

NEW LOCAL PLAN EVIDENCE BASE: OPEN SPACE STUDY 2022

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Council’s most recent Open Space Study (“the Study”), which has carried out an audit of existing open space provision within Rochford District, across a range of different typologies of space. It builds upon and replaces the previous Open Space Study, published in 2009.
- 1.2 The Study will inform the Council’s new Local Plan, which will set out the sites, policies and allocations to guide the District’s housing, economic, environmental and infrastructure needs to 2040. The Study will form a key part of the evidence base, providing a baseline for the current provision of open space across the District, identifying the locations in which there is a deficit in terms of quality, quantity and accessibility of open space, according to nationally-recognised benchmarks for measuring the provision of different types of open space. In identifying settlements and wards in the District where open space is insufficient and/or not accessible enough, it provides the evidence required to ensure that any future development is able to help deliver the identified shortfalls in open space through developer contributions, benefiting new and existing residents. With open spaces providing a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits, it is important to ensure there is a sufficient, varied and equitable provision of space for communities across the District, keeping pace with growth.
- 1.3 In addition to a broad audit and analysis of the District’s open space provision, the Study also identifies which of the open spaces would be suitable for designation as Local Green Spaces, a status outlined in national planning policy which recognises demonstrably special local open spaces and affords them additional protection (see paragraphs 2.3 and 3.36)
- 1.4 As well as forming part of the evidence base for the Local Plan and its statutory responsibilities, the analysis and findings from the Study will be of interest to a range of other Council departments and external partners responsible for the upkeep and improvement of the District’s open spaces, sports and leisure facilities, natural habitats and public rights of way; the promotion of healthy lifestyles; and the protection of wildlife and biodiversity.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Open Space Study 2022 has undertaken a comprehensive audit and analysis of the District’s Open Space provision, building on the earlier 2009 study. The importance of the District’s open spaces for a range of environmental, economic and social benefits cannot be overstated, with some of these including increased biodiversity; improving air quality; sequestering carbon; regulating climate in urban areas; increasing physical activity and

resultant public health improvements; increased local economic development; and fostering stronger social cohesion in communities.

- 2.2 The recent Covid-19 pandemic, and resultant lockdowns, only served to highlight the importance of access to open space and public rights of way for physical and mental wellbeing. While it has long been understood that access to open spaces improves human wellbeing, the extreme situation of lockdown brought to the forefront the disparity in people’s experiences, with some having access to green open spaces while others lack it, especially those living in dense urban areas, or rural areas comprised of private farmland with no public right of access.

Methodology and standards

- 2.3 The Study was carried out in accordance with established guidance for conducting open space studies, as set out in the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) for Open Space, which draws upon the earlier PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, and its companion guide. It also includes a review of relevant background documents, including previous consultations. The Study comprised the following stages:
1. *Site identification:* All open spaces and their boundaries were mapped using a Geographical Information System (GIS), enabling further objective analysis to be carried out, such as identifying areas currently experiencing poor access to open space, or assessing the overall coverage of open space within the District. A number of new sites have emerged since the previous 2009 Open Space Study (e.g. as part of new housing developments), so new records were created where necessary, allowing additional space provision to be mapped, quantity/accessibility provision updated and site visits to be carried out.
 2. *Quantity Assessment:* A desk-based assessment, utilising GIS records of all open space in the District, assessed against population data to give provision in ‘hectares per 1000 population’. This is calculated both for the District as a whole, and for each individual ward, and the total area for each category/type of open space is also calculated and compared against the population. By using established national benchmark standards that set out the recommended amount of different types of open space per 1000 population (e.g. for playing fields), it can be assessed whether the District exceeds or fails to meet recommended provision levels. This analysis can also be used to identify which wards have particular deficiencies in open space provision, and to identify the types of open space which are assessed to be in short supply. Finally, using future population projections, it can be determined whether the current provision is sufficient by district/ward as the population grows, and where additional provision may be required.

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3. *Quality Assessment:* A site-based assessment of all identified open spaces within the District which could be accessed at the time of survey, using an agreed methodology based on the nationally-recognised Green Flag Award principles. Criteria audited during site visits comprised Accessibility; Facilities; Safety and Security; and Cleanliness and Maintenance. Sites were scored from 0-100% and any potential issues or improvements flagged. This assessment was also used as the basis for determining eligibility for Local Green Space status.
 4. *Accessibility Assessment:* Utilised GIS mapping software to assess distribution of open spaces across the District and their accessibility from local neighbourhoods, locations, and settlements. It focused on accessibility at a settlement level to determine the areas which have deficiencies in accessing open spaces of various types. Best practice guidance taken from Fields in Trust and ANGSt standards was used to determine the benchmark accessibility distances for different types of space, based on the distances people might be expected to walk to access a site.
 5. *Local Green Space Assessment:* Using a methodology drawn up in line with the NPPF and relevant NPPG, the Study provided recommendations on which open spaces in the District could be eligible for Local Green Space designation, by meeting the criteria of being 'local in character', in 'reasonable proximity to the community it serves' and 'demonstrably special to the local community'. The list of suggested sites was then included in the Regulation 18 Spatial Options consultation for the District's new Local Plan (conducted in July-September 2021), allowing the public to comment on the suitability of sites and propose additional ones.
- 2.4 It should be recognised that the Study is a snapshot in time, and that some of its observations regarding the quality or provision of open space may change over time, or have already changed, as some open spaces are improved and new development delivers additional provision. Nevertheless, the broad findings and recommendations are likely to be an important part of the evidence base informing policies governing the location of development and infrastructure requirements for the period leading up to the new Local Plan, and beyond.
- 2.5 It is also important to note that the national policy sphere relating to topics such as open spaces and green infrastructure is changing rapidly. This is only likely to accelerate as the provisions of the Environment Act 2021, such as Biodiversity Net Gain, come into effect. Consequently, the recommendations of this study should be considered alongside new national provisions and their supporting evidence, to give a fuller picture of how to best meet the District's needs for open space.

3 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 A summary of the findings and recommendations are grouped below by the stage of the assessment they fall under:

Quantity Assessment

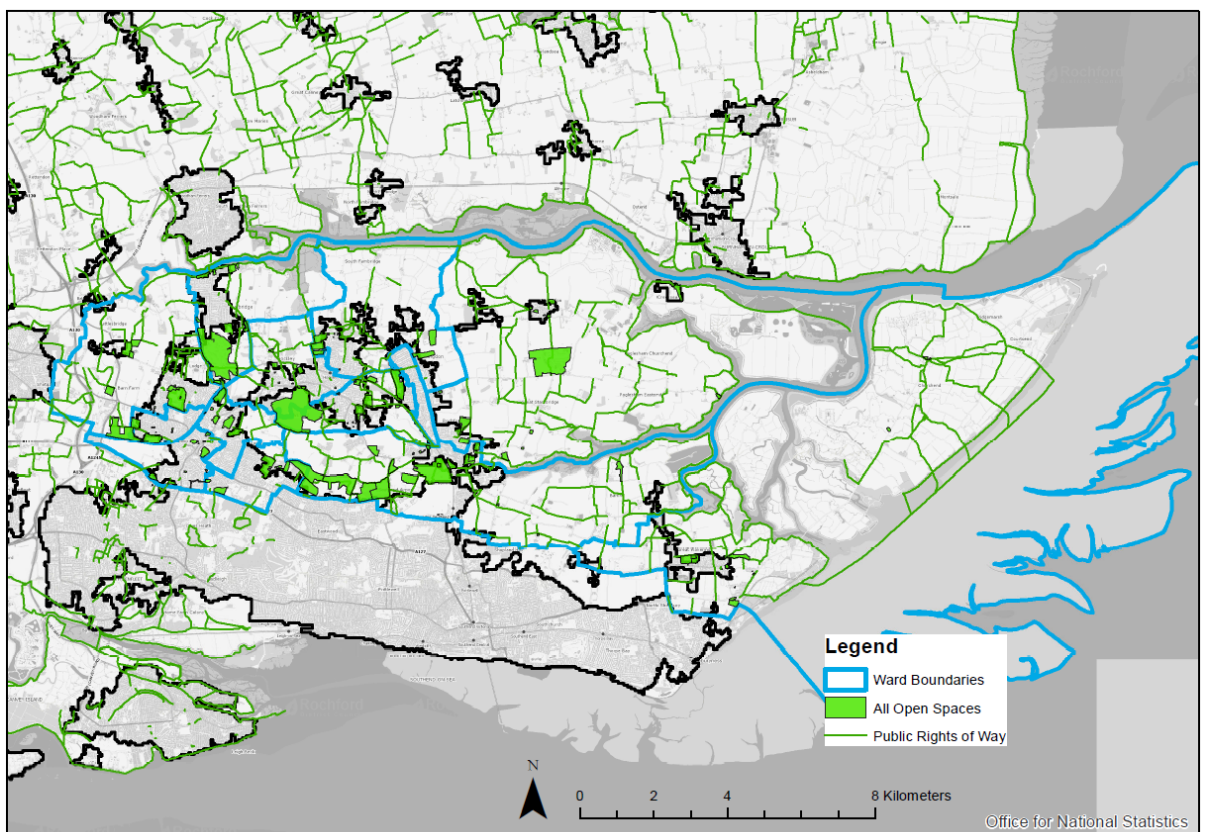
3.2 Overall, the Study shows Rochford District contains a significant amount of open space, with a total of 707ha identified through this Study. Of this, the majority (43%) constitutes a variety of recreational and outdoor sports facilities, with natural and semi-natural green spaces, such as woodland, making up a further 36%. A full breakdown of the quantity of open space provision by type can be viewed in Table 1, below. In addition, Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) are widespread across the District and play an important role linking settlements and various accessible open spaces.

Table 1: Open Space Quantity Summary by Type

Typology	No. of Sites	Area (ha)	Proportion of Total Assessed Open Space (%)	Proportion of District Land Mass (%)
Parks and Gardens	3	2	0.3	0.01
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	26	255	36	1.38
Recreation & Outdoor Sports Facilities	48	304	43	1.64
Amenity Greenspace	44	25	3.6	0.14
Play Space and Provision for Young People	39	5	0.7	0.03
Allotments	10	11	1.6	0.06
Country Park	2 (individual sites within 1 overall site)	83	12	0.44
Civic Space	1	0.05	0.007	0.0003
Cemetery and Churchyards	18	22	3.2	0.12
Total	218	707	100	3.82

- 3.3 There is, however, an uneven distribution of open spaces across the District, as seen in Map 1. Much of the identified open space is concentrated in the **West** and **Central** areas, close to the main population centres of Rayleigh, Hockley, Hawkwell and Rochford. In contrast, the **East** of the District, which contains relatively fewer settlements and residents, has far fewer sites. Factors explaining this include these areas containing a large amount of private farmland (which, whilst generally open and green is not publicly accessible), and the considerable portion of the District occupied by Ministry of Defence sites north-east of Great Wakering.

Map 1: Distribution of Open Spaces and PRowS across Rochford District



- 3.4 In terms of Wards, Roche South, Roche North and Rural, Wheatley, Hullbridge and Hockley Wards have the greatest amount of open space, whilst Hawkwell East, Sweyne Park and Grange, and Trinity Wards contain the least (see Table 2). It should be noted, however, that wards with a low open space provision typically had large spaces sitting just outside their boundaries (e.g. Hawkwell East, which sits close to Magnolia Park and King George Playing Field). A major contributing factor to provision is the Upper Roach Valley, sitting between settlements and wards, and comprising multiple large open spaces, particularly Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace (e.g., Hockley Woods and Grove Woods) and the Cherry Orchard Country Park.

Table 2: Open Space Provision by Ward

Ward	Area (ha)	Proportion of Total Assessed Open Space (%)	Proportion of District Land Mass (%)
Downhall & Rawreth	46.2	6.5	0.25
Foulness & The Wakerings	24.6	3.5	0.13
Hawkwell East	0	0.0	0.00
Hawkwell West	35.5	5.0	0.19
Hockley	98.6	14.0	0.53
Hockley & Ashingdon	32.5	4.6	0.18
Hullbridge	101.3	14.3	0.55
Lodge	32.9	4.7	0.18
Roche North & Rural	92.3	13.0	0.50
Roche South	164.6	23.3	0.89
Sweyne Park & Grange	6.3	0.9	0.03
Trinity	21.4	3.0	0.12
Wheatley	50.7	7.2	0.27
Total	706.5	100	3.82

- 3.5 Rochford District's population is set to increase by 12.5% by 2040¹. Assuming no additional open space is provided, this will result in the overall provision of open space falling from 8.09 hectares per 1,000 in 2020 to 7.19 hectares per 1,000 by 2040. To provide the same level of open space provision for the population, the total amount of open space in the District would need to increase from 706.5ha to 794.8ha of open space provision, requiring creation of an **additional 88.3ha** of open space.
- 3.6 Since the last Open Space Study in 2009, further open spaces have been enabled through new housing developments within the Rochford District. These comprise recently completed developments as well as those still under

¹ Mid 2019 Population Estimates (ONS,2020)

construction at the time of compiling this study. There are also further open spaces planned within proposed developments going through the planning process. A total of 85.96ha since 2009 have been enabled through the planning process, of which 75.85ha of open space is still under construction or planned. It is envisaged that new development will continue to have a key role to play in delivering a variety of high-quality open spaces into the future, to benefit both new and existing communities.

- 3.7 In terms of recommended benchmark standards for different types of open space per 1,000 people, the District's performance varies. It exceeds standards in provision for Recreation & Outdoor Sports (3.48ha, against a benchmark of 1.60ha); and Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace (2.92ha, against a benchmark of 1.80ha). However, it falls short of the standard for Amenity Greenspace (0.29ha, compared to 0.6ha); Playspaces (0.06ha, compared to 0.25ha); and Allotments (0.13ha, compared to different standards of either 0.21ha or 0.3ha).
- 3.8 Parks and Gardens provision (0.02ha per 1,000) fell far short of the recommended benchmark of 0.8ha per 1,000. However, it should be noted that, due to the structure inherited from the 2009 Open Space Study, many multi-use parks and recreation grounds in the District were assessed according to their primary use (e.g., football or cricket), but in reality constitute full parks with a range of recreational and amenity uses, including formal gardens.
- 3.9 The following paragraphs briefly summarise quantity and distribution of different types of open space across the District.

Quality Assessment

- 3.10 A total of 165 of the District's 188 identified sites were audited for quality and visited by officers. Sites which were not audited included those where the site no longer existed/had ceased operation, were inaccessible (e.g., on MOD land), cemeteries and churchyards, or where the site was newly-identified and it was not possible to visit within the timescales of the audit. For full details of the Quality audit, please refer to Section 5 of the accompanying report.
- 3.11 See Table 3 for a breakdown of the numbers of different site typologies audited, and how they performed in terms of quality. Overall, 71% of open spaces fall into the 'Good', 'Very Good' or 'Excellent' bandings, indicating that the majority of sites perform their functions well, and have good provision of facilities, are in good condition, are accessible, and feel safe and secure.
- 3.12 29% of sites fell into the Fair/Poor banding. Of these, 'Fair' open spaces constitute 26% of the total whilst only 3% of all assessed open spaces were rated as 'Poor', implying that even in this banding most spaces can be improved significantly by addressing relatively minor points. Key recommendations for improving these include the following:

1. Better signage along main travel routes for Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces and Recreation and Outdoor Sports Facilities.
2. Appropriate levels of green landscape management (not all sites should be 'pristine', but a balance of amenity and nature conservation should be sought).
3. High levels of maintenance of site furniture (e.g., signs, seats, bins, lighting), equipment (e.g., play equipment), and infrastructure (e.g., paths, car parking).

Table 3: Open Space Quality Audit Results by Typology

	Excellent (90+%)	Very Good (80-89%)	Good (70-79%)	Fair (50 - 69%)	Poor (0 - 49%)	Total
Parks and Gardens	0	1	2	0	0	3
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces	2	6	8	8	1	25
Recreation & Outdoor Sports Facilities	14	7	13	13	1	48
Amenity Greenspaces	7	14	9	8	1	39
Play Spaces & Provision for Young People	11	12	4	9	2	38
Allotments	0	0	3	6	0	9
Country Park	0	0	3	0	0	3
Civic Space	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	35	40	42	43	5	165
Proportion of Open Space Audits %	21	24	25	26	3	100

Within this, 45% were rated

- 3.13 The accompanying Open Space Study includes more detail regarding the quality of open spaces by their typology, along with photographic examples of the variations in quality.

Accessibility Assessment

- 3.14 The vast majority the District's population are within walking distance of an open space, with GIS accessibility mapping showing this to be the case in all urban areas and the main parts of smaller Tier 3 and Tier 4 villages and hamlets. This is particularly the case in terms of 'publicly-accessible' open spaces (i.e., Parks & Gardens, Amenity Greenspace, Natural/semi-natural Greenspace and multi-use public recreational spaces). It can therefore be said that the Study corroborates the findings of the Natural England ANGSt study, which found that approximately 75% of the urban area of the District is within a 300m (5 minute) walk of Public Open Space.
- 3.15 However, there are still pockets of settlement which do not have any walking access to open space in the District. These include the village of South Fambridge and hamlets of Battlesbridge (south of the River Crouch) and Stonebridge. In addition, outlying areas of Canewdon, Ashingdon, Paglesham and Foulness are not within walking distance of spaces, despite the main body of these settlements having accessibility. This is also the case in terms of publicly-accessible open space, with rural areas such as the northern fringes of Hockley and parts of Barling also not having any access.
- 3.16 There are also some pockets of urban areas that are not in walking distance from either publicly accessible open spaces or public pitches/recreation grounds. These include areas of South-East Hullbridge and areas of Rochford (along Ashingdon Road and Southend Road). It should also be considered that within urban areas with walking distance to a public open space, some areas will have a far more limited choice than others (possibly only one space), reducing the choice of residents.
- 3.17 For full details, plus maps indicating the accessibility radii in terms of both open space type and individual settlement, please refer to Section 6 of the accompanying Study:

Further Accessibility Notes and Recommendations

- 3.18 Evidence from this study has shown that recent housing schemes have successfully provided a range of publicly accessible open space on the fringes of settlements, increasing public space provision and accessibility for the wider community. Therefore, where possible, future policies and allocations should support development which provides new open spaces that are accessible to these unserved areas.

- 3.19 Given many unserved or underserved areas sit on the fringes of the District, the Council could work with neighbouring local authorities to explore opportunities to address provision in these areas as part of future Local Plan policies.
- 3.20 Since the Study was carried out, Natural England has released a digital Green Infrastructure Map in 2022, mapping the locations of Green Infrastructure, open spaces and public rights of way across the UK, along with the option to superimpose different accessibility standards and radii. Whilst this is a useful resource, minor differences in which sites are displayed and classified compared to the Study means the two should be used to supplement and complement each other.

Local Green Space (LGS) Assessment

- 3.21 Following site visits, 45 open spaces were identified, assessed and considered to meet the LGS designation criteria, based on the principles as stated within the NPPF and associated guidance. These are set out in Table 4 below. For a full assessment of each open space against the criteria, please refer to Appendix C of the accompanying Study.

Table 4: Local Green Space Assessment

Reference (Appendix C)	Open Space Name	Address	Location	Ward	Open Space Type	Open Space Approx. Size (ha)
5,10	Canewdon Cricket / Football Ground	Althorne way, Canewdon	Canewdon	Roche North & Rural	Cricket / Football	1.83
8	Play Space	Canewdon Playing Field	Canewdon	Roche North & Rural	Play Space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.13
9	The Village Green	Sycamore Way, Canewdon	Canewdon	Roche North & Rural	Amenity Green Space	0.93
14	Great Wakering Common	Common Road, Great Wakering	Great Wakering	Foulness & The Wakerings	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	5.46
15	Great Wakering Recreation Ground	High Street, Great Wakering	Great Wakering	Foulness & The Wakerings	Tennis Courts	0.11

Reference (Appendix C)	Open Space Name	Address	Location	Ward	Open Space Type	Open Space Approx. Size (ha)
21	Play Space	High Street, Great Wakering	Great Wakering	Foulness & The Wakerings	Play Space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.07
25	Great Wakering Recreation Ground	Leisure Centre, High Street, Great Wakering	Great Wakering	Foulness & The Wakerings	Football	5.9
27	Spencers Park Public Open Space	Clements Hall Way, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	4.8
29	Clements Hall Cricket Ground	Clements Hall Way, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Cricket	5.87 (dual use)
30	Play Space	Clements Hall, Clements Hall way, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Play Space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.11
33	Hawkwell Common	Main Road, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Amenity Green Space	0.27
35	Clements Hall Playing Field	Clements Hall Way, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Football	0.15
43	Play Space	Plumberow Mount, Plumberow Avenue, Hockley	Hockley	Hockley & Ashingdon	Play Space (LEAP)	0.17
50	Marylands Avenue Nature Reserve	Marylands Avenue, Hockley	Hockley	Hockley	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	3.03
51	Plumberow Mount	Plumberow Avenue, Hockley	Hockley	Hockley & Ashingdon	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	6.29
52	Kendal Park Nature Reserve	Ferry Road, Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	3.05

Reference (Appendix C)	Open Space Name	Address	Location	Ward	Open Space Type	Open Space Approx. Size (ha)
55	Play Space	Pooles Lane Playing Field, Pooles Lane Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Play Space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.07
60	Hullbridge Playing Field	Pooles Lane, Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Football	3.65
62	Rayleigh Mount	Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Wheatley	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	1.64
66	Wheatley Wood	Near Little Wheatley Chase, Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Wheatley	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	35.34
76	Fairview Playing Field	Victoria Road, Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Trinity	Tennis Courts	0.22
86	Play Space	Sweyne Park, Downhall Park Way, Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Downhall & Rawreth	Play Space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.4
87	Play Space	Fairview Playing Field, Victoria Road Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Trinity	Play Space (LEAP)	0.08
88	Play Space	Rawreth Lane, Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Downhall & Rawreth	Play Space (LEAP)	0.05
89	Play Space	St John Fisher Playing Field, Little Wheatley Chase, Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Sweyne Park & Grange	Play Space (NEAP)	0.05

Reference (Appendix C)	Open Space Name	Address	Location	Ward	Open Space Type	Open Space Approx. Size (ha)
91	Play Space	Grove Road Playing Field, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Lodge	Play space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.15
93	King George V Playing Field Space	Eastwood Road, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Wheatley	Play space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.21
96	St John Fisher Playing Field	Little Wheatley Chase, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Sweyne Park & Grange	Football	5.58
98	Grove Road Playing Field	Grove Road, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Lodge	Football	3.41
100	Rawreth Lane Playing Field	Rawreth Lane, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Downhall & Rawreth	Football	6.8
105	Sweyne Park Open Space	Downhall Park Way, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Downhall & Rawreth	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	9.35
108	King George V Playing Field	Eastwood Road, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Wheatley	Football	3.57
110	Fairview Playing Field	Victoria Road, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Trinity	Football	5.82
111	Turret House Open Space	Victoria Road, Raleigh	Rayleigh	Trinity	Amenity Green Space	5.11
120	King George Playing Field Play Space	Ashingdon Road, Ashingdon	Rochford	Hockley & Ashingdon	Play Space (NEAP)	0.07
121	Play Space	Rochford Recreation Ground, Stambridge Road, Rochford	Rochford	Roche North & Rural	Play Space (NEAP)	0.19

Reference (Appendix C)	Open Space Name	Address	Location	Ward	Open Space Type	Open Space Approx. Size (ha)
123	Play Space	Magnolia Nature Reserve, Magnolia Road, Hawkwell	Rochford	Hawkwell West	Play Space & Provision for Young People (NEAP)	0.06
129	Rochford Recreation Ground	Stambridge Road, Rochford	Rochford	Roche North & Rural	Football	3.85
130	Magnolia Nature Reserve	Magnolia Road, Hawkwell	Rochford	Roche North & Rural	Natural / Semi-natural Green Space	16.01
131	King George Playing Field	Ashingdon Road, Rochford	Rochford	Hockley & Ashingdon	Football	7.02
New Site 1	Play Space	Christmas Tree Crescent, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Play Space (LAP)	0.04
New Site 2	Amenity (west)	Christmas Tree Crescent, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Amenity	1.19
New Site 3	Amenity (east)	Christmas Tree Crescent, Hawkwell	Hawkwell	Hawkwell West	Amenity	0.41
New Site 13	Amenity Area (cenotaph)	High Elms park, Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Hullbridge	Amenity	0.96
New Site 30	Windmill Gardens	Off Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh	Rayleigh	Wheatley	Parks & Gardens	0.14

3.22 The 2021 Spatial Options consultation for the new Local Plan presented these 45 proposed LGS designations for public feedback. Within the ‘Complete Communities’ section of the consultation document, respondents were asked whether the prospective LGS sites within each community were the right ones, and whether other sites required similar designation. They were also presented on maps. This allowed those respondents giving views about proposed visions for their communities to consider whether these spaces

were appropriate, and whether any other sites in the settlement should be considered for similar designation.

- 3.23 The responses received indicated a good overall level of public support for the sites proposed. It is therefore recommended that these sites are progressed through the plan-making process and recommended for allocation as Local Green Spaces. **There will be opportunities to review the list for proposal before the Local Plan is submitted for Examination.**
- 3.24 Many respondents considered that a wide range of additional sites across the District should be protected. These included the following:
- *Local Plan Promoted sites:* Most sites suggested were promoted sites under consideration for allocation for development in the new Local Plan (see Paragraph 3.41 for further comment on this).
 - Most of these were classified as Green Belt and considered to have positive impacts on people's physical and mental wellbeing and community value, as well as providing buffer zones to sensitive habitats. In many cases, their suggestion for designation as LGS was linked to local opposition to their development for housing or other purposes. Many of these sites also had PRoW running through them. In addition, several promoted sites in urban areas were suggested, particularly Council-owned sites in Rayleigh.
 - *Large sites:* Spaces such as Cherry Orchard Country park and Hockley Woods were widely considered as locally significant. Although these do not meet LGS criteria due to their size, they would already be considered protected under various designations.
 - *Public open spaces* not proposed in the list were also proposed, notably Edwards Hall Park (already part of the Green Belt). In addition, the District's network of PRoW, along with the entire sea wall, were suggested to be important to protect.
- 3.25 Sites proposed on Foulness Island, within the Ministry of Defence Estate, were not considered appropriate for LGS designation by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, given the restricted nature of access on the island.
- 3.26 National Planning Guidance states that LGS designation should not be used in any way to undermine the Local Plan-making process (i.e., identifying sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs). In addition, National Planning Guidance does not normally recommend LGS designation for Green Belt sites (as LGS status affords a similar level of protection to that given by Green Belt designation), however does indicate there may be a role for it in villages already protected by the Green Belt to identify areas of particular importance to the local community. Given these

caveats, it is recommended that any decisions to afford LGS status to sites which are currently being promoted are taken in future stages of the development of the new Local Plan, when a clearer position on the most suitable sites for meeting development needs has been taken.

3.27 Such deficiencies should be addressed, with a range of options available (see below). These should be considered alongside the Local Plan as it is progressed, ensuring site allocations and site-specific policies help plug gaps in access to open space for both existing and new communities:

1. Retaining existing open space in situ (e.g. no loss of existing open space).
2. Retaining the existing amount of open space overall (e.g. no net loss of open space, but locating it more appropriately for access). Retaining all existing open space can be restrictive. In some cases, restrictions on loss of open space are entirely appropriate (for example, protecting a designated landscape); but in other cases, there may be justification for loss of open space where improvements to the provision of open space can be made in other ways (for example through the new development of housing sites). Therefore, retaining the amount of open space through a 'no **net** loss' approach is a more pragmatic approach.
3. Designating new open spaces in areas of deficiency
4. New types of open space to replace existing open spaces in areas of deficiency
5. Using existing open spaces to provide greater diversity of types of open spaces (i.e., increasing the multi-functionality of open space). Diversification provides an opportunity to increase provision without increasing the overall amount of open space. This could include adding play facilities to existing open spaces, or increasing the biodiversity value of open spaces, for example, creating local nature reserves.

Relationship with Local Plan

3.28 Rochford District Council undertook a Spatial Options consultation in the Summer of 2021 as the latest stage in preparing its new Local Plan, which will be used to guide development in the District to 2040 and beyond. A Feedback Report has been prepared to summarise and conclude upon this public consultation which forms the latest stage in the production of the new Local Plan. The Feedback Report provides a full summary of the responses received.

3.29 One of the broad thematic elements within the Spatial Options Document was Open Spaces and Recreation, with the consultation asking a range of

questions relating to how open space and sport facility needs can be met through the Plan, how different strategic locations for development could deliver improvements to accessibility or provision of open space and sport facilities, and whether there were open spaces in need of improvement or protection. As part of this, it presented the proposed LGS designations (45 sites) for consultation, with feedback discussed above, in Paragraph 3.36.

- 3.30 In terms of further comments on open spaces, the creation / designation of more parks and open spaces was widely supported, with the recent Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns during 2020 and 2021 underlining the importance of these to local residents. However, respondents wanted firmer details of the types of spaces that could be delivered, along with their locations. There was widespread concern that the promotion of Green Belt sites for development could be counterproductive by reducing open space and impacting popular PRowWs.
- 3.31 A wide range of promoted sites across the District were put forward by developers and agents as having potential to contribute to open space and recreation provision, both in terms of provision of public open space and recreational facilities on their sites (e.g. new play spaces, walking trails, allotments or gardens) and also through Section 106 contributions to enhance facilities elsewhere.
- 3.32 The lack of open space and recreational facility provision in various locations across the District was highlighted, with Hullbridge in particular identified as a community with little public open space provision within walking distance, particularly in the South of the village.
- 3.33 Proposed options for a network of 'hub sites' at schools, along with 3G pitches, were generally supported, with some caveats.
- 3.34 The need to drive to access many of the District's public open spaces and recreation facilities was a common theme, with suggestions for better public transport services and a comprehensive network of walking and cycling routes covering housing, employment, education and open space/recreation sites being widely presented.
- 3.35 The Document presented a range of spatial strategy options for consultation, with variations on the Option 3 'concentrated growth' approach (i.e. large-scale development to create a new community with its own infrastructure) presented as being a particular opportunity to deliver significant new public open and recreation space, including the potential creation of a major new regional/country park.
- 3.36 Given the key headlines emerging from the Spatial Options consultation of widespread public concern at the capacity of existing infrastructure in the District to accommodate further growth, and the potential impact on the Green Belt, it is important to consider how new development might place additional

demand on open spaces, recreation facilities and green infrastructure across the District. **It is recommended that any future spatial strategy, site selection and allocation process for the new Local Plan considers the findings presented in this study regarding the quantity, quality and accessibility of public open space/recreation facilities in a given area, to consider how new development might help address any existing deficits.**

4 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Through provision of better accessibility to, and visibility of, open spaces, the Study's recommendations have the potential to reduce the likelihood and impact of crime and antisocial behaviour in the District's open spaces and communities.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Study's recommendations have the potential to have a positive environmental impact on the District. This could include the enhancement of existing open spaces to increase tree planting and biodiversity; designation of new open spaces (including country parks and natural/semi-natural greenspaces); and improving accessibility to existing and new open spaces by walking, cycling and public transport, thereby reducing the need to drive.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Open Space Study has been prepared in-house within existing agreed resources and budgets.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No legal implications are considered to arise from this decision.

8 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Study's findings and recommendations include implications that Parish councils may wish to note when considering the quantity, quality and accessibility of new and existing open space provision for their own communities.

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as no decision is being made.

10 RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) To note the findings and conclusions of the Open Space Study at Appendix A and publish it as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.



Phil Drane

Director of Place

Background Papers:-

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