

Open Space Topic Paper

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Tamworth is a predominantly urban authority, the planned layout of large parts of the Borough has resulted in a unique legacy in the form of a network of urban green and blue infrastructure which runs east-west and north-south through the centre of the Borough. The main corridors follow the lines of the Rivers Tame and Anker and the Kettlebrook, with more local links extending into the housing and employment areas.
- 1.2 This topic paper seeks to summarise the three main pieces of the Local Plan evidence base which have informed the approach to plan making for Open Space. Studies were published in 2005, 2007 and 2011.

2.0 2005 Open Space Study

- 2.1 The 2005 Open Space study, was carried out in accordance with guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space Sport and Recreation, July 2002) and its Companion Guide (September 2002). The study aimed to provide a clear picture of existing and future needs for open space, sport and recreation in Tamworth and the ability to meet those needs in terms of quality, quantity and accessibility.
- 2.2 With the publication of the 2011 study the 2005 study is now out of date, the findings of the study are summarised below.
- 2.3 Within the Borough a total of 218 sites were visited and assessed on quantity, quality, accessibility and value using a standard matrix and definitions. To assist with the analysis and inform the standard setting the study split up the Borough into 6 analysis areas.
- 2.4 Community consultation was carried out as part of the study, of which the findings were:
 - open spaces are important to the residents of Tamworth but there is a current lack of vision and over-arching strategy for open spaces
 - the main issues emerging are the lack of provision for children and young people, with the need to cater for young people in order to prevent the continued vandalism of children's play areas and the need to address the maintenance of open space sites.
 - the quality of the sites is important to all that use them. The recurring themes of dog fouling, litter, overgrown pathways etc are considered to be a particular problem within the Borough.

- there is a need for any new provision to have a good and effective design that attracts people to use and limits any potential problems

Standards Findings

2.5 A key element of the study was to recommended standards against each of the typologies defined in the PPG17 guidance. The study recommended a set of standards on a typology basis for Quantity, Quality and Accessibility. These standards were latterly updated in the 2011 review and therefore this section of the 2005 has not been summarised in this paper.

2.6 The study also made a number of typology specific recommendations:

- Parks & Gardens: there is a need for a local park in the eastern side of the borough which may be met by investing into surplus of amenity green space.
- Natural and Semi-Natural: improvements to accessibility for existing sites should be considered the priority e.g. opening up the River Tame floodplain as an attractive accessible open space
- Amenity Greenspace: there is an overall sufficient provision of green space in the borough with only minor deficiencies in specific areas
- Provision for Children and Young People: there are 3 areas of priority need for 'play' provision identified – Coton Farm Estate, South Dosthill and Birds Bush Road Estate.
- Outdoor Sports Facilities: the Council has a good record of provision of outdoor sports facilities although 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.
- Allotments: consultation suggests there is limited demand and although there are specific areas of deficiency it is recommended further investigation be undertaken into the demand for allotments specifically in these areas and across the borough.
- Green Corridors & Linkages: there are many opportunities and much potential to develop and provide an enhanced network of green corridors (cycleways and walkways) linking the major open spaces together around the borough.

3.0 2007 Open Space Position Statement

- 3.1 The 2007 Open Space Position Statement applied the recommended standards derived from the 2005 Open Space Study and applied them to the neighbourhood level. The Borough was divided into 23 smaller neighbourhoods defined to best reflect what the Council considered to be local communities, using obvious physical features such as roads, canals and rivers as boundaries where possible.
- 3.2 The study revealed widespread local deficiencies in all types of open space. The majority of deficiencies were less than 2 hectares, however, there were some large shortfalls, particularly in urban green space where half the neighbourhoods have a deficiency of more than 4 hectares, probably because the borough standard is the highest of all open space types at 2.7 hectares/1000 population. The study also highlighted that there are also relatively large deficiencies in outdoor sports and recreation facilities with just under a quarter of neighbourhoods having deficiencies of more than 4 hectares.
- 3.3 It was accepted within the study that it is not going to be possible to achieve the borough-wide standards in most of the neighbourhoods and that there will be limited new open space coming forward. The study acknowledged that boundaries of the neighbourhoods were drawn quite tightly around the urban area so there may be areas of open space outside the boundary but within the accessibility threshold, including open countryside, green corridors like rivers and canal corridors and green space (such as local nature reserves), that could be used to supplement space within the neighbourhood. Furthermore due to the constrained and compact nature of the Borough it is considered to be unrealistic that each typology would feature within each neighbourhood. Furthermore the study reported that residents reported widespread use of open space outside their own neighbourhood.
- 3.4 The position statement recommended therefore that based on assessments at the neighbourhood level open spaces should be protected. It also identified a number of issues which would need to be considered when proposals for alternative uses leading to a loss of open space would occur, such as;
- The quality of the open space in terms of how it is managed and maintained and its facilities.
 - Whether the open space has wider benefits – indicated in the site assessments as ecological, economic, educational, health or historical/cultural benefits.
 - The amount of a particular type of open space in the neighbourhood.

- Whether the site is critical to avoid a deficiency in accessibility, quality or quantity.
- The value attached to an open space by the local community.

4.0 2011 Recreational Open Space Review

- 4.1 The 2011 Recreational Open Space Review provided an update on the assessment carried out in 2005. Sites were assessed in 2010 and the study published in 2011.
- 4.2 The study updated all of the components of the 2005 study with the exception of the community consultation. It is envisaged that this will be carried out through developing the Green Space Strategy.
- 4.3 Through the update process there were a number of amendments to the methodology. These are summarised below;
- The following typologies were excluded from the review because they were not publicly accessible and used for genuine recreation purposes (Allotments, roadside verges and roundabouts) , had been reviewed as part of another assessment (Outdoor Sports Facilities) or were included as part of other typologies (facilities for children and young people)
 - Allotments
 - Roadside verges and roundabouts
 - Outdoor sport facilities
 - Facilities for children and young people
 - Green corridors (in part)
- 4.4 The study included Civic Space as an additional typology and assessed all sites over a threshold of 0.2ha. However this did include smaller areas of open space within areas such as Glascote Heath and Belgrave that collectively form a network of open space.
- 4.5 The review divided the Borough into six analysis areas but this differed from the 2005 study in that it was based on the analysis areas used in the Joint Indoor and Outdoor Sports Strategy which were originally formed from lower super output areas.
- 4.6 The review also included an assessment of value which was set against quality in a quality:value matrix. Combining quality and value is useful for longer term strategy planning. Even if a site is high quality, it may be poorly valued and it would be useful to understand why, similarly, a site may be highly valued but poor quality and this may point to a need to improve quality elements through management.

Standards Findings

- 4.7 The study made a number of recommendations for quantity, quality and accessibility including recommending appropriate standards.

Quantity

- 4.8 The study identified that there is sufficient access to unrestricted open space (irrespective of quality) and that all residential areas are within 400 metres of an open space.
- 4.9 The study recommended that a single standard is set because the Borough is largely urban and contains only one settlement. The amount of open space across the Borough is 5.9 ha/1000 population. Bearing in mind that there is currently sufficient open space in the Borough, it is recommended that 5.9 ha/1000 is used as an overall standard for new development, but that it is applied in a flexible manner according to the location, size of site, type of housing and proximity of existing open space. In many circumstances it would be preferable to ask for a contribution towards improvement of nearby open space (defined as an urban park, amenity open space or semi-natural green space within 400 metres, a distance which equates to a “local” open space) rather than on-site provision. It is recommended that a threshold of 14 dwellings is used as a general guide for on-site provision because this equates to 4.66 ha/1000 population and a minimum size of open space of 0.2 ha to ensure a site that is usable and viable for maintenance (see paragraph 2.10). For developments of less than 14 dwellings and developments of 14 or more dwellings where off-site contributions are requested, contributions would be used to fund quality and physical accessibility improvements. The green space strategy and SPD will set out priority open spaces for enhancement.

Quality

- 4.10 In terms of quality, the study recommended that the quality vision for each typology identified in the 2005 study should be taken forward.

Typology	Quality vision
Urban parks	A welcoming, clean and litter free site providing a range of leisure, recreational and enriched play opportunities for all ages, varied and well-kept vegetation, appropriate lighting and ancillary accommodation (including benches, toilets and bins) and well-signed to and within the site.

Amenity open space	A clean and well maintained green space site with well kept grass and other vegetation, easily accessible with clearly marked footpaths and big enough to encourage informal play. Site should have appropriate ancillary accommodation (benches, bins etc.) and landscaping in the right places providing a spacious outlook and overall enhancing the appearance of the local environment.
Semi-natural green space	A spacious, clean and litter free site with clear pathways and natural features that encourage wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness and also informal recreation and play where appropriate. Site should have appropriate ancillary accommodation (benches, bins etc.). Management of local sites should involve the community if at all possible.
Cemeteries & churchyards	A well maintained, clean site with long term burial capacity, provision of seating areas, bins, clear pathways and varied vegetation and landscaping that provides a sanctuary for wildlife in areas devoid of green space and one that encompasses biodiversity.
Civic space	A welcoming, clean, well lit, litter and clutter free public realm, with ancillary accommodation (benches, bins, cycle stands etc.) and appropriate

- 4.11 This review also went further than the 2005 study and scored quality. It was considered that this was particularly important rather than simply the provision of open space due to the well documented benefits they can bring to someone's health and wellbeing through factors such as greater community cohesion and increased informal recreation.
- 4.12 The study recommended the following quality standard for new development;
- In terms of a numerical standard, "good" quality has been defined as a score of 70% (see paragraph 2.35 of the 2011 report). It is recommended that where new provision is to be made on-site it should meet this standard in addition to the quality vision. Where it is more appropriate to make off-site provision a contribution should be made to improve the quality of an open space within 400 metres of the development site (amenity open space, semi-natural green space or urban park) to this standard.

Accessibility - Needs

- 4.13 The study identified a number of headline open space needs;
- Lack of an urban park on the eastern side of the Borough which can be addressed by considering the re-designation of the network of spaces around Glascote Heath and Stonydelph.
 - Public realm improvements are needed at Ellerbeck and Exley civic spaces.
 - A deficiency in play space in all areas except the east can be addressed by requiring new developments in these areas to include a play area or contribute towards enhancement of existing play spaces in need of improvement.
 - Consideration of more detailed site specific issues in neighbourhood plans.
 - Approach to contributions - amount, where to spend, priority schemes
 - Include strategic sites and improvements in IDP.
 - Standards will be taken forward as a supplementary planning document within the LDF.
 - Protect what we have in general, but consider disposal of low quality/low value sites. Identify sites for alternative uses.

Accessibilities Recommendations

- 4.14 **Approach 1** - separate standards for amenity open space, semi-natural green space and play space All residential areas should be within 400 metres of a good quality amenity open space, 600 metres of a good quality semi-natural green space and 600 metres of a good quality urban park. All residential areas should be within 400 metres of a good quality play space which can be a formal equipped space or area with suitable opportunities for informal or 'wild' play.
- 4.15 This approach would be satisfactory for amenity open space because there is a relatively small gap in provision, but there is a more significant gap in semi-natural green space and even with changes to green space management, it may be an unrealistic standard to achieve. Play space has not been considered as a separate type within the review, however, it is an important community facility and it is therefore relevant to include an accessibility standard. There are significant gaps in formal play space provision but some spaces, particularly the larger ones, already contain features that offer opportunities for informal wild play. There is also scope to provide new equipped play space on existing open spaces.
- 4.16 **Approach 2** - single standard to cover amenity open space and semi-natural green space, separate standard for play space All residential areas are to be within 400 metres of a high quality open space (over 0.2 hectares and scoring 70% or more) irrespective of type and hierarchy. All residential areas should be within 400 metres of a good quality play space which can be a formal equipped space or area with suitable opportunities for informal or 'wild' play.
- 4.17 All residential areas are to be within 400 metres of a high quality open space (over 0.2 hectares and scoring 70% or more) irrespective of type and hierarchy. All residential areas should be within 400 metres of a good quality play space which can be a formal equipped space or area with suitable opportunities for informal or 'wild' play.
- 4.18 This approach takes into account the local character of the Borough, which is small and predominantly urban, all residential areas are within 400 metres of unrestricted green space (amenity open space, semi-natural green space and urban parks) and there are limited land and opportunities for creating new open space. The issue in Tamworth is more around quality and it may be more appropriate to have a single accessibility distance standard for the Borough that focuses on improving quality.
- 4.19 In terms of applying the standard, the Council would expect developments of less than 14 dwellings to make a contribution to off-site provision or improvement of quality and accessibility of sites within the relevant distance threshold in lieu of on-site provision. On sites of 14 dwellings or more there will be need to provide new on-site open

space of the appropriate type where there are no existing sites within 400 metres.

5.0 Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 It is evident that although the 2011 review does not highlight a shortfall due to the scale of the study, i.e. using the analysis areas rather than the neighbourhood level, it takes forward the position statement in highlighting the importance of the quality of an area of open space in recommending a standard of access to a good quality open space.
- 5.2 It is therefore evident at a Borough wide level that as there is sufficient open space within the Borough. Ensuring that new development contributes to an improvement in the quality of existing open space will be of great importance moving forward. This has been reflected in the policies within the pre-submission Local Plan.