

Accessibility

- 16.1 Without accessibility for the public, the provision of good quality open space sites is of little benefit to the community. Limited accessibility greatly reduces the use of a site, and reduces the value of sites to the community. High quality sites are of little value to the community if accessibility is low.
- 16.2 Recent government research suggests that issues such as access for the disabled and elderly may contribute to the low levels of engagement of urban green spaces. With the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 coming into force in 2004 the accessibility of open spaces for the disabled will become fundamentally important over the next 5 years.

Local context

- 16.3 The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) developed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister includes a services domain – this takes into account the accessibility of services for local residents within each ward, and within the district as a whole.
- 16.4 There are five wards in Harborough which are amongst the most 10% of deprived wards in the country in relation to the accessibility of services.
- 16.5 Consultation has indicated that public transport is perceived to be a major issue within the district of Harborough. A number of comments were received regarding this issue, particularly in the Western area – Broughton Astley and Lutterworth area of the district. Poor public transport appears to be particularly inhibitive for young people, and prevents them from a greater use of open space. Furthermore, restricted levels of public transport lead to a greater reliance on the car.
- 16.6 The playing pitch strategy also refers to this restricted transport network and the resulting difficulties in accessing some sites, stating that while there is an oversupply of pitches within the district, there are difficulties in accessing a number of the more rural pitches, hence pitches are not as well used as they could be.
- 16.7 The Harborough Cultural Strategy On Street Survey indicated that one of the two main factors influencing how frequently people participate in cultural activities is the distance i.e. the accessibility of facilities. In addition, the Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces Report (DTLR 2002) highlights the importance of enhancing accessibility to encourage the elderly and less mobile to use open spaces more frequently.
- 16.8 The Harborough Cultural Strategy, jointly developed by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Cultural Partnership, sets out a number of visions for 2010, including the aim to ensure that residents have direct use of facilities within their own locality or good access to them elsewhere.
- 16.9 Accessibility issues are therefore of priority importance at present within the district of Harborough.

Assessment by accessibility factors

- 16.10 Accessibility is a key assessment of open space sites. Without accessibility for the public, the provision of good quality or good quantity of open space sites would be of very limited value.

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16.11 The overall aim of any accessibility assessment should be to identify:

- how accessible sites are
- areas of the district suffering in accessibility and therefore of priority importance
- key accessibility factors that need to be improved.

16.12 As analysed within each open space type section, every open space site within the district where possible has been given an accessibility rating. More specifically though, each parish and ward area has been assessed against specific key accessibility factors. Parish councillors were asked to give overall accessibility ratings for all open spaces within their parish.

16.13 The following assessment is by analysis area, studying the key accessibility factors that are good or poor, therefore identifying the key problems and issues with regards to accessibility in each area of the district.

Overall accessibility analysis

16.14 Only 20% of parish councillors who responded indicated that residents within their parish had concerns or complaints regarding the accessibility of open space sites. 25% of responding parishes provided examples of good or bad practice in terms of access to sites within their parish.

16.15 54% of respondents rated overall accessibility in Harborough as good or very good, and only 10% considered it to be poor or very poor. This indicates that overall, accessibility of open space sites is not perceived to be a fundamental problem.

16.16 89% of respondents rate the value for money of sites as good or very good.

16.17 The main area of concern which was also raised frequently in consultation is the provision of public transport to open space sites, with 70% rating this as poor or very poor.

16.18 Other findings include:

- opening times are considered good or very good by 82% of respondents and there were no negative responses
- the walking distance to open spaces is a highly rated factor with 85% considering this to be good or very good
- information and promotion of sites could be improved with 60% regarding this as average or below.

Analysis Area 1 – Market Harborough and Lubenham

- the overall accessibility in this analysis area is predominantly rated as good (80%). No respondents rated accessibility as poor overall
- information and promotion is the main area in need of improvement. Entrance to sites was also raised as an area for improvement within this sub area
- accessibility by walking and cycleways were the most highly rated factors, receiving no ratings of poor.

Analysis Area 2 – North East Rural

- there were no positive ratings for the provision of public transport and 94% deem this to be poor or very poor
- further areas of improvement are the promotion and information of open space sites and provision of cycleways
- cost and value for money were the highest rated accessibility factors.

Analysis Area 3 – Kibworth, Fleckney and Central

- like analysis areas 1 and 2, the cost and overall value for money of open space sites is the most highly rated accessibility factor
- the lack of cycleways is considered the biggest problem with 86% rating current provision as very poor
- further areas of concern mirror those in other areas – the lack of public transport (76% very poor), promotion and information and signage of open space sites. Again, consideration should be given into the improvement of these accessibility factors.

Analysis Area 4 – Western Area (Lutterworth/Broughton Astley)

- overall, accessibility in the Western area is considered to be average
- as in the other analysis areas, public transport, signage and information and promotion received poor ratings
- provision of cycleways was also considered to be relatively poor. These areas should be prioritised for improvement
- opening times was the highest rated accessibility factor. Cost and value for money was also rated highly, alongside distance from the majority of the population of the parish.

Analysis Area 5 – Peatling and Bosworth

- on the whole, accessibility ratings were relatively good for Peatling and Bosworth with only 11% providing negative responses
- the issue of poor public transport to open space sites was again evident in this area
- value for money and opening times are the most highly valued accessibility factors. Unlike other areas responses on information and signage were in general positive.

An accessibility vision

- 16.19 In addition to commenting on issues and examples where the accessibility of sites is currently a problem within the parish, clerks were asked to identify what improvements they would like to see to open spaces within their locality. This begins to illustrate what features are perceived to lead to an accessible open space, and

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contributes towards the development of a vision for accessible open spaces in the future within Harborough.

16.20 Those factors identified by Parish Clerks as potential improvements in the accessibility of their sites include:

- increases in the level of signage – particularly in rural villages
- improvements in the public transport network
- improvements in the accessibility of open space sites for wheelchair and disabled users
- extended opening hours (facilitated by the installation of lighting and security)
- the development of infrastructure within larger open space sites, such as Lutterworth Country Park.

16.21 These factors represent the start of a vision for the ideal accessible open space within Harborough DC.

16.22 In addition, clerks were asked to indicate whether there were any open space sites which they would consider to be good or bad examples of accessibility within their parish. Those highlighted as good practice, and the reasons why are outlined in table 16.1 below:

Table 16.1 Good Practice Sites

Parish	Site	Reasons
Gilmorton	Church and Churchyard.	Good access from two sides. Paths throughout.
Kibworth Harcourt	Jubilee Green Cemetery.	Within expected travel time
Laughton	Public rights of way and Village Green.	Well used and very accessible.
Shearsby	Shearsby Village Green.	Available to all, at all times, for permitted use as decided by Parish meeting.
Welham	St Andrews Church.	A level site with double doors at the entrance
Cranoe	St Michaels and All Angels.	
Claybrooke Magna	Village Green.	Good access and maintained to a high standard.
Wiston cum Newton Harcourt	Wiston Estate Countryside Stewardship.	Several access points.
Bitteswell	Village Greens.	Access ramps provided for prams, wheelchairs.
Medbourne	Playground.	Flat easy access for pushchairs and wheelchairs.
Billesdon	Woodland and Lake site.	Scheme designed with disabled access included.

16.23 The main reason why sites were identified as examples of bad practice within the district was they are considered to be inaccessible for wheelchairs. Many parishes

were conscious that their open space sites are not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Table 16.2 –Bad practice sites

Parish	Site	Reasons
Lutterworth	Country Park	Needs infrastructure.
Thurnby and Bushby	Manor Field Park	Entrance is hidden. No signs to entrance. No notices. Car park abused for illegal purposes.
Lowesby	Midshires Way	Sometimes becomes very deep in mud.
Gilmorton	Recreation Ground	Poor access to play equipment limits use
Little Stretton	Sence Walk Play area	Poor maintenance of entrances and walk areas. Drainage problems, uneven grass play area, poor play equipment.
Tur Langton	St Andrews	Wheelchair access.
Billesdon	Play area	Originally planned with no concern for disabled access.

16.24 Taking into account comments received during consultation regarding aspirations for an accessible open space, and data received from Parish Councils throughout the process, it is recommended that future sites for Harborough should

- take into account the requirements of the disabled
- have good signage
- larger sites should be easily access through public transport, or a network of footpaths / cycleways.

16.25 These features could form the start of a measurement to assess where open space sites are now and what improvements could be made in the future. It is also useful to make comparisons to other good sites in other Local Authorities.

Determining accessibility standards

16.26 Accessibility standards for each type of open space should be derived from an analysis of the accessibility issues and assessment within the audit and in light of community views.

Distance thresholds and catchments

16.27 Distance thresholds (i.e. the maximum distance that typical users can reasonably be expected to travel to each type of provision using different modes of transport) are a very useful planning tool especially when used in association with a Geographical Information System (GIS).

16.28 PPG17 encourages that any new open space sites or enhancement of existing sites should ensure accessibility by environmentally friendly forms of transport such as

walking, cycling and by public transport. There is a real desire to move away from reliability on the car.

- 16.29 It should be noted that there may be justifiable reasons to set higher or lower thresholds in different areas e.g. a higher threshold may be set if there is no realistic possibility of sufficient new provision to enable a lower threshold to be achievable. Therefore distance thresholds that are set should be realistic as well as encouraging a comprehensive provision of accessible open space across the district. There may also be a case for setting varying standards for urban and rural areas.
- 16.30 There are many varying factors that influence how far people are willing to travel to an open space type. An initial indication of how far people are willing to travel was investigated during consultation for this needs assessment, and has been discussed for each open space type in previous sections, and recommendations for an accessibility standard suggested.

Aspiring to specific standards

- 16.31 Attempts to set specific accessibility standards, identify effective catchments of sites and set distance thresholds for each type of open space in detail would require comprehensive on-site community consultation over a period of time during which the open spaces were used in order to get a random sample of typical users of sites across the district. e.g. during the summer.
- 16.32 In setting accessibility standards to aspire to, these standards should be recognised and accepted by the local community. Regular surveys of users can then be used to confirm whether the accessibility standards are being met. Similar to the quality standards described in section 15, where possible, accessibility standards should:
- enable good designs to encourage usage by appropriate forms of transport
 - enable expectations of the local community to be met
 - provide a measurable vision for those open spaces that are rated as poor or very poor and if achieved, would give these poor spaces a new lease of life and enable them to serve the needs of the local community.
- 16.33 In developing this study a set of accessibility standards was used for each of the ratings used from 'Very Good to Very Poor' for all open space types. These should not be seen as absolute measures but reasonable aspirations and benchmarks upon which to measure the accessibility of any existing open space in order to determine the need for enhancement. These cover the main categories of entrance and signage, distance and catchments, cost, transport and access routes. This matrix is provided in Appendix J.
- 16.34 The primary method of setting an accessibility standard is through the use of catchment areas, as discussed within each of the individual open space type sections. This offers an opportunity to see which areas are deficient in accessible facilities for each open space type.
- 16.35 Suggested recommendations (outlined in each of the specific sections) based on the results of consultation for this study are illustrated in table 16.3 overleaf. It is suggested that further detailed public consultation is undertaken prior to the formal adoption of accessibility standards for the district.

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16.36 The development of standards will enable effective planning and comparisons with other areas in future years.

Table 16.3 Accessibility Catchment Summary

Open Space Type	Mode of Transport	Members		Catchment Areas	
		75%	General Consensus	Recommended Travel Time	Estimated equivalent distance
Parks and Gardens	Walk	20 minutes		10 minute drivetime	4km
	Cycle		20 minutes		
	Bus				
	Car	Between 5 and 10 minutes	15 minutes		
Natural Open Spaces	Walk	20 minutes		20 minute walk	1.6km
	Cycle				
	Bus				
	Car	5 minutes	15 - 20 minutes		
Green Corridors	Walk	20 minutes		20 minute walk	1.6km
	Cycle				
	Bus				
	Car				
Amenity Green Space	Walk	10 - 15 minutes	5 minutes	10 minute walk	800m
	Cycle				
	Bus				
	Car				
Play Spaces for Children	Walk	10 minutes	5 minutes	5 - 10 minute walk	400m - 800m
	Cycle				
	Bus				
	Car				
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Walk	15 minutes		10 - 15 minute drive	4 - 6km
	Cycle		20 minutes		
	Bus				
	Car	10 minutes	15 minutes		
Allotments	Walk	10 minutes		5 - 10 minute drive	2 - 4km
	Cycle				
	Bus				
	Car	5-10 minutes			
Cemeteries and Churchyards	Walk	15 minutes		10 minute drive	4km
	Cycle				
	Bus				
	Car	5 minutes			
Civic Spaces	Walk	20 minutes		10 minute drive	4km
	Cycle				
	Bus				
	Car	10 minutes			