's existing high landscape value, which attracts visitors from throughout the Borough and beyond. It is also recognised that there is a priority for the creation of a southerly located community woodland to provide access to quality countryside for the south of the town as well as a balanced approach to the provision of these facilities (Policy14). It is proposed to continue to add to the existing stock of 7 Local Nature Reserves, giving local communities a strong role in their management and maintenance and to develop the facilities for local people, including children and young people, at existing sites like West Park and Maidendale.
83. The proposed quantity standard (see Policy 15 below) is a long-term aspiration, as it is 15% above the existing level. It will require an additional 39 ha of open space to be managed or enhanced as natural or semi-natural open space. However, large scale additions like the community woodland at Merrybent and incremental additions arising from changes to the management of existing urban open space sites could see significant progress towards this in the short to medium term.
84. The quality standard will require improvement of 6 sites to at least 3* standard and an additional 3 sites to at least 4* standard. Meeting the accessibility standard will require the identification of new sites, or changes to the management of existing sites in the heart

of the urban area. Habitat creation as part of the Central Park redevelopment represents one of the most significant opportunities.

85. Further detail on the plans for countryside sites, for promoting public access to quality countryside, for sustaining and enhancing biodiversity and promoting wider community appreciation of flora and fauna will appear in the related Countryside Strategy and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, due to be published late in 2007 and early in 2008, respectively.

Policy 14: Strategic Countryside Site

A strategic countryside site will be developed in the Skerningham/Barmpton Lane area.

Policy 15: Standards for the Provision of Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces

The Council will work towards a standard of natural and semi-natural green space provision of 5ha/1000 population, such that 60% of the urban population is within 9 minutes (600m) walk of at least one accessible site.

The quality of semi-natural and natural green spaces will be raised so that 75% of sites for which this is the primary purpose are 3* quality or above, and 20% are of 4* quality or above.

Where appropriate, the Council will encourage the use of or allow semi-natural green space to develop as an interim use for sites that awaiting development.

Policy 16: Developing community woodland at the urban fringe

The Council will continue to identify opportunities for large scale planting and habitat creation on the edge of town in support of the Tees Forest initiative.

The Strategy for Informal Recreation Open Space

86. As the largest single type of open space both by number of sites and total area of provision, informal open space warrants specific mention, particularly as it is the subsidiary purpose of many other open space types, e.g. parks and children and young people's provision.
87. The standard for informal recreation provision (see Policy 17 below) has been set to allow for up to 14.6 ha reduction in the total area of all informal open space. This is to allow for some loss of existing informal recreation areas that are of little value to local communities, to allow for incremental losses of non-beneficial parts of larger open spaces, e.g. to neighbouring householders. Potential losses of informal recreation space that can arise with the fencing in of education sites could put pressure on achievement of the open space standard; liaison with schools will be needed to address this.
88. However, because informal recreation sites are usually the closest kind of open spaces to peoples' homes, at 300 m the accessibility standard is the lowest of all open space types. Also, the quality standard has been set moderately high, with a fifth of all sites to be good (4*) quality. A total of 27 sites will need to be improved or removed from informal open space use for this quality standard to be met.
89. A list of the sites identified as being of low value and low quality are set out in Appendix 3.
90. The Council will look at areas of informal recreational open space in terms of their potential for the strategic enhancement of biodiversity and adjust existing maintenance regimes in order to help address this agenda.

Policy 17: Informal open space standards

The Council will sustain informal recreation open space at a level of 6.0ha/1000 population, such that there is at least one accessible informal recreation open space within 300m of 99% of all homes in the main built up area, and the quality of all the spaces is of at least 3* rating, with 20%

being of at least a 4* rating.

Strategies for All Other Types of Open Space

91. Allotments, green corridors, landscape amenity spaces, cemeteries and civic spaces complete the picture for open spaces provision. It is not appropriate to provide quantity standards for these specific types of open spaces, as the factors that control the appropriate quantity of provision will vary within the urban area. For example, civic spaces are need to be centrally located for maximum accessibility, whilst allotments must be provided where demand exists, and this varies depending of the age profile of individual communities and the availability of private garden space.
92. However, the accessibility of allotments is important and the quality of all sites is similarly so, because they all contribute to the overall quality of the urban landscape and the 'feel' of the town.
93. The proposed standards are set out in Policy 18 below. The high quality standards set for civic spaces is in recognition that these area are a focus of community pride and may form the basis of the initial impressions of Darlington of visitors and potential investors. The relatively low standards for landscape amenity space is because several of these sites are privately owned, and the Council's influence over their quality much reduced.

Policy 18: Provision Standards By Open Space Type

Within the main urban area, the overall provision of specific types of open space will be maintained and improved to achieve the following standards:

- (i) Allotments: 95% population within 15 minutes walk (1000m) of at least one allotment site.
- (ii) Green corridors: All primary sites to be 3* quality or above.
- (iii) Landscape amenity: 70% of sites to be 3* quality or above.
- (iv) Cemeteries: All publicly accessible sites to be 4* quality or above.
- (v) Civic spaces: All sites to be 5* quality.

Open Space Provision Associated with New Development

New Development

94. The achievement of the Council's aspirations for open space depends not just on the investment that the Council is able to make into open spaces but also on appropriate provision being secured in association with new housing and other developments. There are ongoing commitments to new housing development at Firth Moor, West Park and Neasham Road, with sites such as Central Park, Yiewsley Drive (Mowden), the Technical College (Cleveland Terrace), Merrybent, Alderman Leach and Beaumont Hill/Springfield also likely to be developed within the next 10 years. New employment development is also anticipated at Central Park, Faverdale and Morton Palms over the next 10 years or so.
95. Policies 19 to 21 set out the planning policy framework that will underpin the Council's efforts to secure new open spaces, contributions towards the improvements of existing open spaces and contributions to the ongoing management and maintenance of open spaces (known as commuted sums), in association with new developments. The approach recognises that the residents of new developments are likely to use both local open spaces and strategic sites, and that any developer contributions should reflect this.
96. New housing development is particularly targeted, as the residents will directly benefit from new and existing open spaces but increasingly, the value to employees, to potential investors and to the image of the town of quality green spaces within and around employment developments is also being recognised.

97. In comparison to the existing Local Plan, the threshold for the size of residential development with which open space or a contribution will be sought has been lowered from 10 to 5 dwellings and encompasses all open space rather than only play areas. On the basis of 2005 figures, this would bring in contributions from an additional 30 dwellings per year.

Policy 19: Open space provision associated with new residential development

New residential development of five or more dwellings will be required to make provision for accessible open space for sport and recreation, to meet the needs of the future residents of the development. This will be assessed by reference to the standards set out in the relevant policies in this strategy. The form in which provision is made will be as appropriate to the location and type of development, and in accordance with the guidelines set out in the forthcoming The Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document within the Local Development Framework.

98. Policy 20 below explains to potential developers where the Council will start from in negotiations on open space provision. It highlights the presumption in favour of on-site provision and how the findings of the local needs assessment will be used to inform the process. Where financial contributions to off-site provision are accepted, the funds may be 'top sliced' to provide a small contribution to strategic open spaces used and valued by all the Borough's residents.
99. The period for which commuted sums will be sought is 10 years, reflecting the Council's existing Local Plan policies and supplementary planning guidance on commuted sums for equipped children's play provision. It is also similar to the requirements of other authorities in the region.
100. New guidelines, in the form of a LDF Supplementary Planning Document SPD will need to be prepared, setting out exactly how capital payments and commuted sums will be calculated.

Policy 20: Securing appropriate open spaces and their maintenance

The quantity and type of open space provision that will be sought to meet the requirements of Policy 17 will be determined on a site-by-site basis, having regard to any identified shortfalls in provision in the area, taking into account the projected population arising from the proposed development. Wherever possible, this provision should be made on site, and will be secured by means of a condition attached to any grant of planning permission.

Where no such shortfalls exist, or where the area available would be unsuitable to accommodate the open space type for which a shortfall has been identified, the Council will seek a capital sum, equivalent to the cost of providing open space to meet the needs of future residents, for the improvement in the quality of existing open spaces in the area, for the enhancement of locally important open spaces and the strategic parks identified in Policy 7 that the occupants of the development can reasonably be expected to use, and to secure the provision of new areas of open space.

Where the Council is asked to adopt areas of open space and play facilities provided in association with new residential development principally for the use of residents of the development, a capital sum will be sought from the developer to cover the maintenance of the facilities for a period of 10 years.

Any capital sums sought from a developer will be secured by means of a section 106 agreement.

101. Policy 21 (below) provides a stronger framework for negotiating green space provision or contributions towards provision off-site in association with some employment development. It encourages developers to include natural and semi-natural elements in any schemes they draw up and to recognise the role that spaces around buildings can have in providing routes to/from the countryside and main built up area, e.g. by designing in green corridors. The policy is limited to developments on strategic

employment sites and these will be identified, in due course, in the Darlington Gateway Strategy, which is currently being prepared separately.

Policy 21: Providing open space with employment development

The Council will seek the provision of accessible greenspace as part of any developments on strategic employment sites. These greenspaces must be laid out and maintained to:

- (i) achieve a high standard of design and landscaping, particularly on prominent frontages;
 - (ii) reflect any pedestrian desire lines through the site;
 - (iii) provide a local informal recreational space for employees; and
 - (iii) contribute to the achievement of the overall open space standard set out in Policy 5.
- The use of natural and semi-natural features and native species within the landscaping scheme is encouraged.

Exceptionally, where provision cannot be made on site, the Council may accept a contribution towards the enhancement of other existing open spaces nearby.

The Design of Open Spaces

102. Open spaces are primarily for the benefit of the local people. Community involvement in the design and enhancement of open spaces is crucial to providing spaces that are valued and meet local needs, but good design also plays its part. A well designed open space is more likely to be a well used, cherished resource, valued by many, whilst poorly designed open spaces can be underused, neglected, and the focus of antisocial behaviour. By careful design, open spaces can also make a significant contribution to more sustainable living environments, e.g. by providing shade, filtration of air, wildlife habitats and sustainable drainage.
103. Policy 22 sets out the design matters that should be taken into account in creating and enhancing open spaces. The assistance of a suitably qualified professional designer is recommended if a new space is to be created.

Policy 22: The Design of Open Spaces

New and existing open spaces should:

- (i) reflect local distinctiveness and existing townscape context; and
- (ii) be well connected to the surrounding development that it is intended to serve; and
- (iii) be accessible to all; and
- (iv) wherever possible, integrate a range of open space uses, providing a wide range of activities; and
- (v) reflect and integrate pedestrian and cycle desire lines; and
- (iv) be overlooked by neighbouring properties, rather than overlooking them.

They should also include clear boundaries, entrances and gateways, the retention of existing landscape features, tree and shrub planting using native species, wildlife habitats and sustainable drainage.

The Approach for Villages

104. There is generally good accessibility to a range of open spaces in Middleton St. George, Hurworth and Heighington but the quantity, type and accessibility of the open spaces varies markedly between the settlements. The strategy proposed for enhancing open space provision in the villages is one, therefore, that is very much based on working in partnership with local communities and the Parish Councils to respond to specific needs identified by the local community and helping to sustain and enhance the existing open spaces. The scale and nature of provision will be appropriate to the size of the settlement; villagers will be expected to travel to Darlington for facilities, such as strategic parks and countryside sites where the scale of investment is only justified by higher levels of forecast usage.

105. Planning policies 19 to 21 above will also apply to the villages and where new development is proposed, every effort will be made to involve the local community (including young people) and Parish Council at the pre-application stage so that their wishes regarding open space provision or enhancement can be reflected in the final form of development submitted for planning permission. The approach taken on each application will accord with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement in Planning.
106. Planning policies 3 to 5 will also encompass open space sites within the villages. When this approach is translated into the Local Development Framework, the open space sites that have been included in the audit will appear on the Proposals Map, affording them protection that is currently lacking through the urban-only focus of existing Local Plan Policy E3.
107. Specific issues highlighted by the audit, e.g. the lack of access to outdoor sports facilities in Hurworth, are addressed through the action plan.

Policy 23: An Approach for the Villages

The Council will work in partnership with local people and the Parish Councils to provide and enhance open spaces in the villages according to locally identified needs.

Planning policies 3 to 5 above and 19 to 21 above will be applied to developments affecting open spaces or new development respectively.

The Approach to Public Participation and Consultation

108. The achievement of the Council's aspirations for new and management of existing open spaces depends on the continued support of local people; this can only be achieved through effective public consultation. The consultation process initiated in the Open Space Strategy will be continued by regular community consultation in line with the Statement of Community Involvement and the principles of the Community Strategy.
109. Policy 24 below provides a commitment that the Council will consult the general public and concerned organisations on any newly proposed open space or the continuing management of existing open space.

Policy 24: An Approach to Public Consultation

The Council is committed to maintaining a dialogue with local people and users of all of its open spaces and recreation facilities and will continue to consult on all proposals for new, improved or changes to facilities through a variety of means.

110. Local organisations and especially 'Friends of' groups will continue to be supported and the establishment of new ones encouraged to represent the views of local people and help guide the future development of facilities. The views of the wider public towards open space and recreation provision will continue to be monitored through regular public consultation as set out in Policy 24 and the results used to inform the direction of the strategy.

RESOURCES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Resources

111. The resources for realising this vision and associated action plans will be drawn in from several sources. There is £1.5 million of capital and revenue funding available through the Local Area Agreement for physical improvements and community engagement in environmental projects. The Council will also use its own Capital Programme to supplement this, and as the opportunities arise, will bid for additional capital resources from the Big Lottery Fund. Open spaces that are of low value and are not required to meet any identified needs will be considered for disposal, with any money raised from sales helping to support the management and maintenance of remaining valued open spaces. Financial contributions will also be secured from private developers for the provision, maintenance and enhancement of open spaces, in association with new housing in the area.
112. Apart from the Local Area Agreement funding which is secured, the other financial resources for realising the strategy's vision and implementing the associated action plan are likely to vary throughout the life of the strategy, depending on other pressure on the Council's own resources, the amount of new development that comes forward, and the varying nature of the programmes that Big Lottery and other external grant regimes support. For these reasons, the achievement of the strategy's aims is seen as a long-term objective, with delivery of projects over the short to medium term likely to fluctuate according to the availability of resources on an annual basis.

Implementation

113. Implementation of this strategy over the next 10 years or so will be driven forward by close management and monitoring of the accompanying Open Spaces Action Plan. Responsibility for this will lie primarily with the Council's Assistant Director (Environmental Services) and will be largely achieved through the area teams set up under Street Scene (see para. 15(g)), in partnership with other Council departments and the local community.
114. Implementation of the strategy also relies on the consistent application of the planning policies in making decisions on planning applications and the responsibility for this lies with the Planning Services Manager, and Planning Applications Committee.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

Strategy Review

115. Once adopted, it is intended that this strategy will remain in place for up to 10 years (to 2017), with a mid term review programmed for 2012. However, the planning policy elements of the document will, in due course, have to be integrated into the appropriate Local Development Framework documents and may be subject to changes as they proceed through this statutory process. The only circumstances in which any planning policy changes that have to be made will trigger a review of the strategy is if they would seriously affect the achievement of the Open Space Strategy as a whole. Otherwise, only a reprint with the amended policies would be required

Monitoring the Strategy and the Action Plan

116. The action plan arising from this strategy will be monitored twice a year by a steering group made up of appropriate Council officers and rolled forward biannually. Monitoring reports will be presented to the Council's Environment Scrutiny Committee annually and headline indicators will feed into other monitoring exercises, such as for the Local Area Agreement and the Local Development Framework.

Updating Audit Information

117. The majority of the audit data will be updated on an annual basis. However, because of the volume of survey work required to update the quality and value assessments, it is proposed to update these on a 3 year cycle, such that only a third of sites are assessed in any one year.