

Quality

- 15.1 Previous research on open spaces undertaken by various organisations suggests that what concerns most users and deters non-users of parks and open spaces are resource related issues, with the general condition and quality of open spaces ranking very highly.
- 15.2 Design is often a key part in tackling the quality factors and consequently barriers to use of urban green spaces.

Wider impact of quality

- 15.3 High quality open spaces are essential to improving the social, economic and cultural characteristics of priority areas. The visibility of open spaces and the importance accorded to them by local residents makes them essential to achieving other objectives. They are often the obvious key indicators of the state of the area in which they are located.
- 15.4 The condition of open spaces can often be the vital ingredient to successfully regenerating priority and deprived areas, improving townscapes and creating a sense of place for the local community.
- 15.5 Quality of open space is vital in determining the value attached to an open space site, and the likely use of the site.
- 15.6 Local standards should include the setting of qualitative standards for open space, providing a vision and benchmark for the development of future and existing open spaces.

Local context

- 15.7 The 2003/ 2004 Best Value Performance Plan outlines a number of visions for 2010, including a vision for a cleaner healthier environment where:

“Pollution of the air is lower and roads are less congested. Households and businesses produce less waste and a greater percentage is recycled. Flooding risks are lower and local development takes great account of local environmental needs. The diversity of natural habitats and wildlife is encouraged and enhanced. There is greater awareness of environmental and energy conservation issues. Organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors are following good environmental policies and practice.”

- 15.8 The plan states that a number of activities are key to delivering the vision, including:
- Open spaces and amenity areas
 - Cemeteries and Burial Grounds
 - Closed Churchyards
 - Public conveniences
 - Street cleaning
 - Grounds maintenance.

15.9 Improving the quality of open space in the district will be key in achieving the vision of a cleaner and healthier environment by 2010.

15.10 The importance placed on improving the quality of open spaces by the Council is evident through:

- the victory of Market Harborough in the East Midlands In Bloom Competition
- the target outlined in the Best Value Performance Plan of implementing the dogs (fouling of land) Act 1996 – aimed at reducing the amount of dog fouling, which will improve the quality of open space
- improve the cleanliness of all streets and open spaces within the district, and the level of satisfaction of Parish Councils – this will be measured by the development of a new performance indicator.
- a number of achievements relating to improving the quality of open space are highlighted in the plan, including:
 - the official opening of Lutterworth Country Park
 - £15,000 of new play equipment for Roman Way, plus new equipment at Welland park, Goodwood Close and Burford Green
 - work is completed on the Millennium Mile.

15.11 In addition, further improvements to the quality of open spaces within the district are planned:

- Develop a new play area at Gores Lane / Goodwood Close – now completed
- Review Northampton Road Cemetery Provision
- Produce a 10 year development plan for Welland Park
- Undertake major improvements to play areas.

15.12 Consultation indicated that quality of open spaces is highly important in determining the use of open space and the value placed upon specific sites.

Assessment by quality factors

15.13 Many of the above plans involve the improvement of the quality of open spaces within the district.

15.14 Any assessment of 'quality' with regards to open space requires some form of scoring system against clear assessment factors. The overall aim should be to identify:

- areas of the district suffering in quality and therefore of priority importance
- key quality factors that need to be improved.

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

their parish. It is important to note that these ratings are subjective. The factors were grouped under the headings of:

- Cleanliness and Maintenance
- Security and Safety
- Vegetation
- Ancillary Accommodation.

15.16 The following analysis is by analysis-area, analysing the key quality factors that are good or poor and therefore identifying the key problems and issues with regards to general quality in each area.

Quality analysis - overall

15.17 34% of parish councillors who responded said that they had received complaints about the quality of open spaces within their parish and 36% indicated that residents were keen to see improvements. 35% of those parishes that responded provided examples of good or bad practice in terms of quality within their parish.

15.18 53% of respondents rated the overall quality of open spaces as good or very good and only 7% poor or very poor indicating that in general, quality of open spaces is relatively high.

15.19 Dog fouling (34%), parking (57%) and toilets within open spaces (75%) are the worst rated quality factors within Harborough district.

15.20 Other themes emerging include:

- vandalism and graffiti are not considered to be a major problem as 77% said that the situation was good or very good
- litter is of some concern with 22% of responses poor or very poor
- the maintenance and management of open space sites is generally well regarded with 66% rating it as good or very good
- planted areas and grassed areas were the among the best rated quality factors with minimal responses indicated as poor or very poor and 61% and 69% as good or very good
- information and signage could be better with 63% rating this as average or below.

Analysis Area 1 – Market Harborough and Lubenham

15.21 This sub-area follows similar concerns to the overall analysis in that the worst rated factors include litter, dog fouling and parking.

15.22 Parking was considered to be the biggest problem at open space sites with 60% rating this as average or below. Unlike the overall analysis a large proportion, 80% regarded information and signage in this area to be good or very good.

15.23 Overall this analysis area has the highest overall quality rating with 67% rating this as good.

Analysis Area 2 – North East Rural

15.24 Again the main concerns include dog fouling (31% as poor or very poor) and parking within open spaces (63%).

15.25 Both the quality of equipment (29% poor or very poor) and signage and information (33%) could also be improved.

15.26 Vandalism and graffiti are not considered a problem in this area with 88% rating the situation as good or very good and only 1 of 32 parishes in this region indicating a negative response.

Analysis Area 3 – Kibworth, Fleckney and Central

15.27 Dog fouling was the worst factor in this area with 58% of responses rating as poor or very poor. Litter is also the common problem with 40% rating as poor and 33% believing the provision of litter bins to be very poor.

15.28 Planted and grassed areas are well rated with 89% of responses indicating them to be good or very good and there were no negative responses for either.

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

15.29 Only 29% of responses rated the overall quality of open space as good or above. The majority believe open space in the area to be average. 57% believe litter to be average or below this figure was even higher for dog fouling, 71%.

15.30 The more positive ratings were planted areas (50% as good), grass areas (40% as good), maintenance and management (47% as good) and the lack of vandalism and graffiti (67% as good or very good).

Analysis Area 5 – Kibworth, Fleckney and Central

15.31 This was the best rated analysis area in terms of cleanliness and maintenance with 80% rating this as good or very good. In terms of the overall quality rating for open space there were no negative responses.

15.32 Unlike other areas there were some responses indicating a positive rating regarding litter problems, 50% rate the situation as good or very good and there were no negative responses.

15.33 Overall, dog fouling (40% responses as poor or very poor), noise (30%), and equipment within open spaces (43%) are the worst rated quality factors within the area.

15.34 Vandalism and graffiti was a very positive factor with 78% of responses rated as good or very good. 80% rated maintenance and management as good or very good.

Determining quality standards

15.35 Quality standards for each type of open space should be derived from an analysis of the quality issues within the audit and in light of community views.

15.36 There are no universal set standards for open space types. However the Green Flag award scheme set up by the Civic Trust does provide some guidance under the following headings:

- welcoming place
- healthy, safe and secure place
- clean and well-maintained place
- sustainability
- conservation and heritage
- community involvement
- marketing

15.37 This Green Flag scheme is the most advanced national model for assessing the qualities that attract people to parks and green spaces.

Aspiring to specific standards

15.38 The qualities identified in local standards should be recognised and accepted by the local community.

15.39 Quality standards should:

- enable good designs to create ‘places from spaces’ i.e. a well designed open space should encourage usage and will create a sense of well-being in the community
- enable the expectations of the local community to be met
- provide a measurable vision for those existing open spaces that are low quality which if achieved would give these poor spaces a new lease of life and enable them to serve the needs of the local community
- help to determine which existing open spaces require enhancement
- encompass management and maintenance issues.

15.40 PPG17 recommends that **quality standards should not be absolute measures but reasonable aspirations and benchmarks** upon which to measure the quality of any existing open space in order to determine the need for enhancement.

15.41 The companion guide ‘Assessing Needs and Opportunities’ also states that any assessment of quality or nature of open spaces or sport and recreation facilities needs a clear set of benchmarks relating to stated standards and ideally some form of scoring system.

15.42 In developing this study we have developed a matrix which outlines our interpretation of ratings from “very good” to poor, for each of the quality factors identified.

15.43 This matrix of standards covers the main categories of cleanliness and maintenance, security and safety, vegetation and ancillary accommodation. The matrix is provided in Appendix I.

15.44 This analysis and quality vision could be developed into an assessment mechanism against which to assess future open space sites within Harborough District Council.

A quality vision

15.45 In addition to commenting on current problems with open space in the parish, for example dog fouling and parking, parish clerks were asked to identify what improvements they would like to see to open spaces within their parish. This begins to illustrate what factors are perceived to be important in a quality open space, and contributes towards the development of a vision for open spaces in the future within Harborough District.

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

- no dog fouling – provision of dog litter bins
- presence of signing
- provision of litter bins
- improvements to the security of sites and development of sufficient but appropriate lighting
- suitable parking
- drainage for sports pitches
- provision of play equipment
- reduction of vandalism.

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

15.48 In addition, clerks were asked to indicate whether there were any open space sites which they would consider to be good practice or bad practice within their parish. Those highlighted as good practice and the reasons why are outlined in table 15.1 below:

Table 15.1 Good practice open space sites

Parish	Site	Reasons
Swinford	Childrens Play Area	
Stonton Wyville	Childrens Play Area	It is well used and well maintained
South Kilworth	Childrens Play Area and Playing Field	Well designed. Safety features. Well used. Good village usage.
Wiston cum Newton Harcourt	Countryside stewardship wistow estate site	Good access and well maintained. Very well used.

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Lutterworth	Coventry Road Recreation Ground	Facilities provided for all age groups. Dog/litter bins provided and grounds maintenance carry out daily checks and litter collection.
East Norton	Churchyard	Maintained with pride by volunteers.
Ullesthorpe	Disused Railway	Tree planting.
Claybrooke Parva	Green Lane	Reclamation of space that had fallen into disuse.
Kibworth Harcourt	Jubilee Green Cemetery	High standard of care and maintenance.
Gilmorton	Pavilion and playing fields	Well used facility. Well maintained. Used regularly for functions.
Leire	Playing field and enclosed childrens area and adjacent Jubilee Walk and nature reserve	
Hallaton	The Cross	Well kept and mown, maintained etc...
Great Bowden	Village Greens	Maintained by Parish Council.
Lowesby	Village Green and Cricket Path	Very well maintained.
Claybrooke Magna	Village Green and Playground	Well maintained, attractive and designed. Good range of equipment and well maintained.
Fleckney	Village Hall	Good all round facilities for group use. Located near centre of Village.
Misterton with Walcote	Walcote School Allotments	Well used and maintained.
Rolleston	Well maintained farmland	Large number of footpaths.
East Langton	Cricket Club	Well drained and well used.
Bitteswell	Cemetery	Joint action between Parish Council and Church.
North Kilworth	Millennium Green	Accessible, well throughout and well used - being adjacent to car park and Village Hall
Medbourne	The Hollow	Good design and planting scheme and encouragement of wildlife, well maintained and used.

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Billesdon	Village Green and Billesdon Woodland and Lake	Overhauled and enhanced as a millennium project. Under development to promote bio-diversity.
Cotesbach	Village Pond	A new initiative in the village. Further work in the year to improve by planting

15.49 The main reason why sites were identified as examples of bad practice within the district was they are considered to be overgrown and appear untidy. The level of maintenance should therefore also be considered to be important in the production of a quality benchmarking standard for Harborough DC.

15.50 Those sites which were considered to be examples of bad practice are highlighted in table 15.2 below.

Table 15.2 – Bad practice open space sites

Parish	Site	Reasons
Claybrooke Magna	Fosseway and Milestone Hollow	Both very overgrown.
Kimcote and Walton	Gravel Hole	Previous answer.
Fleckney	Leicester Road	Facilities not kept pace with needs of Village. Youth Centre inadequate and security poor.
Scraptoft	Local Nature Reserve	Overgrown. Shooting ground. Little maintenance.
Gilmorton	Recreation Ground	Out-dated play equipment. No access. Two, well used and maintained tennis courts.
Great Bowden	Recreation Ground	Lacks car parking, area poorly maintained and Parish Council need to raise adequate funds.
Ullesthorpe	Ullesthorpe Recreation Field	Needs money spending on it.
South Kilworth	Village Green	Roads by and across needs alterations and enhancement to make facility able to be used on regular basis.
Stoughton	Paddock	Centre of Village needs to be kept tidy - plus hedge facing Gaulby Lane cut back.
Billesdon	Village close	Area generally looks unkept.
Cotesbach	Footpaths and bridleways	Often ploughed up and not re-instated. Some paths blocked.

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15.51 Taking into account comments received during consultation regarding aspirations for a quality open space, and data received from Parish Councils throughout the process, it is recommended that a quality standard for Harborough DC could include:

“a clean, litter and dog fouling free area that is well-lit and provides a level of varied vegetation and biodiversity, including well-kept grass and other natural features where suitable. The site should be regularly maintained and have suitable parking in close proximity where appropriate. “

15.52 This could be used as 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 quality sites in other Local Authorities.

15.53 Further public consultation should be undertaken prior to the adaptation of a quality standard in order to ascertain the public perception of an ideal open space from a cross section of residents across Harborough District.