

Outdoor sports facilities

Definition

- 7.1 Outdoor sports facilities is a wide-ranging category of open space and includes natural or artificial surfaces either publicly or privately owned which are used for sport and recreation. Examples include playing pitches, athletics tracks, bowling greens and golf courses with the primary purpose of participation in outdoor sports.
- 7.2 Outdoor water sports facilities are considered separately at the end of this section.

Picture 7.1 – Laleham Park



Strategic context and consultation

- 7.3 There is currently no local playing pitch strategy. However, the Local Plan recognises the importance of playing fields and sports pitches and as a consequence these types of open space are protected from development due to their recreational value.
- 7.4 A policy on sports provision for the development of team sports in Spelthorne's parks was put to and resolved by Council members in June 2004 through a recognised need to develop management plans for parks. The proposal was to proceed with self-management for certain pitches *“but to ensure that the open space is protected for the benefit of the local community.”*
- 7.5 Consultation throughout the study has highlighted a number of issues with regards to outdoor sports facilities:

- the demand for pitches (mainly football) is never satisfied. The pressure, at times, to delete pitches in the heart of residential areas should be reconsidered because their use for sport does not preclude a general open space use for the rest of the time
- further increase in pitches might be achieved by closer liaison with the schools and use of existing sites with physical capacity for more pitches.

7.6 A number of outdoor sports facilities across the Borough were cited as facilities frequently used by those respondents of the household survey. The most popular sites named included Ashford Recreation Ground (Clockhouse Lane) (site # 33).

Setting Provision Standards

7.7 In setting local standards for Outdoor Sports Facilities there is a need to take into account any national or local standards, current provision, other local authority standards for appropriate comparison, site assessments and consultation on local needs.

7.8 However a quantity standard for this typology (which includes golf courses) is set for broad planning need only, as applying a quantity standard for surplus and deficiencies of outdoor sports facilities would be meaningless when considering the wide range and size of outdoor sports facilities from golf courses to bowling greens.

7.9 In line with PPG17 Companion Guidance notes, private sites such as Kempton Park Racecourse and Staines FC Ground have been excluded from the audit.

Quantity

7.10 The current provision of outdoor sports facilities is 214.03 hectares in total across the Borough. This includes the three golf courses in the Borough: Ashford Golf Course, Hazelwood Golf Course and Sunbury Golf Course. These sites have limited public access but have been included within the local standard calculations.

**RECOMMENDED
LOCAL QUANTITY
STANDARD**

**2.37 ha per 1,000
population**

7.11 The current provision of outdoor sports facilities per 1,000 population is 2.37 ha per 1,000 population. The NPFA provides minimum standards for the provision of outdoor playing space. The standard recommends a minimum of 1.6 - 1.8 ha per 1,000 population of outdoor sports provision, covering playing pitches, bowling greens, tennis courts and athletics tracks. These are national standards and do not account for the local context or the demographics of the local area.

7.12 The Local Plan has referred to sports pitches by stating that it is important *'to avoid any loss of public or private pitches'*, and that despite a good provision of open land for informal open space, there is only limited scope to use these for sports pitches.

7.13 Like other types of open space, opinion is split between whether current provision is adequate - 48% of respondents felt the provision of outdoor sports facilities was 'about right'. However, more qualitative consultation indicated, for example, a lack of football pitches (particularly junior pitches), youth facilities and Multi Use Games Areas. This may suggest some locational and specific sport deficiencies. For example, it is noted that provision in Halliford and Sunbury West is disproportionately high because 30% of overall outdoor sports facility provision is within that ward.

SECTION 7 – OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

- 7.14 Figures suggest that the current standards should be retained, therefore a local standard should be set, including golf courses, of 2.37 ha per 1000 population. Since this typology encompasses a broad variety of outdoor sports facilities it should be recognised that application for surplus and deficiency calculations would be meaningless and that standards should be set for broad planning need only.
- 7.15 Any increased provision could be met by enhancing accessibility to existing sports facilities given the audit includes all school pitches, some of which are not currently available for local community use.

Quality

- 7.16 The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) suggests benchmarks for the quality of this type of open space. These include criteria such as gradients, orientation, ancillary accommodation, planting and community safety.
- 7.17 There is no local standard for the quality of outdoor sports facilities.
- 7.18 Overall, from the site visits the quality of outdoor sports facilities appears very positive with all sites considered very good, good or average. Sites visited included Holmes Place and London Irish RFC where it is acknowledged that whilst of very good quality they are more likely to be accessed by spectators than the general public taking part in any sporting activity. Elmsway Tennis Club was the only site visited that was rated as being of average quality: all other outdoor sports sites within the borough were considered to be of good quality. These predominantly consisted of school sites, which will benefit from a regular maintenance programme.
- 7.19 From the consultation with clubs, quality of the sports pitches throughout the Borough was thought to be quite low due to drainage and maintenance issues. The NPFA has previously highlighted the problems but these have not yet been addressed.
- 7.20 The public perception however is of good quality outdoor pitches but whose ancillary facilities need improving.
- 7.21 A quality standard for outdoor sports facilities should include elements of the public's aspirations and other local and national standards. This local standard provides the vision for any new provision and also a quality benchmark for existing outdoor sports facilities.

QUALITY VISION STANDARD

“All outdoor sports facilities, including ancillary accommodation, should be free from dog fouling, vandalism, litter and anti social behaviour. The layout and design should follow ‘safer by design’ principles. Sites should be accessible and should follow design and maintenance standards set by the relevant national governing bodies of sport.”

- 7.22 The Council should ensure that all sports facilities are of sufficient quality and accessibility for them to be considered fit for their intended use.

Accessibility

- 7.23 With regards to accessibility there are also no definitive national or local standards.
- 7.24 The level of accessibility of outdoor sports facilities is relatively low in comparison to other facilities within the borough, influenced by restricted levels of access to school and privately owned sites. In many cases, the quality for these sites is high as a result

of their limited availability outside of the hours of school or sports club use. Results therefore show that site access to sports facilities could be improved. The best and worst sites are similar to those identified in the 'quality' section.

- 7.25 Results from the household survey showed a varied response to the question of how people travel to outdoor sports facilities, with both walking and driving equally popular. 75% of respondents indicated a drive time of 10 minutes as reasonable. Of those who indicated that they walk to sports facilities most frequently, 75% walk up to five minutes.

**RECOMMENDED
LOCAL
ACCESSIBILITY
STANDARD**

10 minute drive

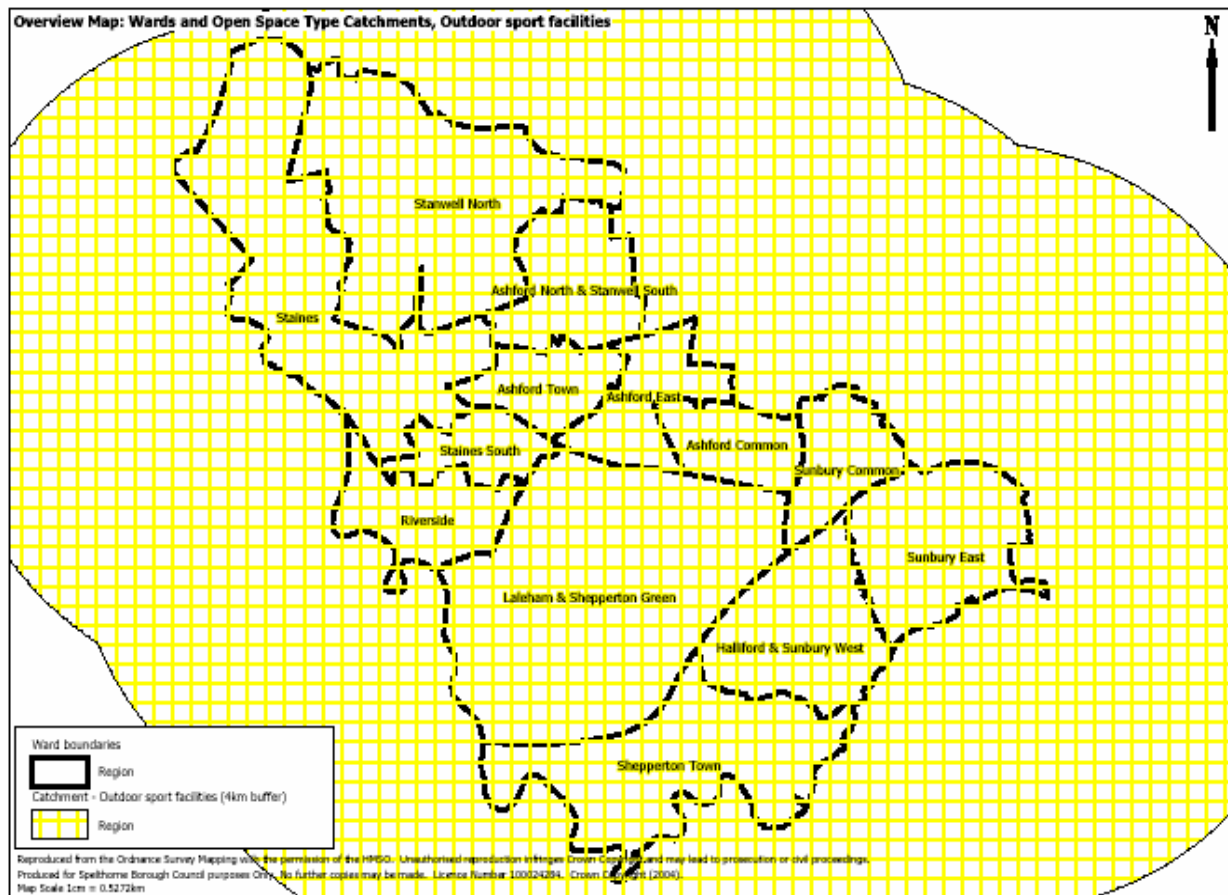
(4km)

- 7.26 We recommend that for the purpose of setting an accessibility standard, driving is taken as the mode of transport in line with other local authorities and national standards. Therefore a local standard of a 10 minute drivetime is recommended.

Applying provision standards – identifying geographical areas

- 7.27 In order to identify geographical areas of importance and those areas with local needs we apply the quantity and accessibility standards together. The quantity standards identify quantitative surplus and deficiencies and the accessibility standards will help to determine where those deficiencies are of high importance. Quantity standards have been set for outdoor sports facilities for planning purposes only in this study. Further research on local demand for sports facilities by sport should be assessed through a Playing Pitch Strategy.
- 7.28 Figure 7.1 below presents an overview of accessibility to outdoor sports facilities. It clearly illustrates that residents throughout the borough are within the desired accessibility catchment of this type of provision, a 10 minute drivetime (equivalent to 4km). However, it should be noted that this includes school sports pitches and golf courses, many of which are not currently publicly accessible.
- 7.29 In particular, consultation has highlighted a demand for junior football pitches and it is recommended that further investigation through a playing pitch strategy (to address the pressures on playing fields) is undertaken along with a specific sports facility strategy. Specific studies on each facility type will enable surplus and deficiencies to be identified more accurately in accordance with the local needs.

Map 7.1 – overview of surplus/deficiencies of outdoor sports facilities across the Borough and 4km buffer



Site Visit Value Assessment – Identifying Specific Sites

- 7.30 Assessing quality and value is fundamental to effective planning of outdoor sports facilities. This can be done simply through comparing value with quality or in assessing all options and combinations when comparing quality, accessibility and usage of sites.
- 7.31 The popularity and value of outdoor sports facilities in Spelthorne is clear with only one site, Halliford School Playing Fields, having low usage. With the majority of the remaining facilities having high usage. This suggests outdoor sports facilities have a vital role to play and, as a priority, consideration should therefore be given to improving those sites, which are of poorer quality or accessibility. In addition, it is important to improve those sites where the quality of the overall site is good but the actual pitch is poor.
- 7.32 There are a number of sites which have been rated high for both quality and accessibility and high level of usage. These sites, listed below, are considered high value and should be protected:
 - Holmes Place and London Irish RFC, Sunbury (site # 14)
 - St Paul’s Catholic College (site # 15)

- Sunbury Manor School (site # 16)
- Ashford Recreation Ground (Clockhouse Lane) (site # 33)
- Thamesmead School (site # 63)
- Sunbury Golf Course (site # 92)
- Ashford Manor Golf Course (site # 100)
- Spelthorne Sports Club (site # 114)
- Littleton Recreation Ground (site # 119).

7.33 Despite the high usage and quality of many sites, there are several which have average or poor accessibility. These sites need the accessibility issues to be addressed in order to maintain the levels of usage. These sites are:

- Elmsway Tennis Club (privately accessible) (site # 34)
- Sunbury Sports Association (privately accessible) (site # 96)
- Hazelwood Golf Course (site # 152).

7.34 As previously mentioned there is one site where the usage level is low and yet the quality and access is considered good (Halliford School Playing Fields – site # 64). Reasons for low usage should be further explored. This is a recently created site.

Outdoor Water Sports Facilities

7.35 Under the title of outdoor sports facilities we were also asked to look at Outdoor Waters Sports in order to recognise the Borough's considerable water area.

7.36 14% of the total land area in the Borough is made up of water. Many of these extensive areas, such as reservoirs and formal gravel pits, are used for various sports, particularly fishing and sailing. The River Thames also runs along the boundary of the Borough and the 15 mile river frontage has multiple recreational uses such as rowing, canoeing, sailing and river cruises.

7.37 There is a total of 470 ha of this type of open space across the borough (excluding the River Thames), but it is not distributed evenly across the borough. Nine wards have no provision of outdoor water sports facilities and 80% of provision is found in Laleham and Shepperton Green (made up principally from the Queen Mary Reservoir). In addition, it is worth noting that the British Disabled Waterski Association is based just outside of the Borough in Wraysbury.

7.38 Although there are no national standards and it is not considered appropriate to set standards for this type of open space it is important to recognise the recreational opportunities that these sites provide and how they provide additional visual amenity value.

7.39 Out of the 11 sites only Desborough Sailing Club (site # 85) and Halliford Mere Lake (site # 84) reflect the pattern where a high level of use would normally have a good or very good quality and accessibility rating. These sites are of significant value and should be protected.

- 7.40 The remaining sites all show low/no usage levels with average or poor quality and accessibility ratings. The more average sites were concentrated on the gravel pits in Laleham and Shepperton Green, Queen Mary Reservoir and Littleton Sailing Club. There is a need to enhance the quality and for accessibility in order to address the low usage.

Summary

Spelthorne is currently well provided for in terms of the space it has containing outdoor sports facilities.

A minimum provision standard of 2.37 ha per 1,000 population has been applied Borough-wide reflecting the strategic significance of outdoor sports facilities. Currently the level of provision Borough-wide is adequate, however there are deficiencies at ward level. There is a significant amount of water area in the borough, which can be used for a variety of outdoor sports and should be taken into consideration when looking at the level of outdoor sports facility provision in Spelthorne.

Generally the quality, usage and accessibility of sites of this type is good throughout the Borough. The Council should work towards maintaining these standards into the future.

Allotments

Introduction

The use and longer term management of Allotments has been the subject of a separate study by Bridge IMC for the Council and the findings of this area by PMP needs to be read in the context of that more detailed work.

Definition

- 8.1 This includes all forms of allotments with a primary purpose to provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion. This type of open space may also include urban farms.

Picture 8.1 – Allotments, Laleham



- 8.2 There are a total of 12 allotment sites across the Borough: these are based in Ashford, Sunbury, Stanwell, Shepperton and Staines.

Strategic context and consultation

- 8.3 Like other open space types, allotments can provide a number of wider benefits to the community as well as the primary use of growing produce. These include:
- bringing together people of different cultural backgrounds
 - improving physical and mental health
 - providing a source of recreation

SECTION 8 - ALLOTMENTS

- contributing to green and open space.

8.4 Consultation highlighted that local residents use many of these allotment sites on a regular basis, particularly Halliford Allotments.

Setting Provision Standards

8.5 In setting local standards for allotments there is a need to take into account any national or local standards, current provision, other local authority standards for appropriate comparison, site assessments and consultation on local needs.

Quantity

8.6 The audit of allotments identified 20.01 hectares in total across the Borough. This equates to 0.22 ha per 1,000 population.

8.7 The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners suggest a national standard of 20 allotments per 1,000 households (ie 20 allotments per 2,200 people (2.2 per house) or 1 allotment per 200 people. This equates to 0.125 ha per 1,000 population based on an average plot size of 250 square metres. The 1969 Thorpe Report suggests 0.2 ha per 1,000 population.

8.8 46% of the household survey respondents felt that allotments were important. However 20% of respondents stated they had no opinion on the provision of allotments. In addition, 40% of the household survey respondents felt the allotment provision is 'about right'. These results suggest that there is a sufficient provision of allotments.

**RECOMMENDED
LOCAL QUANTITY
STANDARD**

*To be based on the
findings of the
allotment study by
Bridge IMC*

8.9 The study has demonstrated a mixed usage of sites with some sites well used and others neglected. Therefore, the Council will look to promote the allotments to determine future use.

8.10 Current level of provision is 0.22 ha per 1,000 population. This is in line with standards set for other local authorities and is twice the recommended standard of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.

QUALITY VISION STANDARD

“Allotments should be free from dog fouling, vandalism, litter and anti-social behaviour. Where appropriate, access pathways and signage should be clearly provided and well maintained”.

Quality

8.11 There are no definitive national or local quality standards for the provision of allotments and community gardens.

8.12 From the site visits, the overall quality of allotments is average. This was the assessment rating given to the majority of the sites, such as Shortwood Allotments (site # 130). Only Shepperton Village Allotments (site # 5) and Chatterern Hill Allotments (site # 129) were rated as 'good'; conversely Commened Road allotments (site # 46) was rated as 'poor' quality and described as 'neglected' and 'overgrown'.

8.13 Consultation revealed that the quality of the actual plots is the responsibility of the plot holder and most residents believe these are well managed and well maintained.

- 8.14 Council officers consider self management of allotments to work well and can improve the overall quality of the sites. Shepperton Village Allotment Gardens is a particular example of good practice.
- 8.15 As supported by the site assessments, allotments also provide some ecological benefits to the local area.
- 8.16 This recommended local quality standard should be the benchmark for existing allotments. It also provides the quality vision for any new provision.

Accessibility

- 8.17 With regards to accessibility there are no definitive national or local standards for this type of open space.
- 8.18 The overall site accessibility of allotments and community gardens was considered average to poor with only one site rated good: Shepperton Village Gardens allotments. The most poorly indicated sites in terms of accessibility were the allotments in Halliford and Sunbury (off Croysdale Avenue – site # 124), Chattern Hill Allotments and Groveley Road Allotments (site # 98).
- 8.19 From the household survey, half of allotment users walked to allotments. 75% of those people suggested a walk of five minutes as the most reasonable. Very few respondents indicated access by cycle or public transport.

- 8.20 Considering the above and the locality of many allotments it is therefore recommended that the accessibility standard is a five minute walk time. However given the minimal response of allotment users compared to other open space users, this standard should be treated with caution even though it is similar to other allotment users in other local authority areas.

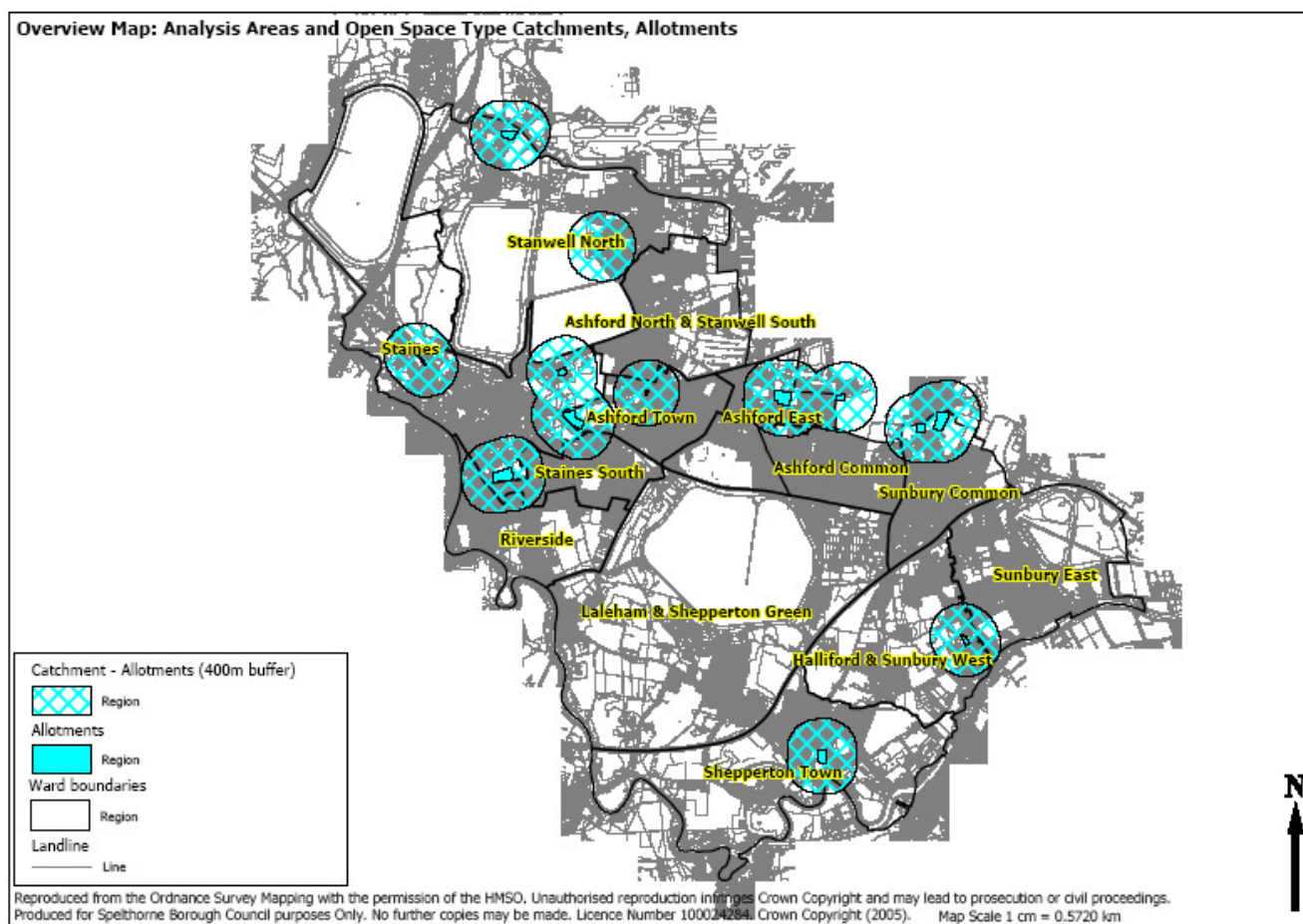
**RECOMMENDED LOCAL
ACCESSIBILITY
STANDARD**

No local standard set.

Applying Provision Standards – Identifying Geographical Areas

- 8.21 In order to identify geographical areas of importance and those areas with required local needs we have applied both the quantity and accessibility standards together. The quantity standards identify quantitative surplus and deficiencies and the accessibility standards will help to determine where those deficiencies are of high importance.
- 8.22 When analysing the application of quantity and accessibility standards it is clear that the deficiencies in both are in the same places, as shown in Figure 8. 1, as per the distribution of these sites across the borough. Specific areas of deficiency are:
 - Stanwell North
 - Ashford North and Stanwell South
 - Ashford Common.

Map 8.1 Overview of surplus/deficiencies of Allotments in the borough



- 8.23 However allotments are a demand-led open space type ie there is no point in providing allotments in these areas if there is no demand for them. Therefore it is recommended that the results and findings from the Bridge IMC Allotments Study are considered before any standards are set for this typology. This study will highlight any areas of surplus/ deficiencies with regards to allotment provision across the borough.
- 8.24 Initial findings from that study suggest that there is still a demand for allotments in the Borough, and although there are some redundant pitches within allotment sites, these are randomly located and therefore of limited value in terms of re-designation to address other open space typology deficiencies, as individual plots will not be of an adequate size or easily accessible.
- 8.25 The Council are looking to produce an allotment development strategy to more effectively market allotment sites, linking to the healthy lifestyles agenda, the aim of which is to maximise usage of existing allotment plots in the Borough.

Site Visit Value Assessment – Identifying Specific Sites

- 8.26 Assessing quality and value is fundamental to effective planning for open space. This can be done simply through comparing value with quality or in more detail by assessing all options and combinations when comparing quality, accessibility and usage of sites.

- 8.27 Most sites with a low level of use would have an average or poor quality and accessibility rating. This is because the factors are related and interlinked.
- 8.28 However there is only one out of the six sites assessed (Shepperton Village Gardens) that follows the pattern of high usage with good quality and accessibility. The value of this site is high and therefore should be protected.
- 8.29 The Chattern Hill Allotments were rated as good quality with high usage, but the accessibility was considered low due to poor signage. This and any other accessibility issues should be addressed to ensure the usage levels are maintained with the potential to increase the overall value of the site.
- 8.30 The Commercial Road Allotments have high usage levels and average accessibility but the quality rating was low. This quality rating should improve when focussing on accessibility and would benefit from further analysis.

Summary

Allotments are a demand-led open space type i.e. there is no real point in providing allotments in these areas if there is no demand for them. It is recommended therefore that before setting standards for this type of open space provision that the results of the Bridge IMC Allotment Study, taken in to account.

Cemeteries and churchyards

Definition

- 9.1. Churchyards are encompassed within the walled boundary of a church and cemeteries are burial grounds outside the confines of a church. These include private burial grounds, local authority burial grounds and disused churchyards. The primary purpose of this type of open space is for burial and quiet contemplation. They also have an ancillary benefit as areas of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

Picture 9.1 – All Saints Church, Laleham



Strategic context and consultation

- 9.2. Cemeteries and churchyards can be a significant open space resource in some areas, particularly in rural areas. In other areas they can represent a relatively minor resource in terms of the land, but are able to provide areas of nature conservation importance. Some churchyards retain areas of unimproved grasslands and other various habitats.
- 9.3. They can make a significant contribution to the provision of urban green space sometimes providing a sanctuary for wildlife in urban areas devoid of green space. As such, although many have restricted access they still provide a useful resource for the local community. A wide variety of habitats can often be found supporting the other open space types such as areas of semi-natural and natural green space.

- 9.4. However, this typology was one of the least important types of open space selected by respondents to the survey although this does not perhaps reflect their value in terms of their primary purpose. There are a total of seven sites in the Borough, including large burial grounds in Stanwell, Staines and Ashford. Not surprisingly, visits to cemeteries and churchyards also represented the lowest amount of occasional use, in terms of number of visits for recreation.
- 9.5. Through internal consultation with Council Officers, it was apparent that the main concern for the Council regarding this open space typology, is whether there is adequate burial provision to accommodate future demand.

Setting Provision Standards

- 9.6. No quantity standards are to be set for cemeteries and churchyards. PPG 17 Annex states:

"many historic churchyards provide important places for quiet contemplation, especially in busy urban areas, and often support biodiversity and interesting geological features. As such many can also be viewed as amenity green spaces. Unfortunately, many are also run-down and therefore it may be desirable to enhance them. As churchyards can only exist where there is a church, the only form of provision standard which will be required is a qualitative one."

RECOMMENDED LOCAL STANDARD

No Local Standard to be set

- 9.7. For cemeteries, PPG 17 Annex states:

"every individual cemetery has a finite capacity and therefore there is steady need for more of them. Indeed, many areas face a shortage of ground for burials. The need for graves, for all religious faiths, can be calculated from population estimates, coupled with details of the average proportion of deaths which result in a burial, and converted into a quantitative population-based provision standard."

- 9.8. This does not relate to a quantitative hectare per 1,000 population requirement.

- 9.9. It appears that there is currently adequate supply within the borough. If the application of a quantitative standard is required, this should be calculated using a combination of population estimates and the average number of deaths resulting in a burial in the borough, rather than using the PPG17 methodology.

Quality

- 9.10. There are no definitive national or local standards for the quality of cemeteries and churchyards.

- 9.11. There were seven cemeteries and churchyards audited within the Borough, five of which received a quality rating of good. One site was rated as average (St Mary's in Staines) and one was rated as poor (Church Road, Shepperton). The above average ratings

QUALITY VISION STANDARD

"Cemeteries and churchyards should be free from dog fouling, vandalism, litter and anti social behaviour. Where appropriate, access pathways and signage should be clearly provided and well maintained."

SECTION 9 – CEMETERIES AND CHURCHYARDS

suggest the quality of cemeteries and churchyards are generally well-maintained and in good condition although St Matthews Churchyard in Ashford was considered untidy and poorly maintained.

- 9.12. In addition, cemeteries and churchyards provide historical, ecological and structural and landscape benefits to the local area but also a local amenity benefit and 'sense of place'.

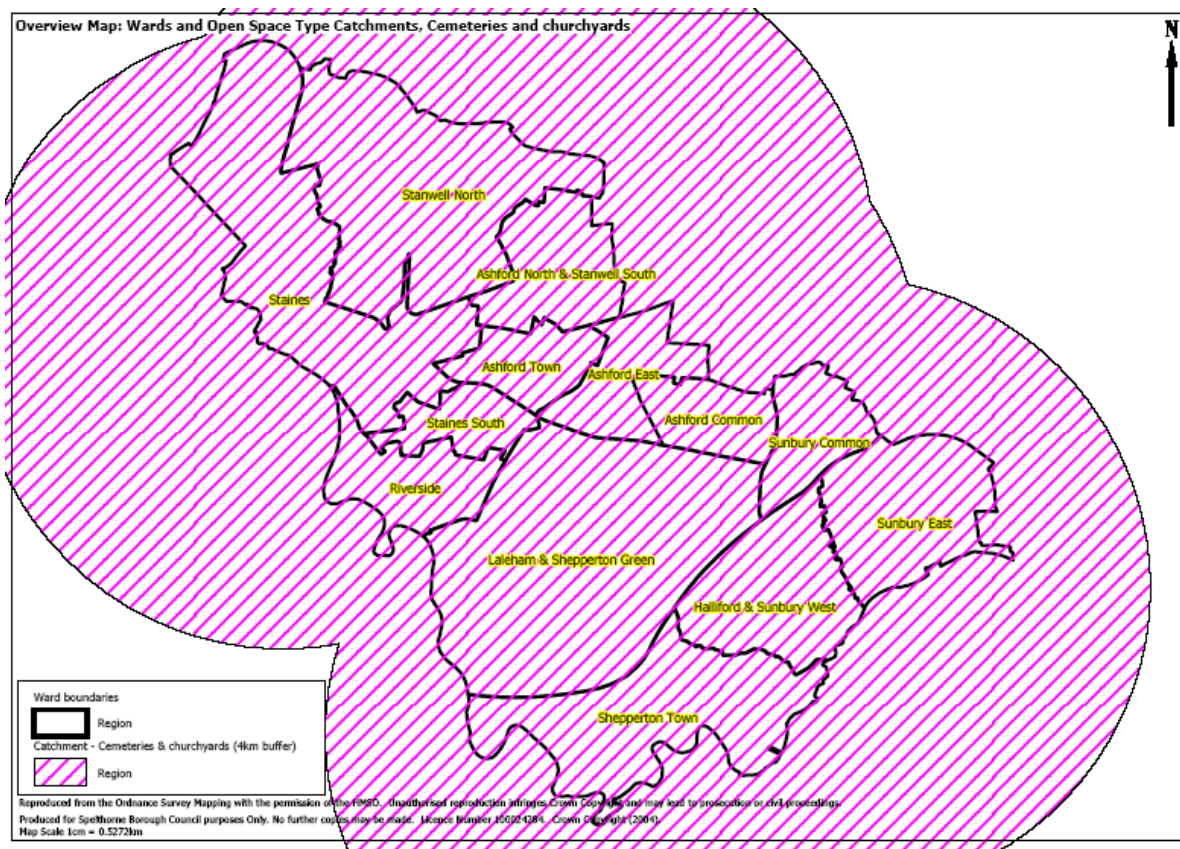
Accessibility

- 9.13. With regards to accessibility there are no definitive national or local standards.
- 9.14. The overall rating given to the site accessibility of cemeteries and churchyards was good, thus reflecting the quality ratings. The site with the poorest access was Church Road, Shepperton.
- 9.15. There is no requirement to set catchments for such typologies as they cannot easily be influenced through planning policy and implementation.
- 9.16. If an accessibility standard were to be recommended, this would be based on the a 10 minute drivetime catchment, as per the findings from the household survey. When applying this accessibility standard, it is clear that the whole Borough and beyond is within the expected travel time of 10 minutes by car (equivalent to 4km), as illustrated in Figure 9.1.

Applying Provision Standards – Identifying Geographical Areas

- 9.17. Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards it is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency or need.

Map 9.1 – Map to show catchment area within 10 minute drivetime



Site Visit Value Assessment – Identifying Specific Sites

- 9.18. Assessing quality and value is fundamental to effective planning for open space. This can be done by comparing value with quality or by assessing all options and combinations when comparing quality, accessibility and usage of sites.
- 9.19. Most sites that have a high level of use would normally have a good or very good quality and accessibility rating. Most sites with a low level of use would have an average or poor quality and accessibility rating. This is because the factors are related and interlinked.
- 9.20. The majority of cemeteries and churchyards that are of high quality and good accessibility that are also rated as well used sites. These sites are highly valued and should therefore be protected. Examples of the sites which need protecting in Spelthorne are:
- Sunbury Cemetery
 - Stanwell Cemetery
 - Staines Cemetery
 - Ashford Cemetery.
- 9.21. St Mary's in Staines is one site where the usage level is rated as 'often' but the access and quality are rated as average. It is suggested that this site is investigated further to see whether enhancement would increase overall usage.
- 9.22. St Matthew's Churchyard is the only site where usage levels are considered low and the quality and accessibility are both poor. Addressing these factors may improve usage levels.

Summary

While it is inappropriate to set a quantity standard for cemeteries, there will be steady demand in the Borough for this type of space. Planning for future provision should be based on close examination of burial and cremation rates. According to the Council there is sufficient capacity at the present time to meet the needs of the population for the foreseeable future.

The quality of cemeteries and churchyards remains particularly important – many people use cemeteries and churchyards as amenity green space for peace and contemplation. It appears that the quality of cemeteries and churchyards within Spelthorne is generally good. It should be a priority to maintain this standard going forward.

Green corridors

Definition

- 10.1. This open space type includes towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines with the primary purpose to provide opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding whether for leisure purposes or travel and opportunities for wildlife migration.

Picture 10.1 – Thames Path



- 10.2. With regards to green corridors the emphasis of PPG17 on urban areas. It uses the typology from the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce Report that is an ‘urban typology’.
- 10.3. Furthermore, elements of PPG17 are contradictory to the Companion Guide on this issue, where despite PPG17 suggesting that all corridors, including those in remote rural settlements should be included, the Companion Guide suggests that unless a green corridor is used as a transport link between facilities i.e. home and school, town and sports facility etc, it should not be included within an audit.
- 10.4. This quality and accessibility analysis considers all types of green corridors identified by the Council, including public rights of way, footpaths, towpaths and other specially designated areas. Although the role that all green corridors play in the provision of open space and recreation within the Borough is recognised, the focus is however on important urban corridors and public rights of way (PROW). The importance of the River Thames and its towpath as a recreational resource and green corridor is also recognised, including its role as part of a national trail.

Local context

- 10.5. The Spelthorne Local Plan recognises the potential which an accessible green space network can provide for the Borough. It states within policy R9:

“...safeguarding the existing rights of way network in the Borough, and will take the opportunities where appropriate, to extend or create footpaths, bridleways and recreational cycle routes.”

- 10.6. The Local Plan also refers specifically to the protection of ‘river corridors’ within policy RU5:

“The Borough Council will seek opportunities to make environmental improvements and extend public access to the riverside as appropriate and particularly in considering any development proposals.”

- 10.7. The Local Plan recognises the importance of green corridors not only to provide sustainable access to open space sites but as being critical to the future of nature conservation.

Consultation

- 10.8. Consultation undertaken for this study highlighted the perceived value of green corridors, and a number of good practice examples were quoted. The most frequently used were:

- River Thames towpath (such as that from Laleham to Staines)
- River Ash Walk
- Colne Valley.

- 10.9. Within the consultation survey 89% of people indicated the high importance of this type of open space but only 25% used green corridors at least once a week with 13% of people using them daily.

- 10.10. Of those who do use green corridors most frequently the majority of people walk to the site, as they provide a local access route away from the roads.

- 10.11. Other consultation indicated concerns regarding overgrown paths. People would use walking routes more if they were of better quality and well maintained and signposted. A lack of dog bins was also raised.

- 10.12. There are many towpaths, cycleways and walking routes across the Borough but internal consultation highlighted that there needs to be more thought about how all these are joined and linked to existing major open spaces. The Boroughs green corridors are not fully utilised mainly due to a lack of investment and available funding. There is potential for improvement with particular areas as proposed in the Local Plan:

- Thames Path – continuous pedestrian route from Staines to Shepperton
- creation of new bridlepath links, for example around Staines Moor, however as a SSSI there would be limited options.

Setting Provision Standards – Quality

- 10.13. Annex A of PPG17 Comparison Guide – Open Space Typology states:

*“the need for Green Corridors arises from the need to promote environmentally sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling within urban areas. This means that **there is no sensible way of stating a provision standard**, just as there is no way of having a standard for the proportion of land in an area which it will be desirable to allocate for roads. “*

- 10.14. It is therefore recommended that no provision standard should be set. PPG17 goes onto to state that:

“instead planning policies should promote the use of green corridors to link housing areas to the Sustrans national cycle network, town and city centres, places of employment and community facilities such as schools, shops, community centres and sports facilities. In this sense green corridors are demanded. However, planning authorities should also take opportunities to use established linear routes, such as disused railway lines, roads or canal and river banks, as green corridors, and supplement them by proposals to ‘plug in’ access to them from as wide an area as possible”

**RECOMMENDED
LOCAL QUANTITY
STANDARD**

No Local Standard to be

Quality

- 10.15. There are no national standards for green corridors although the Countryside Agency does suggest that the user should expect to find:

a path provided by the protection and reinforcement of existing vegetation

ground not soft enough to allow a horse or cycle to sink into it

a path on unvegetated natural surfaces.

- 10.16. As discussed above the Local Plan indicates the aim to safeguard the existing network of accessible green space, linking green wedges and open spaces and encouraging their use as a means of access through the urban area.

- 10.17. Other consultation suggested that there are concerns regarding overgrown paths. People would use walking routes more of they were of better quality and well maintained and signposted. A lack of dog bins was also raised.

QUALITY VISION STANDARD

“Green corridors should be free from dog fouling, vandalism, litter and anti social behaviour. The layout and design should follow ‘safer by design’ principles. They should provide links between green spaces and from residential areas to green spaces.”

- 10.18. The quality standard for green corridors should therefore include elements of these aspirations to meet the needs of the public, and also other local and national standards. This local quality standard provides the vision for any new provision and also a quality benchmark for existing green corridors to achieve.

**RECOMMENDED
LOCAL ACCESSIBILITY
STANDARD**

**No Local Standard to be
set**

Accessibility

- 10.19. There is no requirement to set catchments for such an open space typology as they cannot be easily influenced through planning policy and implementation and are opportunity-led rather than demand-led.
- 10.20. What did come through in the consultation was a lack of signage especially on the less established walking routes. Disabled access was also considered by some respondents to be poor for pathways. Despite the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act, limited funds have been spent on the infrastructure.

Links with the health agenda

- 10.21. Green corridors represent an important chance to link open spaces within the urban area and to promote transport by cycle and walking. These opportunities for informal recreation will help keep the public active and improve health within the local area, all ideals supported by the Council in its Local Plan.
- 10.22. The latest government plan published by the Department for Transport and entitled *“Walking and Cycling: an action plan”* states:
- “Walking and cycling are good for our health, good for getting us around, good for our public spaces and good for our society, For all these reasons we need to persuade more people to choose to walk and cycle more often”.
- 10.23. Therefore it is important to address any qualitative deficiencies of existing green corridors and capitalise on any opportunities to increase and enhance the existing network.

Applying Provision Standards

- 10.24. Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards and that no site assessments have been undertaken on green corridors purely because of the nature of the typology, it is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency.
- 10.25. The aim is to provide an integrated network of high quality green corridors linking open spaces together and opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport.

Summary

Green corridors in Spelthorne are well valued. Opportunities should be taken by the Council to protect and extend the green corridor network where appropriate and possible to do. In addition opportunities for further development of green corridors should be taken where there is demand. It is likely that a large proportion of future provision will be opportunity led.

With the River Thames bordering the Borough, and part of the Long Distance Trail, green corridors alongside waterways are important forms of open space provision and should be maintained.

No minimum provision standard has been set Borough-wide.