

# Draft PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part II



This document is a draft version of the analysis undertaken for part two of the Basildon Borough PPG17 Open Space Assessment. It is a substantial body of work considering the needs and demands for niche open space typologies within the Borough.

The following sections are contained in this draft document:

<b>Chapter 11:</b> Allotments	page 134
<b>Chapter 12:</b> Churchyards and Cemeteries	page 153
<b>Chapter 13:</b> Children & Young People's Play Spaces	page 175

<b>CHAPTER 11 - ALLOTMENTS</b> .....	<b>134</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>134</b>
Allotment Legislation.....	135
Supply of Allotments in Basildon Borough.....	136
Plot Sizes.....	137
Local Feedback .....	138
<b>Accessibility</b> .....	<b>140</b>
<b>Quantity</b> .....	<b>142</b>
<b>Quality</b> .....	<b>144</b>
Quality & Intrinsic Benefits Results.....	146
Intrinsic Benefit .....	149
Quality and Intrinsic Benefit Matrix .....	150
<b>Recommended Policies</b> .....	<b>151</b>

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# Chapter 11 - Allotments

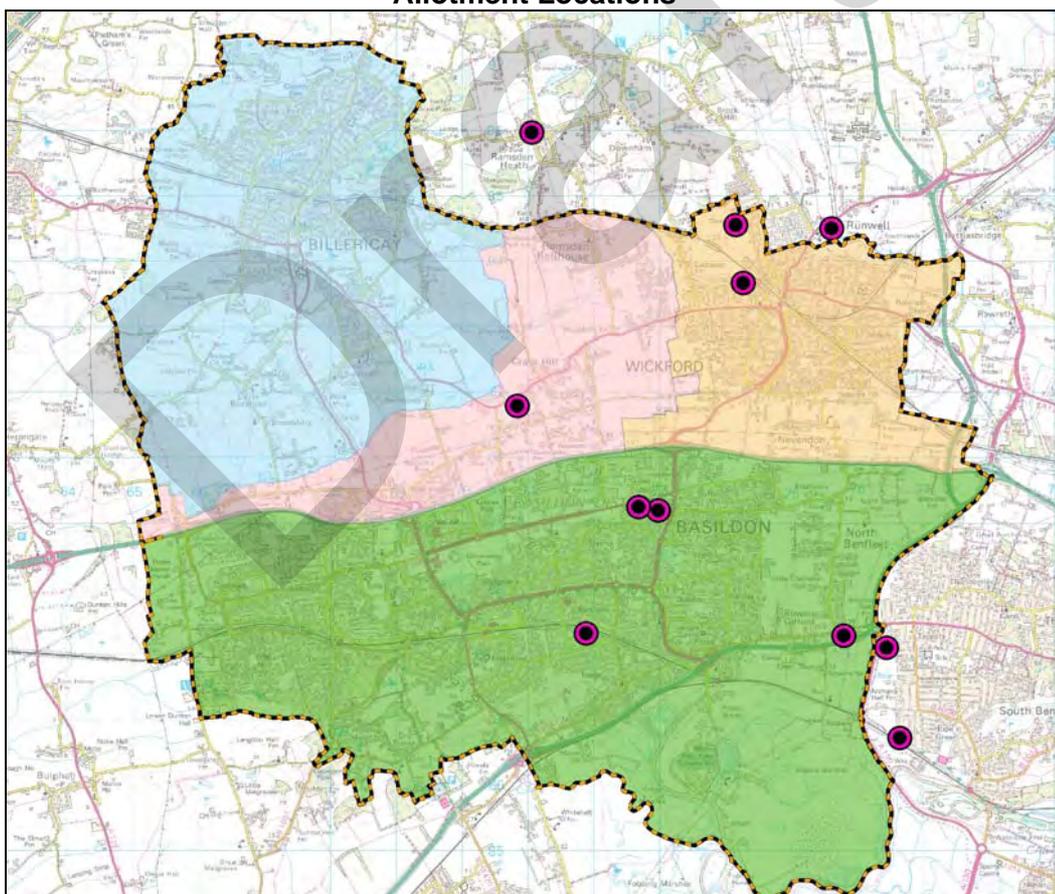
## Introduction

11.1 Allotments are a very specific form of open space, being plots of land rented by individuals for the growing of food. Some of the benefits of running an allotment include providing a healthy physical and mental activity, personal satisfaction from growing, the fostering of social relationships and providing a place to relax away from the hustle and bustle of home.

11.2 In Basildon Borough, there are six active allotment sites, two of which are run by the local authority, the remaining sites being operated by Allotment Associations. In addition, a new 100 plot site is proposed for the southern part of Victoria Park, Laindon, and is expected to become available during 2011. The current operating sites in the Borough are:

- Market Road Allotments, Wickford
- St James Rd Allotments, Vange
- Crays Hill Allotment Gardens
- Bowers Gifford Allotments
- Holden Gardens Allotments, Basildon
- Pendle Drive Allotment Gardens, Basildon

**Allotment Locations**



11.3 Each private site operates as a charity/ non-profit associations and, with the exception of an annual fee for the land, are managed entirely by their association, under the terms of an agreement with the local authority and bound by the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908. The Local Authority sites are bound by the same Act, but are operated directly by the Council. Its Parks & Grounds Maintenance Service is point of contact for the associations if there are any matters to address.

## Allotment Legislation

11.4 Allotment gardening is one of the only recreational activities which has its own legislation. The main piece of legislation is the **Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908** (the principal statute on allotments for England and Wales). The main points of the legislation are:

Section 23 - refers to an evidenced demand for allotments, following receipt of notice by six or more local rate payers, which activates the obligation of provision and letting on a local authority.

Section 30 - where a local authority discovers that a tenant lives more than one mile outside the area for which the allotments are provided, the local authority can serve notice and one month after any such notice the tenancy determines automatically, by effluxion of time.

### Allotments Act 1922

Section 22 - (1) defines allotment gardens as an area not exceeding 40 poles<sup>1</sup> in extent and wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by themselves or their family.

### Allotments Act 1950

Section 9 - amends section 22 (1)/1922 to set the plot size of an allotment garden not to exceed 20 poles in extent where the population of the borough or district is more than 10,000.

Section 10 – regards allotment rents, which should be “*let at such a rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land if let for such use on the terms on which it is in fact let*”.

- In Basildon Borough, the rents paid since April 2010 for an allotment plot at the two Council sites are as follows<sup>2</sup>:

	<b>Market Road, Wickford</b>	<b>St James' Road, Vange</b>
<b>OAP</b>	£14.80 per annum	£14.80 per annum
<b>Adult</b>	£29.60 per annum	£29.60 per annum

Section 12 – granted the right to keep and house hens and/or rabbits within an allotment, other than for a business or trade and except where in conflict with a tenancy agreement, contract or covenant, provided they are not kept in such a manner as to prejudice health, cause a nuisance or affect any enactment.

(Source: NSALG 29-09-2010)

### Town & Country Planning Act 1990

11.5 In terms of town planning, planning permission is not required for land to be used as an allotment garden. This derives from **Section 55, subsection (2) paragraph (e)** and **section 336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990**:

- **s. 55 (2)** The following operations or uses of land shall not be taken for the purposes of this Act to involve development of the land:

<sup>1</sup> See paragraph 11.13 for definition of dimensions.

<sup>2</sup> Effective 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 and correct on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2010

(e) the use of any land for the purposes of agriculture . . . and the use for any of those purposes of any building occupied together with land so used.

- **s. 336 Interpretation:** 'agriculture' includes horticulture, fruit growing, seed growing ... and 'agricultural' shall be construed accordingly.

However, planning permission is likely to be required for fencing and structures, new access and any other associated works.

## Supply of Allotments in Basildon Borough

11.6 In 2010, there were approximately 445 allotment plots in the borough<sup>3</sup>, representing approximately 445 allotment holders<sup>4</sup>. In addition, there are four allotment gardens within 1km of the borough boundary, which are also available to people living nearby, within the Basildon Borough. Although the use of allotments currently equates to under 0.5% of the population, these spaces are an important feature of the open space estate. Interest in running an allotment is greater than supply, with waiting lists for each of the Council sites exceeding the current number of plots available and each of the private sites running reasonable waiting lists with very low annual turnover rates.

11.7 The turnover of plot occupation in the Borough is extremely low, at an estimated 10 per year (variable) for the entire public and private estate. It can therefore take many years for someone to be able to adopt a plot, well after the initial enthusiasm has declined, and those at the top of a list may have even moved away before an opportunity arises. One positive consequence of low turnover is that people have a strong affiliation with each site that has helped community spirit flourish.

11.8 The interest in allotments has fluctuated over time, as has the provision of sites across the country. A survey carried out on behalf of the National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) in June 2009 provided the following national statistics:

Year	Total plots in survey	Councils surveyed	Total waiting lists	People waiting per 100 plots
1970	532,964	*All	5,870	1
1977	497,793	*All	121,037	24
1996	296,923	All	12,950	4
2009	156,490	Principal	76,330	49

\*Figures for 1970 & 1977 apply to England and Wales;  
1996 and 2009 figures apply to England only. NSALG June 2009 p.7

11.9 This table shows a clear decline in allotment provision by local authorities over time and currently the greatest unmet demand coupled with the lowest provision. There are a number of significant uncertainties in the data, not least due to almost a third of councils (110) not having access to waiting list data because they do not run the allotments in their area. However, the survey concluded that the length of waiting lists is too long to be due to uncertainties within the data collected and the evidence supports similar findings from a survey by the London Assembly in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Details of each site have been collected from appropriate persons but not empirically verified.

<sup>4</sup> For this study, the details of allotment holders were not requested. However, through discussions with site organisers, one member holding more than one plot is generally discouraged.

- 11.10 In Basildon Borough, the number of people on Council allotment site waiting lists in 2009 was 130, compared 113 existing plots. Waiting lists for each of the private sites in the borough vary considerably but can identify demand for almost another 80 plots. In all cases the lists are not refreshed until a plot becomes available, but for approximately 332 plots within the four association sites, there are 77 people confirmed on a list. There is no dedicated list system across the Borough for allocating plots and due to a number of factors this research is very approximate. For example, Pendle Drive closed its list at 17 due to the low turnover, but anecdotally they receive a request about once a fortnight. Similarly, people are not restricted to apply only to one list and therefore duplicates may arise between sites. Finally, every site finds new occupiers by contacting people in turn from the list when a plot becomes available. This is the only time they can confirm whether a plot is still desired by the person on the list and there is therefore some uncertainty and 'time lag' in the lists.
- 11.11 Irrespective of these uncertainties, the national and local picture is of a decline in allotment provision, with variable demand over the years, but good site management and a current desire for greater supply. The historic reasons for a decline in provision are complex and will not be considered here. Importantly, the currently demand is still fairly low compared to the total population, but there is an identifiable, continuous shortage of allotment plots in the borough compared to the demand for them from residents.
- 11.12 A proposed new allotment garden at Victoria Park of 40 plots would go some way towards meeting the demand in the Borough. More information on this proposal and other potential new locations is given at Section 11.27 & 11.49.

## Plot Sizes

- 11.13 There are no minimum sizes for an allotment, although very small plots would defeat their workable purpose in providing an area of land to grow produce. An upper limit is given by virtue of legislation<sup>5</sup>, stating an allotment garden as a site not greater than 40 poles<sup>6</sup>, or 20 poles where the electoral population of the allotment authority area is greater than 10,000 people. This grants a smaller maximum area for people living in more populous locations.
- 11.14 The NSALG recommend a '10 pole plot' for an allotment garden, which equates to about 250m<sup>2</sup>. If properly husbanded, this size of site should feed a family of four for a year (see NSALG (2010) *Creating a new allotment site*). However, this recommended size is not binding and an allotment provider can determine the scale of plots, appropriate to local circumstances.
- 11.15 In Basildon Borough, the plot sizes range from around 92m<sup>2</sup> to 225m<sup>2</sup> (around 4-pole to 9-pole plots). Anecdotally, these are considered a little small by experienced allotment holders while new holders often initially find the size of a plot surprisingly large and quite daunting. Holden Gardens, Basildon deliberately split a number of plots into 'starter plots' because a full plot can be a 'handful' for a new user. These have proved to be a popular starting point.
- 11.16 For clarity, a pole (sometimes referred to as a 'rod'<sup>7</sup> or a 'perch') is around 5.5 yards, or 5m. A single 'pole plot' is therefore an area of land measuring 1 pole x 1 pole (25m<sup>2</sup>). A 10 pole-plot would be equivalent to ten of these 'single pole plots', rather than a plot of land of 10 poles by 10 poles (which would be a 100-pole plot).
- 11.17 There is no regulation on the shape of a plot, although rectangular or square plots are the most likely shape, generally because these are easier to manage, measure and partition.

<sup>5</sup> See the Allotment Act 1922, Section 22(1) and the Allotment Act 1950, Section 9.

<sup>6</sup> The 'pole' is a traditional measurements for allotments. The conversion to metric is described in paragraph 11.16.

<sup>7</sup> Relates to an Anglo-Saxon unit of length equal to the length of the rod that connected a plough to the nose of an Ox.

## Local Feedback

- 11.18 Local feedback clearly shows that people who have an allotment, value them immensely. Almost a quarter of people who responded to the Open Space Survey 2009 and who rent an allotment cited it as their favourite open space anywhere (inside or outside of the district). Over half told us they want these places to be a focus for improvement. Comments from the survey also suggest that a commitment to an allotment can become a significant emotional connection, enriching a person's enjoyment of where they live.
- 11.19 Although the proportion of users is quite low compared to the population, the Open Space Survey 2009 indicated that people are less happy with the provision of allotments in the borough than some other typologies, and that there is demand for the authority to concentrate on improving and providing allotment sites over some other types of open space.
- 11.20 Within the borough, people feel that all open space has physical, social and mental health benefits and all typologies are important to perceptions of the environment. There is general satisfaction with the allotments from those that use them and five out of six allotment gardens achieved a high quality rating in the Quality Assessment 2007.
- 11.21 However, over a full range of surveys, allotments were regularly considered the least important typology by local people. Equally, these specialist spaces have a dedicated user base, but the majority of people are less likely to use or benefit from them.
- 11.22 There are a few areas for improvement. The provision of facilities within sites is inconsistent. Most do not have CCTV or other security features, only half have parking facilities and only one has any formal signage. The two best-rated sites have site based staff<sup>8</sup> and one other site has toilet facilities. Access and footpaths within the sites for disabled users are either poor or reasonable and there is a consistently low score for signage information about the sites and how to contact management.
- 11.23 More positively, the general design of facilities and paths is good, as is management and maintenance, with all sites having a 'reasonable' or 'good' rating for a '*cared-for appearance*'. There is low evidence of vandalism and most sites have good levels of community involvement along with evidence of sustainable management practices such as rainwater harvesting and composting
- 11.24 Allotment holders have a high regard for these sites and there are a number of people who would appreciate the opportunity to try to grow their own food. Many people don't feel able to grow effectively at home for a variety of reasons, but mostly due to the garden space required and confidence. An allotment garden has a wealth of experience and knowledge that can be very helpful to new people. Although they are relatively inexpensive to hold for a year, the time and energy required to cultivate them successfully can be quite high and the cost of fertilizer, seeds and equipment can add to this substantially. To assist, some allotment societies provide communal manure through deals with farms or have other ways of group purchasing seeds and other items that people will require.
- 11.25 Although it is fair to state that allotments are often held by retirees, there is a trend towards 'downshifting'<sup>9</sup> and a growing number of young adults interested in allotments. Certain allotment societies have noticed encouragement coming from schools and individual families in getting children and young people involved in growing food, welcoming the diversity and interest from the younger generations.

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<sup>8</sup> Holden Gardens and Pendle Drive Allotments

<sup>9</sup> A process of leaving the rat-race and becoming more self-sufficient, less money orientated and less hectic. This is not exclusively the approach of retirees, but is more commonly associated with people who are retired.

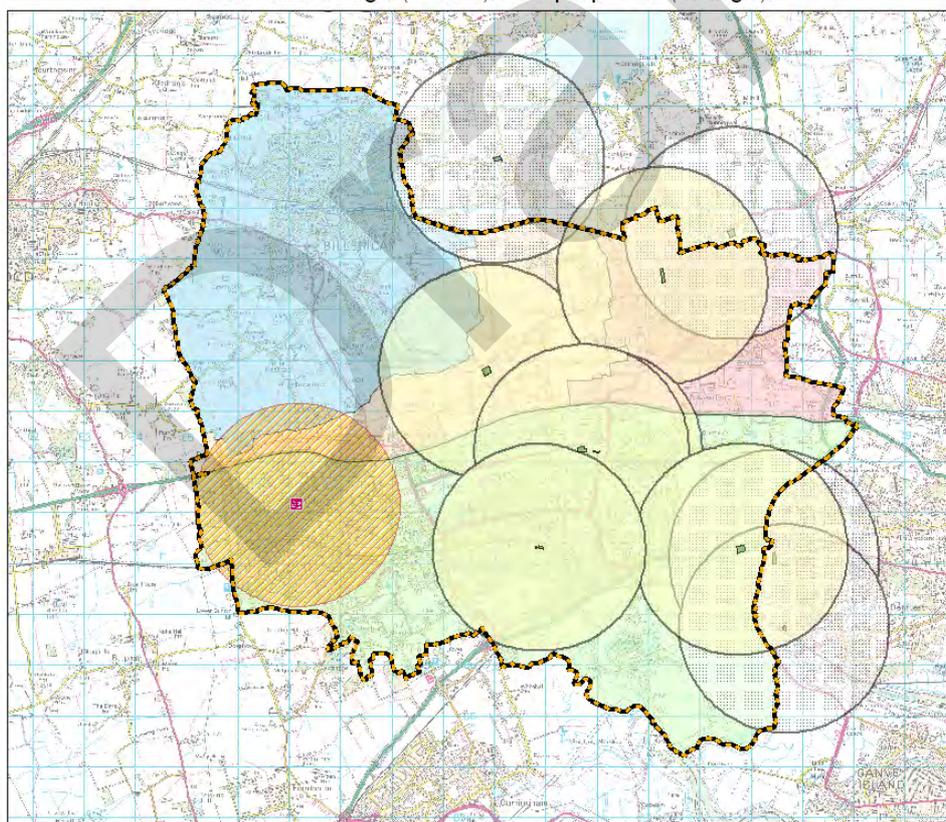
11.26 The next few sections bring together the accessibility, quantity, quality and intrinsic benefit assessments, in order to clarify the supply and demand for allotments. The processes taken for each topic of assessment are explained in the appropriate section of this PPG17 Assessment document.

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## Accessibility

- 11.27 The maximum distance that people should expect to travel to reach an allotment has been determined as 2km straight line distance, ignoring any barriers to access. The evidence and reasoning for the 2km distance is set out in PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part I - Chapter 5 – Accessibility. The ‘barriers to access’ are not included for this typology as the majority of people visiting an allotment choose to do so by motor vehicles due to the location, or to carry equipment, and are therefore largely unhindered by the physical barriers previously identified in the Borough as impeding access by foot.
- 11.28 An analysis of the provision of allotment sites quickly identified a dominance in the east of the borough, with no provision in the west (see map X below). Based on the accessibility of 2km, improved access to allotments is only realistically possible by providing additional plots in deficient locations.
- 11.29 It was identified that increased provision could be achieved either through the diversification of existing open spaces or through new provision, subject to availability and resources. However, allotments have a specific user base and any new provision should be intelligently provided, expecting to account for the location of potential users, rather than just arbitrarily ‘filling in the gaps’.

Allotments 2km boundary - showing Current (yellow), outside of Borough (dotted), and proposed (orange).



- 11.30 An opportunity has been identified to diversify Victoria Park in Laindon to accommodate a number of different open space activities. Victoria Park is one of the Boroughs Urban Parks and Gardens, but has a relatively low quality score and low levels of use by the public in comparison to other urban parks of similar size. For a number of reasons, Victoria Park has been under consideration for diversification, mostly to increase footfall and activity within the park and to increase its value to the public. One potential use is for a portion of the space to be used for an allotment garden. Should this proposal be realised, it would provide a site that

is accessible to a large number of people within the Laindon / Langdon Hills area. The Victoria Park option is described in more detail at paragraph 11.59.

- 11.31 Improved accessibility to allotments should be encouraged and, where opportunities arise, the need for allotment provision in the northwest and southwest of the Borough should be investigated.

#### **Allotment Accessibility Standard**

Residents in Basildon Borough should be able to reach an allotment site within 2km of where they live.

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## Quantity

11.32 The quantity of allotment gardens in the borough can be interpreted as the amount of land set aside for allotment purposes and the number of plots available cumulatively across the borough.

11.33 In 1949, the Government-sponsored Allotment Advisory Committee recommended four acres (1.6ha) of allotment land to be made available for every 1000 people in England. If this was to be applied today, Basildon Borough would need to look to provide about 267ha of allotment gardens, approximately the amount of land currently provided as Urban Parks, almost equivalent to the size of Hyde Park & Kensington Gardens in London. This highlights the importance of home-grown food production in the post-war period, but also how circumstances have changed, for this would be unmanageable to provide today. Ideally, the number of plots should be approximately equal to the number of people that wish to run a plot, not a simple proportion of the population.

11.34 The current quantity of land available for this typology is 8.9ha, which is equal to 0.41ha/1000 population. For a standard size plot of 10 poles<sup>10</sup>, this would be sufficient to provide around 350 plots. However, land at an allotment site must also be available for access roads, footpaths, boundary planting and any other elements which are necessary for the function of the allotment, but reduce the potential for the full use of the site by plots and therefore a direct division of the land available into plots will always be an overestimation.

Settlement Area	Settlement Population		Allotments	Amenity Green Space	Churchyards & Cemeteries	Civic Space	Natural Green Space	Outdoor Sports	Urban Parks
Billericay & Burstead	33,823	Ha	0	14.8	5.8	0	128.1	98.08	40.1
		Ha/pop	0.00	0.44	0.17	0.00	3.79	2.90	1.19
Noak Bridge & Ramsden	7,491	Ha	2	12.7	1	0	12.12	34.45	0
		Ha/pop	0.27	1.70	0.13	0.00	1.62	4.60	0.00
Basildon	96,991	Ha	4.5	162.23	10.8	3.53	292.93	126.8	209.1
		Ha/pop	0.05	1.67	0.11	0.04	3.02	1.31	2.16
Wickford	27,363	Ha	2.4	31.2	2.3	0.5	1.3	3.1	52.2
		Ha/pop	0.09	1.14	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.11	1.91
<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>165668</b>								

11.35 The number of plots available throughout the borough is approximately 425. As previously stated, plots in the Borough do not, on average, extend to the NSALG 10 pole recommendation. Smaller plots have become more common as people's leisure time is more divided, the continuous growing of food is less necessary (due to refrigeration and modernisation of supermarkets) and household sizes have reduced.

11.36 To determine the demand for open space in the borough, this study relies on the existing characteristics of the open space provision, with public and stakeholder engagement evidencing whether this is considered sufficient or not. In general, public engagement suggests that people feel there is a sufficient amount of land available for open space in the borough. With specific regard to allotment gardens it is not possible to break down the overall opinion into a more detailed assessment and therefore supplementary means of doing so are required. Individuals that stated they occupy an allotment plot were clearly happy with them and consider them to be very important. Furthermore, the waiting lists for each site identify a

<sup>10</sup> Defined by National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners, 2010

number of people who are currently unable to access an allotment but wish to do so<sup>11</sup>. From this information it is possible to make a more informed decision on allotment demands.

- 11.37 There is evidence of an unmet demand of up to 207 additional plots across the Borough. This is calculated from the numbers of people currently on waiting lists at each site. 207 new plots would equate to anything from 2ha up to 5.2ha of land, depending on the size of each plot<sup>12</sup>. This compares to an entire open space estate in the Borough of over 1,200ha. While diversification of other open space may be possible, an allotment is essentially a private space for the leaseholder and changes to any existing open space could be resisted by other local open space users, who may view the conversion as a loss of open space and therefore community consultation should always form part of the site selection process.
- 11.38 Perhaps more realistically, a new site of similar aspect to the 2ha site at Crays Hill, which provides approximately 120 four-pole plots (~100m<sup>2</sup>) together with the necessary access roads, footpaths and boundary treatments, would require about 3.45ha for 207 plots. On the same ratio of allotment land to facilities, a 207 10-pole site would need over 6.7ha.
- 11.39 The quantity of land available for any new provision is likely to be defined by what is available, rather than what is needed, but this should not prevent standards being set for the ideal provision, based on an assessment of demand.
- 11.40 This assessment offers guidance based on the current typical local provision and this presumption should be taken into account. The divisions within the site should be based on the reasonable principle that the land should be capable of growing produce. Discussions with the Council's allotment officer and the committee members of local associations would offer a wealth of experience and advice for the best plot sizes to maximise take-up and for the effective use of the land.
- 11.41 A new aspect is the demand for variable plot sizes, particularly a range of smaller plots. This demand has grown from potential users who often desire smaller plots for a wide variety of personal reasons. Small plots are also more manageable for those less mobile or disabled, or those wishing to gain experience but find large plots daunting. Sheds or other storage containers on small plots may limit the effectiveness of a plot and should be given consideration when dividing sites into small parcels.

#### **Allotment Quantity Standard**

- The quantity of land available for allotments should not be reduced.
- There is a demand for additional allotments in the borough.
- Waiting lists identify over 200 people who wish to use an allotment. Meeting this demand would require between 3.4ha and 6.7ha of land to be made available for allotments.
- Allotment plots should be available in a variety of sizes to cater for the differing needs, experience and abilities of gardeners, including disabled people.
- Divisions of no less than 25m<sup>2</sup> (1 pole plot) and no more than 250m<sup>2</sup> (10 pole plot) should be considered a guideline to ensure plots are useful, manageable and to encourage people to use plots effectively.

<sup>11</sup> A potential inaccuracy in the waiting list data comes from there being no regular process of updating the lists, except when plots are available and people are contacted in turn. In addition, an individual is able to join more than one list to improve their chances of being allocated a site.

<sup>12</sup> The lower figure relates to the smallest sites in the borough at 4 pole plots and the higher figure relates to the NSALG recommended 10 pole plots. Neither figure includes site facilities, access roads, etc.

## Quality

11.42 Quality is an essential part of the provision of open space in the borough. Achieving accessibility and providing a good quantity of space without meeting the qualitative demands of users would not present an appropriate balance in provision.

11.43 The overall quality of a site is a judgement of many aspects, including how well a space functions; its attractiveness; the level and means of security; the level of occurrence and impact of anti-social behaviour; how well it is landscaped and how adequately street furniture is maintained; its access for disabled individuals; the appropriateness of facilities; its management and other factors that influence the capability of the space to meet the demands placed on it.

11.44 Each site has been assessed against a robust scoring system and particular aspects weighted according to local interest. Each site has therefore been scored for its ability to meet the demands of stakeholders and given a *quality rating* to assist in the determination of priorities. The features and facilities that make up the quality score and the rating for allotments are stated in PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part I, Appendix C.

11.45 The ratings and percentage scores for allotments in the Borough are:

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| • Market Road Allotments, Wickford         | 49.3% (Low Reasonable)  |
| • St James Rd Allotments, Vange            | 51% (High Reasonable)   |
| • Crays Hill Allotment Gardens             | 52.3% (High Reasonable) |
| • Bowers Gifford Allotments                | 55.9% (High Reasonable) |
| • Holden Gardens Allotments, Basildon      | 62.2% (Good)            |
| • Pendle Drive Allotment Gardens, Basildon | 63.6% (Good)            |

11.46 As described above, the ratings are based on the ability for each site to meet the demands of stakeholders. For this assessment, those demands are summarised by a generic Quality Vision:

### Quality Vision

Engagement shows that people desire clean, secure, litter and dog-foul free open spaces that are well maintained and provide a variety of functions. Spaces should feel safe and address vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Landscaped features and well-designed facilities, particularly toilets, catering establishments and seating, are encouraged. More natural areas, lakes and woodlands are desired along with well-maintained open areas of grass. Clear information within and about the District's opens space estate is desired.

11.47 This statement applies to all open spaces, not only to allotments, for which references to woodlands and areas of open grass are obviously not appropriate. However, the expectations for allotments are not greatly different to those for other green spaces, being for appropriate care and maintenance, safety and security, visual interest, litter bins and toilets.

11.48 In regards to the main concerns and issues that effect people's use of open space, the main worries are not particularly a problem at allotment sites. In Topic Paper 3 – *What People Told Us*, there were four main concerns to people:

- Litter

- Anti-social behaviour and vandalism
- Dog fouling
- Maintenance

11.49 From the quality assessments these are not pressing concerns at allotment sites, indicating that each site successfully deters such activity and promotes good maintenance. This could be due to their fenced & gated nature, controls expressed through the user agreements and rules for renting a plot, but also through personal pride and allotment gardening being an activity that naturally deters inappropriate uses or poor environmental conditions.

11.50 To capture the specific needs for these spaces, a quality vision for allotments has been formed. This includes the general aspirations set out in the quality vision but also captures the specific features desired at allotment sites in the borough.

11.51 The proposed vision for allotments is:

### **Quality Vision for Allotments**

Engagement shows that people desire clean, secure allotments that are well maintained and have good soil and drainage. Allotments should be accessible and feel safe at all times, discouraging anti-social behaviour. Well-designed facilities, particularly water connections and toilets, are encouraged. Clear signage and information both within and about the Borough's allotments is desired.

## Quality & Intrinsic Benefits Results

11.52 As with all open space, the policy approach to each allotment site is based on the quality rating it achieved following a qualitative audit in 2007 and whether there are any Intrinsic Benefits present.

11.53 The quality ratings for the Borough's allotments are stated above. Of the six, five achieved a High Reasonable or greater rating, whilst one is considered Low Reasonable. Each allotment site is expected to achieve a rating of high reasonable or greater in order meet local peoples' expectations. The rating is dependent on a number a factors including the facilities present and the quality of differing aspects of provision. The quality of each aspect will differ between sites and the overall rating is a combination of all scores to enable priorities to be determined.

11.54 The rating table below expresses the High / Low Quality ratings for allotment sites and Open Space Assessment Part I Appendix C states the factors that influence the scoring.

**Figure 27 Quality Ratings for Allotment Gardens**



11.55 The management approach for these spaces is currently granted by the following statement:

## Management Approach

All open spaces should be improved and enhanced where possible.

With the exception of Urban Parks and Gardens and Civic Spaces, each space should achieve a minimum quality score of 50% (a high-reasonable rating), or at least maintain the rating as determined in this document, whichever is the higher.

All Urban Parks and Gardens and Civic Spaces, due to their more extensive use and range of functions, should achieve a minimum quality score of 60% (a 'good' rating), or at least maintain the rating as determined in this document, whichever is the higher.

New open spaces, defined as those not included in the 2007 audit, will be expected to achieve a 'good' quality rating, as determined in this document and shall be maintained to this standard for a minimum of 20 years.

Spaces that achieve a low quality rating, as determined in this document, should be considered for appropriate improvements, where possible.

- 11.56 Allotments should be enhanced where possible and at least maintain the quality rating as determined in this document. This approach would ensure all sites improve in line with expectations. For Holden Gardens and Pendle Drive, the endeavour should be to maintain a Good rating, and for St James Road Allotments, Crays Hill Allotment Gardens and Bowers Gifford, a High Reasonable rating should be maintained. The remaining site, Market Road, Wickford scored an overall Low Reasonable rating and should be managed so as to improve its rating. For Market Road this should not be very challenging, as the score was marginally short of a High Reasonable rating and therefore some minor improvement could make a significant difference to its quality rating.

For example, while Market Road Allotments score very well for health and safety, the quality and design of footpaths and community involvement, it is let down by having few desirable features and a low quality of signage. The site has no formal signage within the site and information on the owner / manager is not easily available. Furthermore it does not contain car parking, CCTV or other security, reasonable access for disabled persons, site based staff or toilets. Addressing any one of these aspect would likely raise the quality of the site to High Reasonable. Addressing more than one aspect would obviously benefit the site and its users immensely.

- 11.57 Maintaining these ratings is the least that should be achieved through the management approach to each space, with a view for improvement and enhancement where opportunities allow. A complication which permeates this assessment is how to manage change at sites which are not operated by the local authority. However, allotment associations are generally open to considering enhancements that would benefit the holders and are amenable to adopting management approaches that are an improvement on current practices where support is available. Any genuine improvements are likely to be taken positively.

## New Allotment Sites

11.58 New allotment sites are likely to be a relatively rare occurrence, but the authority will endeavour to ensure they are provided in a 'good' quality state, when they are created. The most important factors are stated in the Quality Vision above and the scoring system is set out in PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part I Chapter 6 and Appendix C. Through these recommendations it should be possible to devise a site which is well managed, meets public expectation and contributes positively towards the allotment estate of the borough.

## Victoria Park, Laindon

11.59 Following the initial results of the Open Space Assessment Part I and continuing a number of proper management and wider regeneration objectives, the local authority has produced a programme for diversifying part of Victoria Park in Laindon to provide up to 100 new allotment plots. This would be a significant contribution to current provision, potentially meeting a large proportion of the demand evidenced through waiting lists. This would also increase the activity within a relatively underused Urban Park, provide greater informal security, provide an allotment site within 2km of many residents who are currently not within the adopted catchment standard and increase the visibility of allotment gardening in an urbanised setting. It would also solidify the local authority's support for allotment gardening as a leisure activity and its commitment to more sustainable neighbourhoods.

11.60 The initial concept has been revised for a number of practical reasons, but the location benefits from secure funding and has the capacity for an excellent allotment garden without greatly reducing the size of the open space.

### Initial concept for Victoria Park



11.61 In addition, Billericay Town Council is seeking a suitable site for an allotment garden and, while discussions with various land owners have not proved fruitful, other options are being pursued. In November 2010 the local authority Planning Service and Parks & Ground Maintenance Development Team undertook an assessment of several poor quality open spaces in Billericay to identify whether any could be suitable for diversification. At time of publication these assessments were progressing.

### **Intrinsic Benefit**

11.62 For the Basildon District PPG17 Assessment, an emphasis is placed on recognising the 'Intrinsic Benefits' (IB) offered by open spaces to the community and/ or environment, alongside their primary open space use. As defined in PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part I, Section 6 – Quality, IB are defined as:

- Being a Legally Protected or Recognised Land Designation
- Being a Locally Protected or Enforced Environmental Designation
- Having a Flood Defence or Drainage Role
- Have a Pollution Mitigation Role
- Being an In-Perpetuity Use

11.63 Of all the allotment sites, Holden Gardens and Bowers Gifford have identified Intrinsic Benefits relating to noise pollution and air pollution remittance<sup>13</sup>. In both cases this is due to the proximity of a classified A-road. Guidance recommends drawing noise and air quality buffers around a road to ensure any harm is taken into account for development proposals. This helps to ensure the impact on people and property is minimised. For most open spaces the buffer they create between, for example, roads and properties, benefits the properties and has little detriment to temporary users or foliage of the open space. For allotments, there is some legitimate concern that air pollution may harm the produce from the site. As this relates to the historic position of these sites, it is not something that can be easily amended.

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<sup>13</sup> Intrinsic Benefits can change over time and full consideration of whether any Intrinsic Benefits are present need to be considered as and when any proposals occur.

## Quality and Intrinsic Benefit Matrix

- 11.64 A dual-axis matrix is regarded as an acceptable way of comparing both the quality of open spaces and their Intrinsic Benefits (IB). It results in each space being ranked in one of four categories comparable to a high or low quality and a high or low intrinsic benefit. Keeping the application of the PPG17 Assessment in mind, this is a useful way to inform open space management, investment opportunities and asset management and has therefore been applied to all audited open spaces.
- 11.65 The quality rating and intrinsic benefits together identify the policy approach that should be taken for an open space, as shown below. Currently, three sites fall within High Quality / Low IB, two are within High Quality / High IB and one falls under Low Quality / Low IB.

**Figure 28 Quality and Intrinsic Benefit Matrix**

	Low IB	High IB
High Quality	<p><b>High Quality/Low IB</b></p> <p>Wherever possible, the preferred approach to a space in this category should be to <u>maintain and enhance</u> its quality.</p>	<p><b>High Quality/High IB</b></p> <p>Spaces that fall into this category should be maintained and enhanced.</p> <p>The planning system and their management approach should also preserve their IB.</p>
Low Quality	<p><b>Low Quality/ Low IB</b></p> <p>Wherever possible, the approach to these spaces should be to <u>enhance</u> their quality.</p> <p>If enhancement is not possible, for whatever reason, the space can be considered firstly for alternative open space uses, based on the needs of the locality.</p>	<p><b>Low Quality/ High IB</b></p> <p>The approach to these spaces should be to <u>enhance</u> their quality if possible. The planning system and management approach should be to preserve the IB, in situ.</p> <p>Enhancing the quality can include considering alternative open space uses that also conserve the IB and improve the overall use by the community.</p>

- 11.66 The ongoing management of spaces should improve and enhance their quality where possible. As identified previously, each space of High Quality should at least maintain its quality rating as determined in this document.
- 11.67 The way that individual spaces can be enhanced is primarily identified in the quality audit undertaken in 2007. This is the *starting point* for identifying improvements based on the audit criteria and is not exhaustive. Ultimately the Quality Vision guides expectations for an allotment site in Basildon Borough and the Quality / IB Matrix states a recommended management approach. The scores for individual aspects of allotments are retained by the local authority and indicate which aspects work well and which do not. While this is invaluable in guiding improvements, it is not a restrictive set of criteria and any reasonable alternative way to meet the vision should be considered.

## Recommended Policies

Following the evidence outlined above, the following policies are recommended in regard to the provision and management of allotment gardens in the Borough.

1. The quality vision for allotments and the management approach as stated in this document should be the basis of decisions for the improvement, enhancement and management of these spaces.
2. The expansion of existing sites should be considered positively where demand is evidenced and the expansion can be undertaken without harm to surrounding uses.
3. New sites should be provided in accordance with the accessibility and quantity standards and where there is an identified demand. They should be provided in such a way as to achieve a 'good' quality rating as set out in this document. Any new site should be provided with the considered advice of the Council's Parks Development Team and, where possible, members of allotment societies already operating sites within the Borough.
4. Allotment plots within new sites should ideally be offered first to those on the waiting lists of existing sites, due to the extensive waiting times currently experienced and the identified demand from these individuals.
5. In new allotment locations, and where adaptation is possible in established allotments sites, plots which can be safely tended by disabled leaseholders should be provided near to car parking, main entrances and essential facilities, as part of the entire site.

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<b>CHAPTER 12 – CHURCHYARDS &amp; CEMETERIES</b> .....	<b>153</b>
<b>Consultation</b> .....	<b>155</b>
<b>Accessibility</b> .....	<b>157</b>
<b>Quantity</b> .....	<b>158</b>
Burial Rates .....	158
Findings .....	161
Current Provision – Publicly Operated Sites.....	162
Alternative Means of Meeting Demand.....	163
<b>Quality</b> .....	<b>166</b>
Awards.....	166
Auditing.....	167
Management Approach .....	170
Intrinsic Benefit .....	171
Implementation .....	172
<b>Recommended Policies</b> .....	<b>174</b>

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## Chapter 12 – Churchyards & Cemeteries

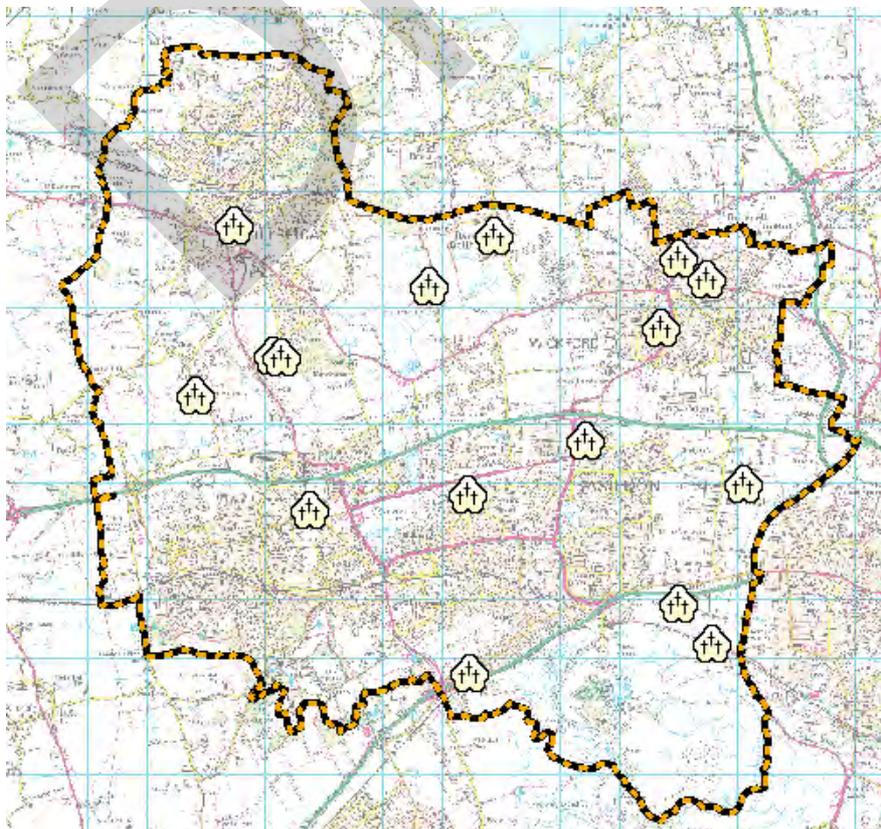
12.1 Churchyards and cemeteries have significant value to people and communities. They are commonly alongside historic churches or other religious buildings and provide a sombre, tranquil setting for memory, celebration and reflection. While these are innately civilised places, they tend to also be bio-diverse, with mature trees, hedgerows and well established habitats.



12.2 In Basildon Borough there are 17 churchyards and cemeteries identified through the PPG17 Open Space Assessment 2007.

These are shown on the map below. Each is an important site within their locality, with individual characteristics and features. Most are maintained directly by Parochial Church Councils rather than Basildon Council and controlled in accordance with their specific rites, ecclesiastical laws and customs.

12.3 The Council maintains 3 public cemeteries: Great Burstead (opened 1971); Wickford Cemetery (opened 1928) and Pitsea New Cemetery (opened 1947). There is also a privately operated crematoria within the grounds of Pitsea Cemetery. Public cemeteries amount to around 13ha of open space compared to the total of 19ha that are available in all churchyards & cemeteries in the borough.



Location of Churchyards and Cemeteries in Basildon

## **Biodiversity**

- 12.4 As well as being a place for burying the dead, their veneration and commemoration, many churchyards and cemeteries offer a quiet sanctuary for wildlife, and have over time, become important sites of ecological value in their own right. Detriment to biodiversity can occur in these spaces due to increasing demands for burial space, pressure to preserve their primary function and a preference for neatness and order, together with the impacts of Health & Safety legislation which can result in vegetation being cut back to test the structural soundness of memorials.
- 12.5 Burial grounds include habitats such as grassland, woodland and scrub and it is these habitats which attract species such as bats, beetles and butterflies, as well as foraging animals. The memorials and headstones provide unusual 'masonry habitat' similar to 'rock outcrops' which are rare in the urban context but provide homes to ferns, invertebrates and lichen communities, as well as fungi and mosses.

## **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

- 12.6 The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), established by Royal Charter in 1917, pays tribute to the 1,700,000 men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the two world wars.
- 12.7 There are twenty five individual CWGC graves in the Borough's churchyards and cemeteries marked by uniform headstones, differentiated only by their inscriptions: the national emblem or regimental badge, rank, name, unit, date of death and age of each casualty are inscribed above an appropriate religious symbol and a more personal dedication chosen by relatives. Where there are risks of earth movement, graves are marked instead by bronze plaques on low pedestals.
- 12.8 Similarly, there are eight graves dedicated to the Civilian War Dead from 1939-1945 that the Council maintains. These honour civilians who died in the UK, were lost at sea or who died abroad in causes attributable to service. A list of those commemorated by the CWGC is included in Appendix G.

## Consultation

12.9 Consultation with local residents and key stakeholders was undertaken through a variety of methods. The key issues emerging included:

### ***Citizen Panel 2008:***

- 24% of respondent considered that Churchyards and Cemeteries were very important, 43% considered them important.
- Respondents from Fryerns, Lee Chapel North, and Wickford North rated Churchyards and Cemeteries as 'very important' / 'important'.
- Respondents between 16 to 30 years of age considered that Churchyards and Cemeteries were more important than respondents of later age groups.
- Respondents rated Churchyards and Cemeteries with higher importance than Civic Spaces.
- Respondents rarely used the typology, with some only visiting a few times a year.

### ***Basildon Forum for the Elderly, 2008:***

- The typology is seen as an important amenity space by respondents.
- It was highlighted that the typology does provide a strong biodiversity support within the Borough.
- Churchyards and Cemeteries are areas of peace and reflection and should be maintained to encourage this.

### ***Disability Access Forum, 2008:***

- Training at Churchyards and Cemeteries has taken place to enable disabled access at typology.

### ***Open Space Survey 2009:***

- Across all typologies, Churchyards and Cemeteries have the least direct 'demand' from respondents.
- Access to Churchyards and Cemeteries is usually achieved through use of a car.
- Quality of the site was highlighted for its peace and quiet, and restrictions on use (no dog walking, children playing games, etc).

### **Basildon Borough Council Cemetery Officers Consultation, 2010**

- There are three publicly run cemeteries in the borough: Wickford Cemetery, Pitsea Cemetery, and Great Burstead. At current rates of inhumation, Pitsea is understood to have around one year of capacity remaining, Wickford has fifteen years, and Great Burstead thirty.
- Currently, Pitsea accommodates half of all inhumations within the Borough, Wickford takes a third, and Great Burstead a sixth.
- Pitsea could be extended further if all space within the site could be used.

### ***Funeral Director Consultation, 2010:***

- In November 2010, fourteen funeral directors, operating from various locations in the Borough and further afield, were written to, in order to gain an understanding from their unique perspective, of local funeral and burial preferences.

The questions sought their views on:

- Whether the proportions of funerary rites in the Basildon Borough matched national trends;
- How cremations were affecting the local need for burial space;
- Factors affecting peoples' choice of burial location;
- Burial space take-up trends between 2000 and 2010;

- Visitor facilities in cemeteries;
- Despite extended the time with which a response would be accepted and sending a reminder email, only one Director responded, which is disappointing. The views taken into consideration in regards to those working with these sites are therefore only those of the local authority officers and the Herongate Woodland Cemetery.

## Consultation Summary

- 12.9 Overall, the response to the Typology is varied, ranging from little importance, to one which is seen as very important and also having significant amenity provision. There are also clear issues as to the future provision of burial spaces from a Public Site management perspective.
- 12.10 In Basildon Borough, people feel that all open space has physical, social and mental health benefits and all typologies are important to their perceptions of the local environment. There is general satisfaction with the Borough's churchyards and cemeteries. In particular, elderly residents identified these areas as places that are particularly important to them, generally because they are quiet and calm (particularly without dogs and children), with visiting the graves of loved ones being the second most cited reason to visit.
- 12.11 The Open Space Survey 2009 identified that churchyards and cemeteries were the least visited type of open space in the Borough. However, other typologies were considered less important, showing that a relatively low frequency of visit does not detract from the perception of them being a vital type of space for people to visit at various times.
- 12.12 In general, specialist spaces such as these were important, with a dedicated user base, although the majority of people remarked they would be less likely to use them.
- 12.13 The following sections bring together the accessibility, quantity, quality and intrinsic benefit assessments for churchyards and cemeteries, in order to clarify the supply and demand for these sites. The processes within each assessment are explained in the relevant section of this document.

## Accessibility

- 12.14 A maximum distance that people should expect to travel to reach a churchyard or cemetery has not been established for Basildon Borough.
- 12.15 Many of these spaces have historically sensitive locations and relate to considerations beyond the remit of this study, such as the proximity of a place of worship. It would be ineffective for the authority to set a recommended maximum distance within which all residents should be able to reach a churchyard or cemetery. These sites have already been developed and have in-perpetuity use. They cannot be 'closed down' and moved elsewhere to meet local need. The desire for these spaces is also very different to the desire for recreational green space and therefore location considerations for the existing sites, or any new sites, should be made through an appropriate management process, not through a calculated distance recommendation drawn from this assessment.
- 12.16 However, it is clear from public engagement, that elderly residents are more likely to visit these types of spaces than other age groups. If new sites are required, there should be consideration of the following:
- Is it within a reasonable distance of residences, for ease of access to its amenities?
  - Whilst the location does not need to meet maximum walking distance requirements, is it accessible by a range of different transportation?
  - The site should have off-street parking provision, to accommodate people driving from further afield or for those with impaired mobility.
- 12.17 There is therefore, for the reasons stated above, no maximum accessibility standard proposed for this typology. This is supported by the PPG17 Companion guide, which allows authorities to exempt certain typologies from specific aspects of open space, stating that *"...For example, it is not realistic for authorities to set quantity standard for hard surfaced civic space or distance thresholds to inland water ways"*.

### **Churchyards & Cemeteries Accessibility Standard**

It is not considered appropriate to set a maximum distance for accessibility to churchyards or cemeteries.

New provision should be located near to similar established sites provided it is accessible by a range of transportation, or in another accessible location.

## Quantity

- 12.18 There is no legal duty to provide burial space. For many years, services have been provided in response to demand by public and private providers, and by the Church of England and other faiths and religions. The Government feels that there is no evidence of any lack of willingness for this to continue and therefore legislation has not been necessary to ensure space is available<sup>1</sup>. However, the Government also considers the planning system to be the correct mechanism to assess local need for burial spaces.
- 12.19 The quantity of land available for this typology has been identified as 19.9ha, which is equivalent to 0.12ha per 1000 population. In total, the Council, as Burial Authority, has over 22,800 internments and had a need for over 300 new graves in 2009-2010, relating to over 400 burials (many burials utilise existing graves, such as family members being buried together). The Council maintains five closed churchyards such as Pitsea Mount, which do not provide space for new graves.
- 12.20 Over half of the overall burial land is within the Basildon Settlement Area (SA), although as a proportion of the population, the Billericay SA has greater supply (see table below). The largest cemetery in the Borough is Pitsea Cemetery at 5.9ha. This covers a public section, a private section and the crematoria itself. For comparison, with the exception of Pitsea Cemetery (5.9ha) and Great Burstead Cemetery (3.8ha), all other churchyards and cemeteries are less than 2ha in extent. Just two sites therefore account for almost half the burial space in the Borough.

Settlement	Pop.		Allotments	Amenity Green Space	Churchyards & Cemeteries	Civic Space	Natural Green Space	Outdoor Sports Facilities	Urban Parks & Gardens
<b>Standards</b>			<b>Part II</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>Part II</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>2.62</b>	<b>Part II</b>	<b>1.82</b>
Billericay & Burstead	33,823	Ha	0	14.8	5.8	0	128.1	98.08	40.1
		Ha/ pop	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.17</b>	0.00	<b>3.79</b>	<b>2.90</b>	<b>1.19</b>
Noak Bridge & Ramsden	7,491	Ha	2	12.7	1	0	12.12	34.45	0
		Ha/ pop	<b>0.27</b>	<b>1.70</b>	<b>0.13</b>	0.00	<b>1.62</b>	<b>4.60</b>	<b>0.00</b>
Basildon	96,991	Ha	4.5	162.23	10.8	3.53	292.93	126.8	209.1
		Ha/ pop	<b>0.05</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>0.11</b>	0.04	<b>3.02</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>2.16</b>
Wickford	27,363	Ha	2.4	31.2	2.3	0.5	1.3	3.1	52.2
		Ha/ pop	<b>0.09</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>0.08</b>	0.02	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>1.91</b>

- 12.21 The quantity analysis undertaken for all open space essentially relies on the characteristics of the existing Settlement Areas, with demand for each typology identified through public and stakeholder engagement informing how appropriate it is felt to be. For churchyards and cemeteries, provision based on the existing space is not a realistic way of identifying demand. Instead, interment data, with an appreciation of the land required over time and the capacity remaining in existing open sites, is a more realistic assessment of future need.

## Burial Rates

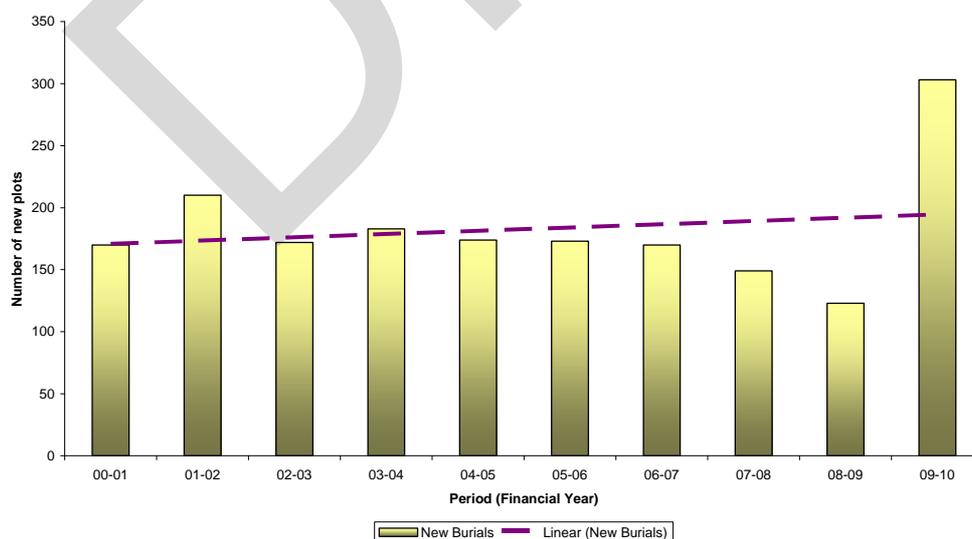
- 12.22 In 2009, just over 73% of all deaths in Britain resulted in a choice of cremation, which represents a steady rise since 1970<sup>2</sup>. This has reduced the pressure on burial grounds, although cemeteries are more commonly also setting aside areas for the interment of ashes with memorial markers. These trends may well change in the future, increasing or reducing

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice (June 2007) *Burial Law and Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Way Forward*

<sup>2</sup> Cremation Society of Great Britain, 2010, <http://www.srgw.demon.co.uk/CremSoc/>

the demand for plots. It should also be noted that certain religious denominations do not cremate the deceased, including Muslims, Catholics and Jewish Orthodox.

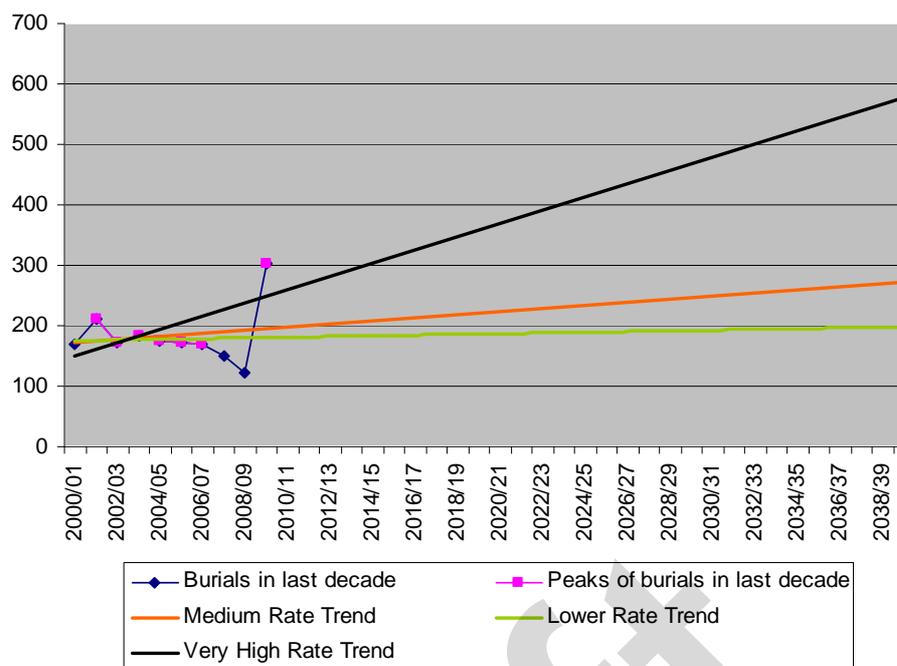
- 12.23 The Council currently works to a general principle of being able to identify sufficient burial land capacity for the needs of a generation, approximately 30 years ahead. There will be steady demand in the Borough for this typology of open space and planning for future provision should be based on a close examination of burial and cremation rates alongside the expected growth of population.
- 12.24 Based on previous mortality rates, the national average for cremations and a decade of annual burial figures, the local authority handles an average of approximately 1/5<sup>th</sup> of all burials from the Borough.
- 12.25 In 2009 - 2010<sup>3</sup>, there were an estimated 900 burials, with 303 new graves required at Council operated sites. Over three hundred new burials was a significant increase on previous years and a departure from the general trend (see graph under 12.27 below). There is no clear explanation for the sudden spike, or the gradual decline in the immediately preceding periods, although comparison with national winter mortality rates can be made. With each grave<sup>4</sup> being around 4.5m<sup>2</sup>, this equates to almost 0.14ha of land (1400m<sup>2</sup>) being used for burial purposes in 2009-2010.
- 12.26 What is obvious, based on the yearly burial rate, is that overall rates are not constant. Officers responsible for cemeteries suggest that public burial rates are impacted by several issues. For example: deaths arising from particularly cold winters/ epidemics, as well as financial matters such as the inability to afford a plot of choice. This suggests a greater demand for authority sites in times of adverse winters, recession or national health emergencies. Importantly, people are also able to purchase the exclusive right to a plot, which can change the number of plots required in a particular year irrespective of the national trends and this is therefore an anomaly which needs to be noted.
- 12.27 The trend in Basildon Borough over the previous decade is for an increase of about 2.5% per annum, as shown in the graph below.



- 12.28 A projection can be made of these trends to predict low, medium and high values of spaces required over the next 30 years:

<sup>3</sup> An assessment of internments is made every financial year, through a return form to The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accounting (CIPFA).

<sup>4</sup> Grave = 3m x 1.5m and accounts for grass boundaries and pathways separating each headstone/ grave marker.



- **Lower rate:** 30 years = 5,695 – around 189 estimated burials a year.
- **Medium rate:** 30 years = 6,856 – around 228 estimated burials a year.
- **Very High rate:** 30 years = 12,000 – around 400 estimated burials a year

12.29 These predictions contain a few cautionary notes:

- It is only a projection of use of publically owned and operated Cemeteries and Churchyards from a single decade of empirical data;
- It does not relate to known death rates within the Borough, but to burial rates;
- It does not account for choice in burial – such as cremation over inhumation, or burial within another part of the country, such as in neighbouring authorities, or dedicated sites for specific religions, such as Jewish Cemeteries;
- It does not account for population growth in the future, only the increase in burials over the previous decade;

12.30 A consideration of population growth has not been made in previous assessments of capacity but will have an impact on the burial rates. The population of Basildon Borough has consistently risen throughout its history. The following population projections are used in other parts of the Local Development Framework’s evidence base to test the impact of future growth possibilities<sup>5</sup>:

**Scenario 1: Basildon District Current Growth Rate (LOW)**

This scenario has been calculated by extrapolating the population growth achieved between the years 2001 and 2008, forward to 2021 and 2031. The growth rate achieved was 2001-2008 was 0.42%/annum.

**Scenario 2: Office for National Statistics (ONS) Predicted Rate (MEDIUM)**

The ONS predict a growth rate of 0.6%/annum on the Census 2001 population base.

**Scenario 3: ONS Predicted Rate + 0.2% (HIGH)**

For arguments sake, a slightly higher growth scenario of 0.2% on top of Scenario 2, of 0.8%/annum is to be modelled to determine the affects of the high population forecast.

<sup>5</sup> The growth scenarios are inclusive of death rates.

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
	Low (711/ a)	Medium (978/ a)	High (1311/ a)
2010	172,067	<b>174,470</b>	177,467
2025	175,622	179,360	184,022
2040	193,397	203,810	216,797
Growth in thirty years	+21,330	+29,340	+39,330

12.31 In 2009, the mid-year population estimate of Basildon Borough was **174,100**. This implies that the ONS predicted medium scenario rate is the best fit to actual growth and the most appropriate for funerary needs at this time.

12.32 The average mortality rate from 1996-2007 can be calculated to be 1.8% of the population<sup>6</sup>. For the projected ONS population growth, this would imply a need for around 850 plots per annum in 2010, rising to 1020 plots per annum by 2040. For local authority plots, this equates to between 170 and 205 plots respectively, based on 1/5<sup>th</sup> burial space being provided by the Council. This is between the lower and medium rates identified in growth scenario data.

## Findings

12.33 Based on the range of evidence above, it is estimated there will be a need for just under 7,000 public burial plots for the next thirty year period, based on existing trends. This is approximately 230 plots per annum but can change substantially within a single year and increases per annum. There is a current need for 180 public burials per year.

12.34 There is a further need for approximately 28,000 other burial plots over the same period resulting from deaths in the borough, hosted by other sites and methods for which the assessment could not obtain specific data.

12.35 Based on an estimated grave size of 4.5m<sup>2</sup> there is a need for a minimum of 3.15ha of land available to accommodate public burials for the next 30 years.

One grave = 4.5m<sup>2</sup> (3m x 1.5m).  
7000 x 4.5m<sup>2</sup> = 31500m<sup>2</sup> (or 3.15 hectares)

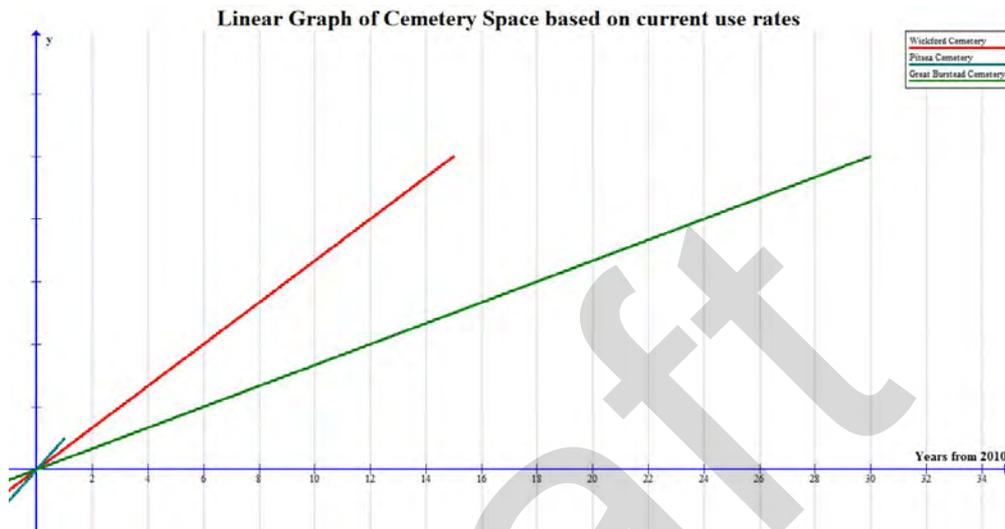
12.36 This calculates to around 1.1ha/decade, although a greater average number of burials will be expected per year towards the end of the period when the population would be greater. This amount of land does not account for access, walkways, car parks, etc, which are discussed below.

<sup>6</sup> Calculated from NOMIS mid-year population estimates and ONS known deaths, averaged over 1996-2007.

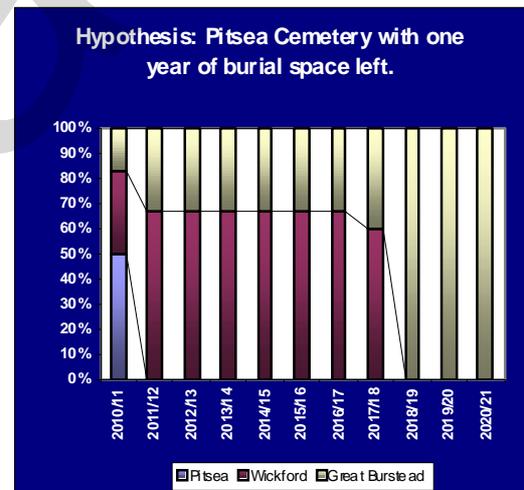
## Current Provision – Publicly Operated Sites

12.37 By plotting the approximate ratio of burials occurring at each Council run cemetery site, and accounting for the limit of land available, the lifespan of each site can be estimated at their current rates to be:

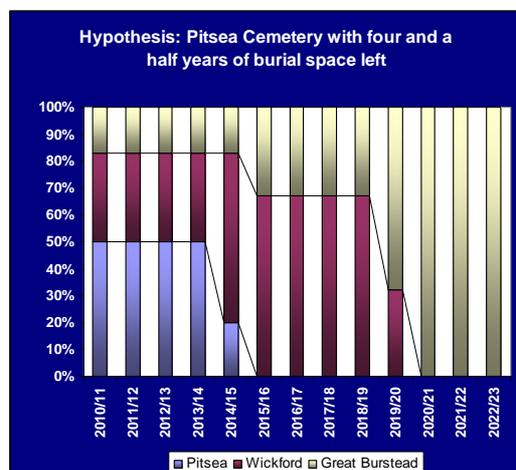
- **Pitsea**                                    **less than one year**
- **Wickford**                                **fifteen years**
- **Great Burstead**                        **thirty years**



12.38 There is a steady demand for burial spaces that is largely determined by location. However, the price of burial spaces is also an important factor, therefore when Pitsea Cemetery is full, the overall demand for public burials may not decrease. Presuming that when a cemetery is full, the remaining public cemeteries will absorb the additional burials, we can predict that Council sites will be unable to accommodate any further burials by 2021.



12.39 There are a few options to extend the interment capacity of a cemetery. One of these is to utilise the footpaths, roads and other spaces to make full use of a site. At Pitsea Cemetery this approach is being considered, which would free up sufficient land for between 150-170 plots.



12.40 If the plan for replacing pathways with burial plots at Pitsea Cemetery is agreed, around three additional years of capacity would be created at Pitsea. This would extend the total capacity of public burial grounds in the Borough by two years, to 2023.

12.41 From consultation it is not clear whether people would approve of this approach for a small additional capacity, given the quality issues around removing footpaths and other features.

12.42 Based on the information provided, there is currently around 1.8 Ha of burial plots available to the Borough.

Site	Remaining Land
Pitsea	500m <sup>2</sup>
Great Burstead	14,000m <sup>2</sup>
Wickford	3,600m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.81 Ha</b>

12.43 As estimated above, to accommodate growth to 2040 would require 3.1ha of public burial land. An additional 1.3Ha of land would therefore be needed to meet Borough needs for this time period. This does not include associated facilities and features, landscaping, access, etc.

12.44 Proper cemetery management recommends the maximum capacity of any cemetery to be 1000 plots per acre (2470 per hectare) and minimum capacity at 500 plots per acre (1235 per hectare). The differences are for variety of practices and to accommodate access roads, wider footpaths, amenities and other facilities or features. Currently the Council provides plots at a reasonable average of 872 per acre, although this is a generalisation over many years, different sites and changing practices.

12.45 The statistics clearly indicate that the Borough's cemeteries and churchyards are becoming full, with a ratio of occupied to unoccupied space of about 4:1. An assessment of current open capacity in Council ownership is that 1.8ha remains, or the equivalent of around 4,000 burial plots, at the provision of 872 graves per acre.

12.46 A further 1.3ha is likely to be required to meet expected demand until 2040. However, this does not allow for planting, setting, features, buildings, footpaths, boundary treatments and other aspects. These features generally reduce the land available for burials by about 20%. An accurate measure of the land required including these facilities is 3.7ha, with an additional requirement for 1.9ha likely to begin being required within a decade.

12.47 If the local authority continues to provide land for a predicted generation of burials, there will be a requirement for **3.7ha of land**, of which **1.9ha is currently undetermined**. Should there be an increase in the demand for cremated remains to be interred and provided with cemetery space, there will be a reflected need for more burial land.

## Alternative Means of Meeting Demand

### Reliance on Private Cemeteries

12.48 The authority does not have land held in reserve to extend or create new burial grounds. However, the privately run section of Pitsea Cemetery, currently operated by Westerleigh Group<sup>7</sup>, provides a 3ha site in addition to the crematorium, which could play a substantial role in accommodating the Borough's future demand, particularly in the Basildon Settlement Area. This will require an understanding and acceptance that the option for a public burial plot will decrease over time, and eventually only be open to those people who have purchased plots in advance (exclusive rights) or have family plots which can still be opened. Information on the current rate of internment at the Westerleigh site is not formally known, but is understood to currently be lower than the Council element of the Pitsea Cemetery.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.basildoncrem.co.uk/>

- 12.49 The authority could take a decision to reducing it's the provision of additional typology space in the future, favouring instead the availability of private cemetery space to meet demand. The impact of this decision would be to alter the relationship between publically subsidised and market priced burial services, limiting the choices available to the public and increasing the cost borne by the deceased's estate or family. There will still be a need to provide land for this open space typology, but the private sector would be expected to propose and provide sites as necessary. The identified capacity, particularly at Westerleigh operated site, is considered sufficient for the next 30 year generation period.
- 12.50 Assuming this approach was followed, the cost to the local authority will likely reduce over time, as burials become less frequent in its own sites. However, administrative processes are already being improved to ensure this service has a zero-sum cost to the authority and in any case, the net expense has historically been relatively small. Against this, the authority will retain a duty to maintain many of the burial areas and discontinuing its ability to provide exclusive rights or funeral services will ultimately reduce revenue that is currently used to maintain these open spaces. In the long term, the net cost may therefore increase, even if service provision changed.
- 12.51 In real terms, the private provision available at Pitsea, coupled with the Council cemeteries in Great Burstead and Wickford are the only sites with guaranteed reasonable future capacity in the borough for burial purposes.

#### Reconfiguring Existing Cemeteries

- 12.52 Some of the existing sites could be reconfigured to accommodate greater numbers of plots. As an example, a proposed change in land management is being explored at Pitsea Cemetery, which would extend its usable life by reconfiguring footpaths, maintenance and planting areas to increase overall burial capacity.
- 12.53 While this is pragmatic and represents a better use of the Council's land asset, it is not an ideal approach as it will be challenging to make the amendments whilst preserving the original design and aesthetic harmony of the cemetery. Early assessments calculate that this reconfigure will provide an additional two – three years of burial space in Pitsea Cemetery.
- 12.54 Similar efforts at other sites may offer similar extensions to capacity, but initial estimates show that this cannot be regarded as a long term solution.

#### Reuse of plots over 100yrs old

- 12.55 In June 2007, the Government responded to a consultation on the need to update burial law. One element of the debate regarded the need to find additional capacity in cemeteries and churchyards. Respondents to the consultation felt that respect for the dead would not be undermined by the re-use of graves provided it was done properly and sensitively. The Government was concerned with the need to respect the deceased but was persuaded that re-use was justified in principle and would be a prudent and proportionate response to the need for burial space. The Government therefore permits local authorities to authorise excavation of old graves using exhumation licenses where there is lack of capacity. Licenses are granted by request to the Secretary of State, if justified.
- 12.56 In essence, the Government considered 100 years to be the appropriate minimum length of time for application for exhumation, although where land is in particularly short supply, 75 years might be acceptable.
- 12.57 It is expected that consultation on the re-use of burial space would be undertaken with any affected relatives and organisations with a proper interest. This was considered more appropriate than a full consultation with the community.

- 12.58 In most instances, a 'lift and deepen' technique is preferred, provided there are no health and safety or environmental issues that restrict this approach, such as a high water table.
- 12.59 For more information please refer to the Ministry of Justice publication *Burial Law and Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Way Forward*<sup>8</sup>.

### **Quantity Standard**

- 12.60 Based on the presentation of the current situation and the exploration of options and reasoning above, it is recommended that the Council adopt the following standard in relation to the quantity of churchyards and cemeteries in the borough. The standard reflects the options for public and private provision of burial space in the future for the greatest flexibility.

#### **Churchyards & Cemeteries Quantity Standard**

Demand is currently equivalent to 180-230 new graves per year, equal to between 0.081ha and 0.104ha of land per annum.

There is sufficient capacity in the combination of private and public cemetery sites in the Borough to accommodate predicted demand for the next 30 years.

There is insufficient capacity in public cemetery sites to meet projected public burial demand for the next 30 years. By 2021 the available capacity at Council sites is likely to be exhausted. An additional 1.9ha of land will be required in order to meet minimum expected demand to 2040.

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<sup>8</sup> Available from: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/burial-law-policy.pdf>

## Quality

- 12.61 The quality expectation of Churchyards and Cemeteries follow the standards agreed in PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part I, set for the general improvement of open spaces. However, some elements are not appropriate to this typology, especially play spaces or any element which would detract from the needs of peace, reflection and biodiversity. This section therefore considers which qualities are more appropriate for these spaces.
- 12.62 The authority would expect the facilities within its area, and particularly those within its control, to meet a certain level of quality. In accordance with legislation, local authority cemeteries must be kept in good order and repair, as must all buildings, walls and fences<sup>9</sup>. Church of England churchyards that have been closed must also be kept in decent order, and their walls and fences in good repair<sup>10</sup>.
- 12.63 An important indicator for cemeteries is the quality of the sites. While the availability of land is important, people rightly have certain expectations for these spaces. In Basildon Borough, quality has been established through a two-stage process. Firstly the sites were assessed and scored for a wide range of aspects: how well each space functions, its attractiveness, the level and means of security, how well it is landscaped, the adequacy of park furniture, its access for disabled individuals, the appropriateness of facilities, its management and other such factors. The second stage is to establish which aspects are the most important to people using the Borough's open spaces by setting out a Vision, and weighting particular aspects to ensure local expectations are accounted for. Quality scoring is described in more detail in Chapter 5.

## Awards

- 12.64 In addition to the Council's standards set out in this document, there are a number of industry best practice standards, awards and guidance on cemetery management. These include:
- The Charter for the Bereaved was established in 1996 by the then Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration (now the ICCM). It is awarded to cemeteries that can demonstrate a proper respect for the rights of the bereaved with regard to grave choice, cremation procedures, monuments, ceremonies, maintenance of graves, and other services.
  - The Phoenix Awards are organised annually by the Association of Burial Authorities to encourage creativity in cemetery and memorial design
  - The Cemetery of the Year Awards are sponsored by the Confederation of Burial Authorities and award sites that best serve the community and visitors.
- 12.65 In 2008 Wickford Cemetery won second place in the Memorial Awareness Board's Cemetery of the Year. Entered into the under five-acres, best-kept cemetery section, the cemetery was praised for its shrub beds, flower borders and memorial trees as well as the available facilities, including a disabled toilet and waiting room.
- 12.66 The Cemetery of the Year Awards are organised by the Memorial Awareness Board (MAB) and sponsored by a range of members including the Institute of Cemetery and Crematoria Management (ICCM) and the National Association of Memorial Masons. The judges consider all aspects of a site, including customer care, maintenance, safety and security and availability of choice for the bereaved. They particularly consider how the cemetery best serves its community and visitors. Winning awards in national competitions is an excellent example of how cemetery providers and their staff have always endeavoured to exceed basic

<sup>9</sup> Regulation 4, Local Authority Cemetery Order 1977

<sup>10</sup> S.215 Local Government Act 1972

provision and provide special, pleasant environments, prior to the existence of local quality standards.

## Auditing

12.67 Whilst churchyards and cemeteries are a relatively small aspect of the open space available to the Borough's local communities, they have an impact on the areas they serve, their users and need maintaining to ensure they remain pleasant, accessible and functional. The open space audits carried out in 2007 scored aspects of open spaces from 'very poor' to 'excellent', with an overall rating calculated on the basis of those aspects that were important to the users of each type of open space in Basildon Borough. This found that from a quality perspective there is a relatively universal expectation that all open spaces are clean, well maintained and attractive.

12.68 However, there are a number of factors which are impacting on the overall quality of these spaces. Whilst access from surrounding streets is often reasonable, probably reflecting a relatively central position within settlements, specific consideration of disabled people routinely scores poorly. This largely reflects the historic or hilly nature of locations and the difficulty in re-landscaping such spaces, but there are also cost, management and setting issues. Horticulture condition is variable, from non-classified and very poor through to good ratings. Surprisingly, marketing and community involvement is also varied between sites, although again this reflects different site specific management approaches and targeting of a very specific user group that does not require or respond to standard marketing practices all of the time.

## Recommended Facilities

12.69 The Department of Constitutional Affairs<sup>11</sup> recommends that consideration is given to providing facilities for the bereaved and visiting members of the public. Such facilities might include:

- Shelter
- Seating areas
- All weather pedestrian access
- Car parking
- Floristry
- Water supplies (for floral tributes)
- Litter and waste bins (including bins for dog faeces)
- Rubbish recycling
- Toilets
- Refreshments
- Signs

12.70 The appropriateness of these facilities depends on perceived demand and available resources.

## Grounds Maintenance

12.71 Depending on the requirements of individual sites, ground maintenance is likely to include:

- Grass-cutting
- Planting and up-keep of floral displays
- Trimming and care of trees and shrubs

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<sup>11</sup> Department for Constitutional Affairs, (2005) Guide for Burial Ground Managers

- Care of grave areas, including removal of kerbstones and memorials where appropriate
- Care and cleaning of pedestrian and vehicular access routes
- Building maintenance
- Rubbish clearance
- Upkeep of signs and notices
- Ground levelling, as necessary

12.72 Each churchyard and cemetery has been scored for its ability to meet the demands of visitors and given a quality rating to assist in the determining management priorities. The features and facilities that make up the quality score and rating for this typology are identified in Appendix C.

### Quality Ratings

12.73 The ratings for churchyards and cemeteries in the Borough are as follows:

• All Saints Churchyard, North Benfleet	Poor
• Runwell Road Burial Ground, Wickford	Poor
• St. Michael's Churchyard, Pitsea <sup>12</sup>	Reasonable
• Holy Cross Church, Basildon	Reasonable
• St Catherine's Church, Wickford	Reasonable
• St Mary's, Ramsden Grays	Reasonable
• All Saints Church, Vange	Reasonable
• St Nicholas Church, Laindon	Reasonable
• St Mary's Church, Little Burstead	Reasonable
• St Margerets, Church Rd, Pitsea, Bowers Gifford	Reasonable
• St Mary's Church, Ramsden Bellhouse	Reasonable
• Chapel Street Burial Ground, Billericay	Good
• St Mary Magdalene Church, Billericay	Good
• St Peter's Churchyard, Basildon	Good
• Wickford Cemetery, Wickford	Good
• Great Burstead Cemetery, Billericay	Good
• Pitsea Cemetery, Pitsea	Good

12.74 The ratings are based on the ability for each space to meet the demands of its visitors. These demands are defined following engagement with the general public and other stakeholders to establish a vision for open space. The general Quality Vision (detailed in chapter 6) has been determined to be:

#### Quality Vision

Engagement shows that people desire clean, secure, litter and dog-foul free open spaces that are well maintained and provide a variety of functions. Spaces should feel safe and address vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Landscaped features and well-designed facilities, particularly toilets, catering establishments and seating, are encouraged. More natural areas, lakes and woodlands are desired along with well-maintained open areas of grass. Clear information within and about the Borough's open space estate is desired.

<sup>12</sup> St. Michael's Churchyard is audited under *Land at St. Michael's Church*, site No. 311.

- 12.75 This generic statement does not apply solely to churchyards and cemeteries and makes reference to aspects that would not generally be expected within this niche typology, such as catering establishments and open areas of grass. The provision of any facility and the design of these more specialist open spaces must be based on decisions appropriate to the function of the space, and not general expectation. Ultimately, the expectations are not greatly different to those for green spaces, being for appropriate footpaths, safety, seating, visual interest, information, toilets and litter bins.
- 12.76 The best rated sites in Basildon Borough are the public cemeteries in Great Burstead, Wickford and Pitsea. These have on-site wardens, provide relaxing locations with good access, clear signage, welcoming entrances, well maintained horticulture, land and furniture and have little or no evidence of vandalism.
- 12.77 The proposed vision for this typology, based on local engagement is:

### **Vision for Churchyards & Cemeteries**

Engagement shows that people desire clean, safe, litter free churchyards and cemeteries that are well maintained, tranquil and relaxing. These spaces should have appropriate footpaths, feel safe at all times and discourage vandalism and anti-social behaviour. A natural setting and well-designed facilities, particularly toilets and seating are encouraged. Clear information and signage about the spaces is desirable.

- 12.78 The management of these spaces and the provision of new spaces should be carried out to meet the standards set out in this document and achieve the above vision.

## Management Approach

- 12.79 As with all open space, the policy approach to each churchyard and cemetery is based on the quality rating it achieved following a Qualitative Audit in 2007 and whether there are any Intrinsic Benefits present.
- 12.80 The ratings for each of these spaces have been stated above. They relate to a score of above or below 50% on an overall quality score. This separates spaces into High or Low Quality, to set an appropriate management approach that focuses on sites in need of most attention first.

### Quality Ratings for Churchyards & Cemeteries



- 12.81 The management approach for open spaces is given by the following policy, endorsed in PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part I, March 2010:

### Management of Open Space

All open spaces should be improved and enhanced where possible.

With the exception of Urban Parks and Gardens and Civic Spaces, each space should achieve a minimum quality score of 50% (a high-reasonable rating), or at least maintain the rating as determined in this document, whichever is the higher.

All Urban Parks and Gardens and Civic Spaces, due to their more extensive use and range of functions, should achieve a minimum quality score of 60% (a 'good' rating), or at least maintain the rating as determined in this document, whichever is the higher.

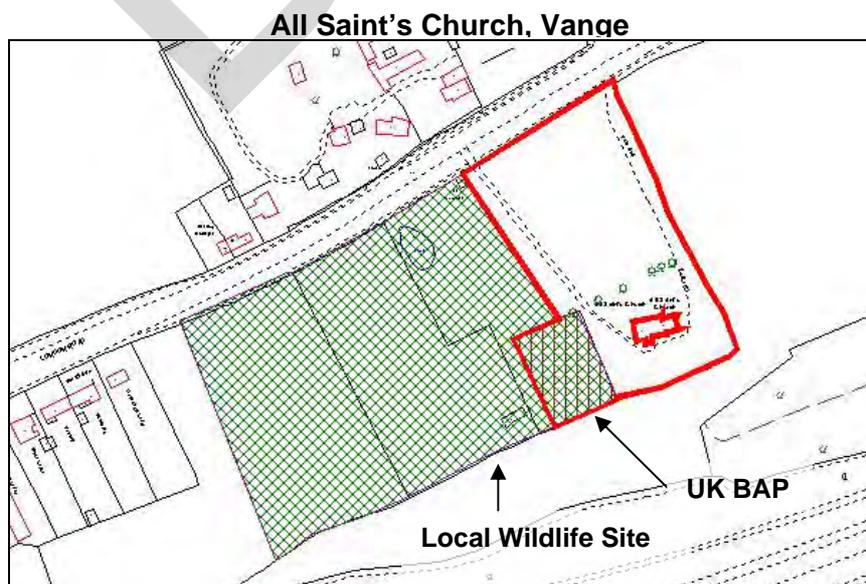
New open spaces, defined as those not included in the 2007 audit, will be expected to achieve a 'good' quality rating, as determined in this document and shall be maintained to this standard for a minimum of 20 years.

Spaces that achieve a low quality rating, as determined in this document, should be considered for appropriate improvements, where possible.

- 12.82 In line with this, churchyards & cemeteries should be enhanced where possible and at least maintain the quality rating as determined in this document. For the majority of spaces, this is a reasonable or good rating, with only two closed cemeteries noted to be of particularly poor quality.
- 12.83 Maintaining these ratings is the least that should be achieved through the management approach, with a view for each location to be improved and enhanced where opportunities arise (the specific improvements for each poor quality space are listed under *Implementation* below).
- 12.84 Entirely new cemeteries are unlikely to be created in the next decade, although extensions or burial space optimisation to existing sites might become necessary as overall burial space decreases. However, when capacity becomes strained or a local demand is identified for more burial space, land should be allocated for this purpose (or alternative provision identified). Where a new site, extension or optimisation solution is proposed, the quality vision given in this document and the management approach stated above should be used to identify the qualitative expectations of local people and therefore guide the design, features and facilities of any new provision.

### Intrinsic Benefit

- 12.85 For the Basildon Borough PPG17 Assessment, a greater emphasis is placed on recognising the 'Intrinsic Benefits' (IB) offered by open spaces to the community and/ or environment, alongside their primary open space use. As defined in Section 6 – Quality, IB are defined as:
- Being a Legally Protected or Recognised Land Designation
  - Being a Locally Protected or Enforced Environmental Designation
  - Having a Flood Defence or Drainage Role
  - Have a Pollution Mitigation Role
  - Being an In-Perpetuity Use
- 12.86 All of the identified spaces have an IB, being in-perpetuity uses (see Chapter 6). Several sites adjoin UK BAP or Local Wildlife Sites, although only St. Michael's Churchyard (a closed site) and a parcel of land alongside All Saint's Church in Vange (see below) are constrained by formal protective designations.



- 12.87 A dual-axis matrix is regarded as an acceptable way of comparing both the quality of open spaces and their IB. It results in a series of spaces ranked between the four management

approaches of High Quality/High Benefit, High Quality/Low Benefit, Low Quality/High Benefit, Low Quality/Low Benefit. Keeping the application of the PPG17 assessment in mind, this is a useful way to inform open space management, investment and asset management and has therefore been applied to all audited open spaces

12.88 Currently, all churchyards and cemeteries fall into the High IB column. Four sites are considered to be of Low Quality and thirteen are ranked as High Quality.

### Quality and Intrinsic Benefit Matrix

	Low IB	High IB
High Quality	<p><b>High Quality/Low IB</b></p> <p>Wherever possible, the preferred approach to a space in this category should be to <u>maintain and enhance</u> its quality.</p>	<p><b>High Quality/High IB</b></p> <p>Spaces that fall into this category should be maintained and enhanced.</p> <p>The planning system and their management approach should also preserve their IB.</p>
Low Quality	<p><b>Low Quality/ Low IB</b></p> <p>Wherever possible, the approach to these spaces should be to <u>enhance</u> their quality.</p> <p>If enhancement is not possible, for whatever reason, the space can be considered firstly for alternative open space uses, based on the needs of the locality.</p>	<p><b>Low Quality/ High IB</b></p> <p>The approach to these spaces should be to <u>enhance</u> their quality if possible. The planning system and management approach should be to preserve the IB, in situ.</p> <p>Enhancing the quality can include considering alternative open space uses that also conserve the IB and improve the overall use by the community.</p>

12.89 The ongoing management of these spaces should improve and enhance their quality where possible. As identified previously, each space of High Quality should at least maintain its quality rating as determined in this document.

12.90 The way that individual spaces can be enhanced is primarily shown through the quality audit undertaken in 2007. This is the starting point for identifying improvements based on the audit criteria and is not exhaustive or exclusive. The following section states the improvements that can be made to enhance the two poorest scoring open spaces.

### Implementation

12.91 The improvements that could be made to enhance each churchyard and cemetery depends on the individual characteristics of the space and on the inclination of the landowner to invest. There is no single solution as each space is unique, but the factors which could be considered for each are:

#### All Saint's Churchyard, North Benfleet

- Provision of a car park, disabled access, litter bins, seating, and signage as well as toilets should the demand warrant it
- Increased mix of trees and appropriate landscape management
- Improved access through internal paths and access from nearby dwellings

- Improved signage and entrances
- Improve management and maintenance of existing street furniture and a need for a more 'cared-for' appearance
- Better routes around the space
- Solutions to reduce the occurrence of vandalism
- Improved community involvement and promotion.

**Runwell Road Burial Ground, Wickford (United Reform Church Burial Ground, Wickford)**

- Provision of a car park, footpath, disabled access, litter bins, seating, and signage as well as toilets, should the demand warrant them.
- Improvements to the management and maintenance of site-based flora, furniture and a need for a more 'cared-for' appearance
- Introduction of horticulture
- Improved disabled access, internal paths and access from surrounding housing
- Improved signage, entrance and information
- Improved community involvement or marketing

12.102 A consistent low score is identified in the category of '*management of wildflower meadows; consideration of access for disabled people; design of facilities and pathways and; management for biodiversity*'. There is an opportunity to seek general enhancements in these areas.

12.103 Where opportunities arise, improvements to other sites should consider whether they enhance the site in line with the vision and the management approach proposed in this document, and should utilise the quality assessment audit undertaken.

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## Recommended Policies

1. The quantity of land required for burials should be monitored every year to ensure the demand for burial space over a generation (30 years) can be met.
2. The quantity of land required for burials should be monitored to ensure the demand for a 5 year time-horizon can be met. The Local Development Framework, Open Space Strategy and its Action Plans should establish a suitable policy mechanism to optimise existing burial sites and secure additional provision and monitor the capacity of open cemeteries and advise of when there is a need for further space as appropriate.

### Churchyards & Cemeteries Quantity Standard

Demand is currently equivalent to 180-230 new graves per year, equal to between 0.081ha and 0.104ha of land per annum.

There is sufficient capacity in the combination of private and public cemetery sites in the Borough to accommodate predicted demand for the next 30 years.

There is insufficient capacity in public cemetery sites to meet projected public burial demand for the next 30 years. By 2021 the available capacity at Council sites is likely to be exhausted. An additional 1.9ha of land will be required in order to meet minimum expected demand to 2040.

3. Local communities should be encouraged, where it is deemed appropriate, to adopt detached burial grounds, so that they become a community asset, as well as serving as a place of rest and reflection.
4. Opportunities to enhance churchyards and cemeteries should seek to meet the quality vision for these spaces and the approach to managing open space. Any new cemeteries or extensions should endeavour to meet the Vision for Churchyards and Cemeteries and achieve a quality rating of 'High Reasonable' or above (Score of 50%+) in accordance with the quality assessment method outlined in this document.

### Vision for Churchyards & Cemeteries

Engagement shows that people desire clean, safe, litter free churchyards and cemeteries that are well maintained, tranquil and relaxing. These spaces should have appropriate footpaths, feel safe at all times and discourage vandalism and anti-social behaviour. A natural setting and well-designed facilities, particularly toilets and seating are encouraged. Clear information and signage about the spaces is desirable.

## Chapter 13 – Children & Young People’s Play Spaces

<b>Specific Policy Framework</b> .....	<b>176</b>
<b>National</b> .....	<b>176</b>
Planning Policy Guidance 17: Open Space, Sports and Recreation (PPG17), 2002 .....	176
Every Child Matters, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2003 .....	176
Planning for Play: Guidance on the Development of a Local Play Strategy, National Children’s Bureau/ Big Lottery Fund, 2006 .....	176
Children’s Plan, Department for Children, Schools and Families 2007 .....	177
<b>Local Policy</b> .....	<b>178</b>
Play Strategy 2007 - 2012.....	178
Integrated Youth Strategy, 2007 - 2010 .....	178
Overview & Scrutiny Commission Task & Finish Group - Play Provision Review, 2008 .....	178
Methodology of Review .....	179
Play Area Review - Quantity Assessment.....	180
Play Area Review - Quality Assessment.....	180
Conclusions of Task & Finish Groups Review of Play Areas .....	184
<b>PPG17 &amp; Play Area Review Methodology Comparison</b> .....	<b>185</b>
<b>Public Engagement</b> .....	<b>186</b>
<b>PPG17 Step 1 Appraisal – Identifying Needs</b> .....	<b>186</b>
<b>Play 4 Play, 2006</b> .....	<b>186</b>
Play 4 Play Summary .....	188
<b>Open Space Survey 2009 - Children &amp; Young People</b> .....	<b>188</b>
<b>Bright Sparks Project, Essex County Council &amp; the Arts Council 2008-2009</b> .....	<b>189</b>
<b>Analysis</b> .....	<b>189</b>
<b>PPG17 Step 2 Appraisal - Auditing Local Provision</b> .....	<b>189</b>
Definitions of Play Spaces .....	189
1) Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAPs).....	190
2) Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAPs) .....	190
3) Local Landscaped Area for Play .....	190
4) Local Areas of Play (LAPs).....	190
5) Other activity areas .....	190
<b>PPG17 Step 3 Appraisal – Setting Provision Standards</b> .....	<b>191</b>
<b>Quantity Analysis</b> .....	<b>192</b>
Benchmarking .....	195
Children in each Settlement Area .....	196
Setting a Standard .....	197
Recommendation .....	200
<b>Quality Analysis</b> .....	<b>201</b>
Recommendations .....	204
<b>Accessibility Analysis</b> .....	<b>206</b>
Benchmarking .....	212
Recommendations .....	213
<b>PPG17 Step 4 Appraisal – Applying Provision Standards</b> .....	<b>213</b>

## Children & Young People's Play Spaces

- 13.1. Play is an essential part of every child's development, teaching them life skills that are essential to their well-being as they move into adulthood. The provision of high quality play areas therefore has an important role in enabling children to develop social skills, build confidence, heighten self-awareness and manage risk.

## Specific Policy Framework

### *National*

#### **Planning Policy Guidance 17: Open Space, Sports and Recreation (PPG17), 2002**

- 13.2. In accordance with PPG17, the provision of children & young people's spaces in the Borough are being reviewed and standards set for their continued provision to meet the needs and demands of younger residents. National planning guidance takes the following view:

*"Open space and sports and recreational facilities that are of high quality or of particular value to a local community, should be recognised and given protection by local authorities through appropriate policies in plans. Areas of particular quality may include:*

*i. small areas of open space in urban areas that provide an important local amenity and offer recreational and play opportunities;"*

- 13.3. PPG17 recognises within its broad set of typologies that open spaces include:

*vi. provision for children and teenagers - including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other more informal areas (eg 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters);*

#### **Every Child Matters, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2003**

- 13.4. This is a Government programme that sets five recommendations for children and young people's general well-being:

1. Being healthy: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle;
2. Staying safe: being protected from harm and neglect and growing up able to look after themselves;
3. Enjoying and achieving: getting the most out of life and developing broad skills for adulthood;
4. Making a positive contribution: to the community and to society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour;
5. Economic well-being: over coming socio-economic disadvantages to achieve their full potential;

#### **Planning for Play: Guidance on the Development of a Local Play Strategy, National Children's Bureau/ Big Lottery Fund, 2006**

- 13.5. The need to improve the provision that is made for children to play is acknowledged in a range of national policy areas: from planning, open spaces and transport to health, education and childcare. Local authorities in England have a statutory duty, under the

Children Act (2004), to co-operate in their provision for the enjoyment of play and recreation as part of the five key outcomes for all children.

## **Children's Plan, Department for Children, Schools and Families 2007**

- 13.6. The Children's Plan is a ten-year strategy to make England the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up.
- 13.7. The Plan is built on the fact that young people spend only one fifth of their childhood at school, and that they learn best when their families support and encourage them and when they are experiencing positive activities outside the school day. It sets out a series of ambitions for all areas of children's lives:
- at age 5, 90 per cent of children will be developing well across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage;
  - at age 11, 95 per cent of children will have reached expected levels in literacy and numeracy;
  - at age 19, 90 per cent will have achieved the equivalent of five good GCSEs;
  - at age 19, the majority of children will be ready for higher education with at least 6 out of 10 children achieving the equivalent of A Levels;
  - child poverty will be halved by 2010 and eradicated by 2020;
  - there will be clear improvements in child health, with the proportion of overweight children reduced to 2000 levels;
  - the number of first-time young offenders will be reduced so that by 2020 the number receiving a conviction, reprimand or final warning for a recordable offence will have fallen by a quarter;

## **Charter for Children's Play, Play England, 2007**

## **National Play Strategy, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008**

## **Better Places to Play Through Planning, Play England, 2009<sup>1</sup>**

- 13.8. Play England aims for all children and young people in England to have regular access and opportunity to free, inclusive, local play provision and play space. This guidance aims to support local planning & transport authorities to develop and implement planning policy that ensures that children and young people have access to high quality playable spaces close to where they live and spend their time.
- 13.9. It builds upon PPS3: Housing, PPG17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation and the Manual for Streets (Dft & CLG, 2007).
- 13.10. It examines the ways in which spatial planning can clarify the need for, and supply of, playable place as part of their open space assessments. This includes:
- Identifying Local Need
  - Understanding the existing policy framework
  - Knowing about the local population of children and young people
  - Listening to the local population of children and young people, their parents & carers
  - Auditing Local Provision

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://to.ly/cfjv> for further details and a copy of the document

- Mapping playable space
- Assessing the quality of playable space
- mapping barriers to outdoor play and informal recreation

## *Local Policy*

### **Play Strategy 2007 - 2012**

- 13.11. The Council's Play Strategy 2007-2012 was produced through the Essex Play Partnership, a group of all the public organisations and the voluntary sector with an interest in young people and play. The Strategy embodies the vision set out by the government in the document 'Every Child Matters'. It integrates closely with the Council's Strategic Improvement Plan, Social Inclusion Policy, Integrated Youth Strategy, Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy and the Basildon Tackling Obesity Strategy.
- 13.12. It was approved by the Council in September 2007 and forms the basis of decisions on play spaces and play equipment in the Borough. There are six aims of the Play Strategy and a number of related objectives to achieve a better provision for play, including a review of the quality and quantity of provision. The strategy sets out a number of activities to improve, monitor and review play within the Borough.
- 13.13. It concluded that when comparing Basildon Borough with other local authorities of a similar size, there is a relatively high number of designated play areas.
- 13.14. The evidence gathered and the methodology followed to produce the Strategy is significantly similar in many respects to the requirements placed on the Open Space Assessment by PPG17. The work undertaken for the Strategy is therefore heavily reflected throughout this assessment. The full Play Strategy is available from Basildon Borough Council and a summary of the relevant findings are set out below.

### **Integrated Youth Strategy, 2007 - 2010**

- 13.15. The Youth Integrated Strategy (YIS) is a response to the 2004 Children's Act and promotes an integrated approach to children and young people's services. Its aims are to:
- provide Basildon District Council's strategic framework for children and young people's services
  - set out priorities and actions of Basildon District Council.
  - continue to develop partnership working to shape an integrated youth approach.
- 13.16. The IYS included an action to establish the Play Partnership, a body who's work influences this assessment. In addition, the objective to promote healthy lifestyles includes a number of wider Council objectives such as the development of a Sporting Village; a comprehensive programme of sports, exercise and fitness through Cultural Services and; the development a Play Strategy (September 2007). Play is a vehicle that can help deliver the Council and LSP aims and objectives. The aim of this Strategy is to ensure play is not forgotten when action plans are being developed throughout the organisation and when working with partners.

### **Overview & Scrutiny Commission Task & Finish Group - Play Provision Review, 2008**

- 13.17. In 2007, the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Commission challenged a group of Members to form a Task & Finish Group to review play provision in the Borough. It was chaired by Cllr Don Morris. The Leisure & Health Scrutiny Committee have been monitoring its implementation since it concluded with a series of recommendations in 2008

- 13.18. The Group's review, aided by independent inspections of play facilities concluded that many of the Borough's play areas were not up to an acceptable standard and were not benefiting the local community as they should be, principally owing to a lack of play equipment. The key thrust of the Play Strategy was to help resolve this by creating large play hubs with multiple activities that encourage mass participation. These would then be complemented by smaller more localised play areas of a quality compliant with national standards for play areas.
- 13.19. In 2007, there were 259 areas defined as play areas in the Borough, compared to 90 within neighbouring Chelmsford Borough. As many of these were not up to the standard required by the Strategy they did not benefit the local community as they should. The Strategy accepts that such play areas should not continue to be maintained by the Council as it moves towards a quality rather than quantity approach.
- 13.20. At its meeting held on 3 April 2007 the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission agreed that an annual programme of task and finish groups should be developed at the commencement of the 2007/08 municipal year and endorsed a proposed approach with regards to the establishment of such a work programme. This involved writing to all Members of the Council asking them to identify any issues which they felt should be the subject of an in-depth review by a task and finish group. One of the issues suggested by Members was a review of the Council's play areas.
- 13.21. On 19 September 2007, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission agreed that a review of the Council's Play Areas should be undertaken and approved a project plan for the review. As the review progressed, its scope was revised to ensure a sufficient conclusion. The desired objectives/outcomes were as follows:
1. Assess the value of the current 259 play areas in the District in terms of a number of factors including location, proximity to other play areas, current usage, standard of play equipment and maintenance issues.
  2. Identify which of the current play areas should:-
    - a. Be retained as localised play areas to support the large play hubs to be created across the District.
    - b. Perhaps cease to be play areas.
- 13.29. It was decided that, to ensure a sufficient conclusion to the review and in view of the borough wide PPG17 Open Spaces Assessment being undertaken to assess the current provision and future needs of all types of open space, the task and finish group should not consider the final future provision of play areas or the possible future use of land from which play areas may be removed, as originally envisaged. This was due to the possibility of the group making specific recommendations concerning particular play areas, which could not be sustained when considered later in the wider context of the Open Spaces Assessment.

## **Methodology of Review**

- 13.30. As part of the review, the Task and Finish Group undertook the following:-
- Commissioned an inspection of the Council's play areas by the Play Inspection Company Ltd to establish their play value.
  - Organised a drop-in session for all Councillors to learn about the Play Strategy; view maps showing the location and play value of play areas, and give their comments on particular issues in relation to play areas in their own wards.
  - Visited a number of play areas in the Northlands Park area to assess the difference between those with high play value and those with little or no play value.

- Examined the implications, particularly financial, redefining those play areas with little or no play value as informal play areas.

## Play Area Review - Quantity Assessment

- 13.31. The Basildon District Play Strategy established that there are 259 designated Play Areas in the borough. In 2007, there were also noted to be a number of other areas where children played:
- 68 school fields and playgrounds
  - 57 football pitches
  - 11 cricket pitches
  - 6 bowling greens
  - 2 novelty golf courses
  - 2 artificial turf areas
  - 1 rugby pitch
  - 7 Multi-Use Sports Areas (MUSAs)
  - 4 Skate Parks
- 13.32. Together with the designated Play Areas, this represented all of the formal provision available, including fee paying provision.

## Play Area Review - Quality Assessment

- 13.33. As part of its duties to inspect its own play equipment each year, the Council employs a specialist contractor, the Play Inspection Company Ltd, to carry out structural inspections of the all its play areas.
- 13.34. Each piece of play equipment is inspected and an assessment is made of whether it meets applicable standards.
- 13.35. The assigned Task and Finish Group agreed that, for the 2007 inspections, the Play Inspection Company Ltd should be asked to extend its structural inspection to include an assessment of the *play value* of each play area. This information was required to enable the task and finish group to determine which play areas were failing to provide the quality of play provision that the Play Strategy aspired towards.
- 13.36. The inspections were conducted in December 2007 and the full results are included in the Group's Report<sup>2</sup>. The inspections focused on three elements.
1. A structural inspection to determine the risk posed by the area and what remedial action was needed to the equipment or furniture;
  2. A Disability Discrimination Act assessment was made; and
  3. Specifically for the purposes of the review, an assessment was made of the play value of each play area.

### Results of Structural Inspections

- 13.37. Within each play area, all of the play equipment was assessed and photographed together with any perimeter fencing, gates, benches, litter bins and safety surfacing. The report addressed any safety issues relating to the equipment or areas and identified whether safety standards were being complied with and noted any points of failure. An overall risk

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.basildon.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=2207&p=0>

assessment of each area was made. These assessments identified a number of minor repairs which would be required to specific items of play equipment and these works would be undertaken. The overall risk assessments were either very low or low.

### Results of Disability Discrimination Act Assessment

13.38. To determine whether each play area complied with the Disability Discrimination Act 2010, an assessment was made of the play equipment as well as the general site features, i.e. the entrance and gates, the paths and routes within the play area, the signage, surfacing and furniture. The results of these assessments show that the requirements of the Act are not being complied with. The inspector advised that it was highly unlikely that a position could be reached whereby all play areas complied with the Act, but that steps could be taken to ensure that this was achieved in relation to a number of play areas. The sort of improvements that would be required include the erection of shelters, link paths within the areas and wheelchair accessible entrance gates.

### Results of Play Value Assessment

13.39. Each play area was assessed against three criteria to determine overall play value. These criteria were site features, equipment features and play co-operation. The components of play value<sup>3</sup> were measured to provide an overall play value score.

### **Play Value Definitions**

13.40. Each of the components within each criterion had a weighting and the inspector arrived at the total play value score for each play area by adding together the scores for site features, equipment features and play co-operation. The maximum available score was 97 although the inspector advised that a total score towards the high end of the range was very rare. The highest mark achieved in Basildon Borough, 46 for Wickford Memorial Park, was considered to be a very good score.

13.41. The play value results were divided into four colour-coded categories, as follows:

<b>Play Value Score</b>	<b>Colour Code</b>	<b>No. of Play Areas Affected - Original (Adjusted)<sup>4</sup></b>
0-2	Red	108 (109)
3-4	Brown	30 (29)
5-9	Purple	57 (57)
10+	Green	64 (64)

13.42. An initial assumption of this division was made as follows:

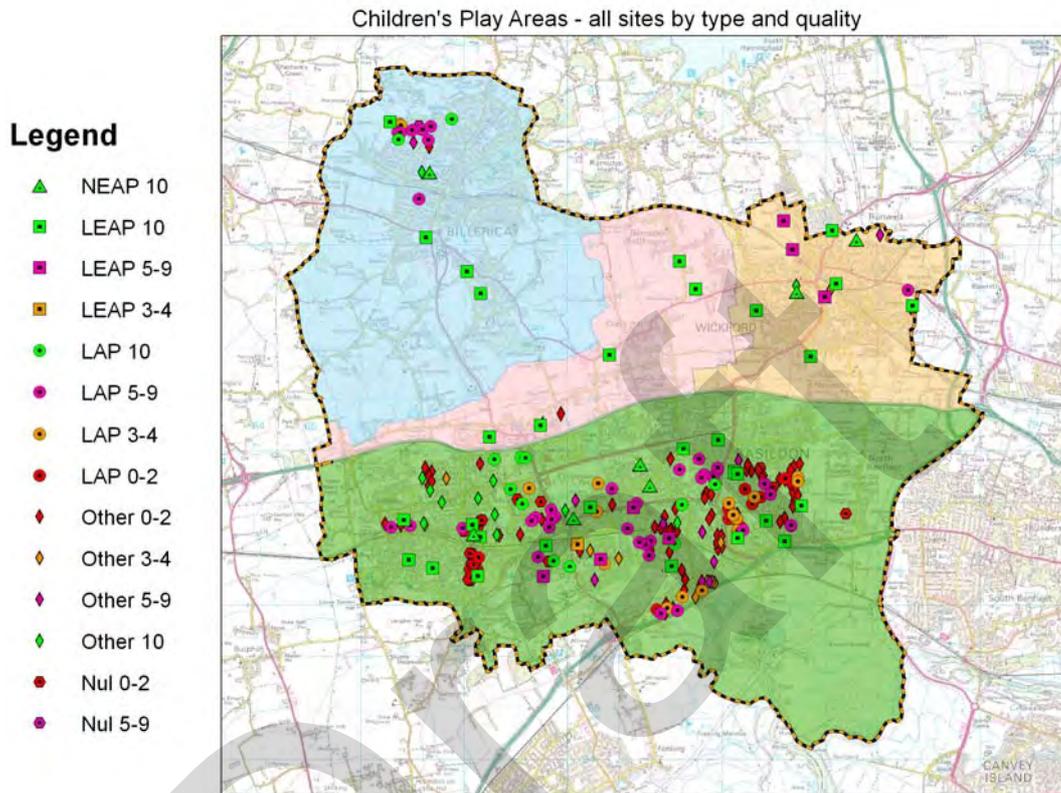
- The 'red' play areas should be considered for re-designation as informal open spaces.
- The 'brown' play areas should be considered for re-designation as informal open space unless there could be investment in them to improve their play value.

<sup>3</sup> see paragraph 13.127 for details of the components of play value

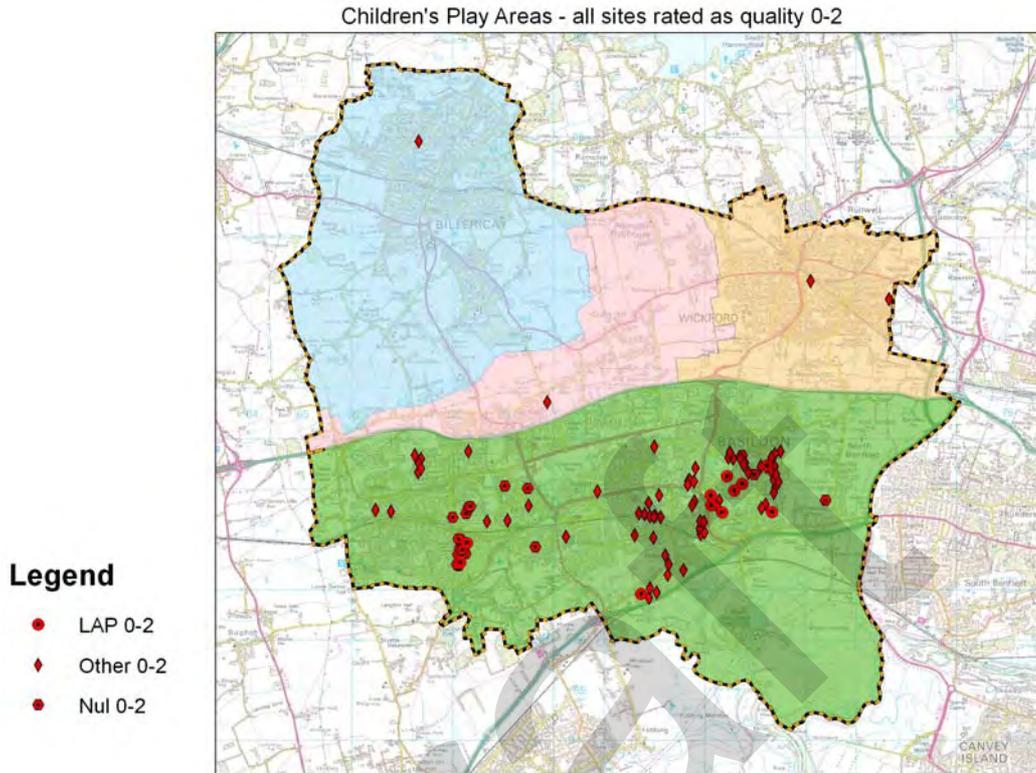
<sup>4</sup> An adjustment to the figures was required in 2011 following a review of the Play Strategy data.

- The 'purple' play areas should be considered for retention as play areas but would benefit from investment.
- The 'green' play areas have a good degree of play value should be considered for retention as play areas.

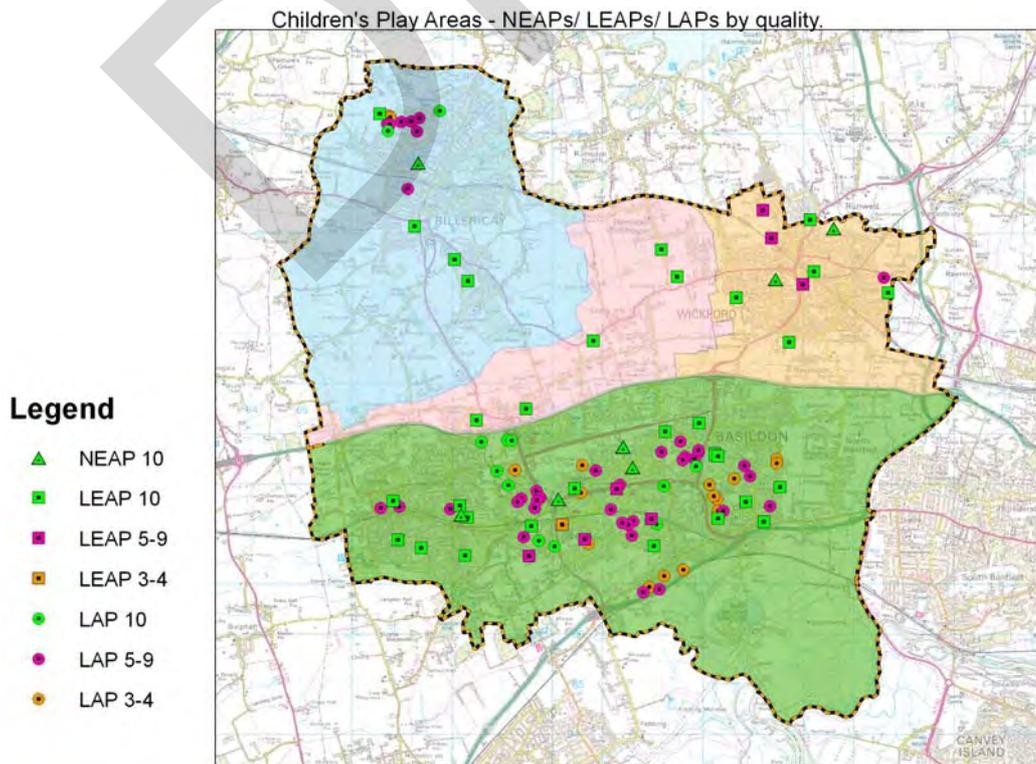
13.43. All of the play areas were identified on a map using the colour coding explained above. This enabled Members to see at a glance the prevalence and distribution of play areas:



- 13.44. Those spaces with little or no play value (a score of 0-2 (marked red) in any of the categories) were separated in order to determine the spread and location of these sites (see map below). By definition of their value, these sites do not contribute to play in the Borough and should not be identified as play spaces.



- 13.45. By removing the poor spaces, a more genuine and accurate distribution of sites that meet acceptable play standards in Basildon Borough can be identified:



- 13.46. The Council's Cultural Services Manager advised the Task and Finish Group that through his discussions with officers at other authorities, it was evident that the number of

designated play areas was significantly higher than most other authorities. For example, within Chelmsford borough there were 90 play areas compared to 259 within Basildon. Over a number of years there had not been a strategic approach to the provision of play areas, something the new Play Strategy sought to address.

- 13.47. As demonstrated by the assessment of play value, the high number of play areas was not an indication of adequate provision, as a significant proportion offered little or no value (42%). 104 play areas (40%) included no play equipment at all.<sup>5</sup>
- 13.48. It was suggested that spaces that offered little or no value were inaccurately defined as play areas and could more accurately be defined as informal open spaces, pending the outcome of the Open Space Study.

### Engagement with Members - Drop-In Session

- 13.49. On 9 June 2008, the Task and Finish Group hosted a drop-in session at the Basildon Centre for all Members. The group was keen to learn of Members' experience of play areas in their own Wards. Eleven members attended and Table X gives the results of this consultation. The results suggested that maintenance/ upkeep and vandalism were the main issues on which residents contacted their Ward Members with regard to play areas. There was general agreement to the proposal that play areas with a low play value should be re-designated but also a desire for the remaining play areas to be improved.
- 13.50. Members also provided comments on specific play areas which would be taken into consideration as part of the Open Space Assessment.

Were you aware of how many play areas were in your ward before seeing the maps?	Yes	5
	No	1
How often do residents contact you about play areas?	Frequently	2
	Occasionally	1
	Infrequently	2
What are the main issues residents raise?	Quality of Play Area	-
	Maintenance of Play Area	6
	Vandalism of Play Area	5
	Request Removal of Play Area	3
	Request Improvement to Play Area	1
	Dog Fouling	4
	Lighting in the Play Area	1
	Little Around the Play Area	1
Anti-Social Behaviour Issues	1	
What are your views on the proposal to remove play areas with low play value?	Agreed	1
	Agreed if not used or others are improved	3
	Disagreed	1

### Conclusions of Task & Finish Groups Review of Play Areas

1. The Council has a significantly higher number of defined play areas than similar sized local authorities.
2. The number of areas defined as play areas in the district is misleading as 108 (42%) of these have little or no play value and 104 (40%) include no play equipment.

<sup>5</sup> Not all of these received a final play value score of 0-2 as their score was increased by marks for site features such as paths, seating and planting.

3. The high number of low value designated play areas is not consistent with the aim of the Council's adopted Play Strategy for 'quality not quantity'.
  4. It would be more accurate to re-define the 108 play areas with little or no play value as informal open space.
  5. The re-designation of such play areas as informal open space would clear the way for them to be considered under the wider Open Spaces Study. A more accurate assessment of the potential future use of these areas, either as enhanced play areas or as an alternative use, can then be made.
  6. In order for the relevant play areas to be re-designated as informal open space, it is estimated that there would be a cost in the region of £77,610 to remove redundant items.
- 13.51. As these 108 areas would no longer require the level of inspection and cleaning undertaken for play areas there would be an annual cost saving in the region of £22,209 after 3½ years.

## PPG17 & Play Area Review Methodology Comparison

- 13.52. Given that the Play Area Review was a substantial and valuable body of work which considered similar matters to this Open Space Assessment, it is necessary to review how its context, methodology and conclusions address the objectives of PPG17, based on the fact that Children and Young People Facilities are an Open Space typology in their own right.
- 13.53. It is also worth noting that Stage II of *Planning for Play* Guidance, entitled 'Review' recommends that the following stages are followed when reviewing play provision<sup>6</sup>.
47. Review of Existing Consultation
  48. Identifying, mapping and auditing current provision
  49. Scope of audit: play and the wider built environment
  50. Audits and Local Standards
  51. Mapping and Assessing Current Provision
  52. Access Audit
  53. The mechanics of the audit process – The two stage approach
  54. Audit Recording Systems
  55. Analysis patterns of play opportunities
- 13.54. These stages relate well to the approach adopted by Basildon Borough Council for the PPG17 Assessment (based on the PPG17 Companion Guide) with each stage relating to the first four Steps, thus:

<b>Planning for Play Guidance</b>		<b>PPG17 Assessment</b>
47	Review of Existing Consultation	Step 1 – Identifying need
48	Identifying, mapping and auditing current provision	Step 2 – Auditing local provision
49	Scope of audit: play and the wider built environment	
50	Audits and Local Standards	Step 3 – Setting standards
51	Mapping and Assessing Current Provision	Step 2 – Auditing local provision
52	Access Audit	
53	The mechanics of the audit process	
54	Audit Recording Systems	
55	Analysis patterns of play opportunities	Step 4 – Applying standards

- 13.55. The two review processes, whilst approaching play opportunities from different policy perspectives, are nevertheless comparable.

<sup>6</sup> These are however slightly different to those recommended in PPG17.

## Public Engagement

### **PPG17 Step 1 Appraisal – Identifying Needs**

(Step 47 of Stage II Review of Planning for Play, 2006)

13.56. One of the aims of this Assessment is to establish what is desired in terms of play spaces from people living in the Borough. Public and stakeholder engagement is the most effective way to do this. A number of exercises have been undertaken, each of which builds a robust picture of the demands on the borough. Some of these exercises were very specific, focused on particular issues or open space matters, while others were general surveys of public responses to a range of issues. For this assessment, the consultation results for the Play Strategy and the findings stated in the Open Space Topic Paper 3 – *What People Told Us* have been used to inform what is in demand in the Borough. A summary of a number of public engagement exercises specific to Children & Young People's Spaces is given below.

### **Play 4 Play, 2006**

13.57. To inform the development of the Borough's Play Strategy, a consultation was carried out jointly between the Children's Fund Essex and 'Mapalim', a play and arts organisation, under the brand 'Play 4 Play'.

13.58. The consultation went to 6 schools; 2 secondary, 2 junior, 1 primary and 1 special school in the District. It consulted with 1093 children and young people and 80 parents and in these terms was a very effective exercise.

13.59. The main objectives were:

- To create participatory techniques to engage with children and young people;
- To gain the view of children and young people regarding play;
- To gather valuable information to inform the play strategies;
- To be inclusive and consult widely with individuals regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, gender, or location;
- To build capacity of staff skills for local schools;
- To research the views and wants of parents/carers and the wider community;

13.60. To engage more effectively with children, workshops took a play approach, based on 9 core questions, all of which were put together to answer the outlined consultation outcomes. The most relevant questions and results to inform the PPG17 Assessment and the Open Space Standards are:

1. What is play/what do you play?

- The majority of children and young people thought of football first.
- All of the top ten activities except number two and seven were outdoor based. Number two and seven were IT based activities. This suggests that developing outdoor facilities for active play is the way to meet the Borough's children and young people's wishes.

2. Where do you play?

- 26% of children and young people put 'the park' at the top of where they currently play, followed by 'outside' at 22%
- There is no real marked aged-related difference of play venue – children in years 1-3 ranked 'park' first, followed closely by swimming. Years 4-6 gave the answer

- 'park', followed by 'outside'. Years 7-8 chose their top four choices as locations outdoors away from the home – probably unsupervised.
- Parents and carers think their children mostly play at 'park' and 'friend's houses', which match the choices of children. However the parents and carers third and fourth choices were the 'library' and 'leisure centre', neither of which was listed by the children at all.
3. Where do you not play?
    - Home, outside, swimming pool, park were the top four answers
  4. Where would you like to play?
    - 'Football pitch/ stadium' and 'park' were the first and second choices across the whole age range. 'Swimming pool' ranks third.
    - The top five places for older children and young people (years 7-8) are all outdoor places for unstructured play: 'outside', 'football stadium' and 'swimming pool' being their third, fourth and fifth choices respectively saying that this age group want places to play without obvious direction or rules.
  5. What would children like to play?
    - 'Football' was the first choice, followed by 'waterslide'
    - Younger people put 'football' top.
    - The middle group (years 4-6) list rides, rollercoasters and swings as their top three choices, suggesting that this group focus firmly on the traditional playground as their first choice.
    - Reflecting their stage of development, older children and young people list 'youth club', 'ice-skating', 'shopping' and 'golf' as top choices after football.
  6. Who do you play with?
    - Top three responses were 'siblings', 'friends' and 'parents/carers' respectively.
    - Fourth and fifth were 'grandparents' and 'alone'
  7. Who would you like to play with?
    - Top result was 'friends' 58%, followed by 'siblings' with 11%
    - Parents were ranked sixth in preference, but third in reality
  8. What is stopping you from playing (accessibility)?
    - Children and young people saw family related issues as the top three limiters on play: 'siblings', 'parents' and 'not allowed'
    - Among the two youngest age groups, after family, the top inhibitors to play were 'lack of desired facilities', practical issues of access, timings and cost or social (fear of older children, confrontation, etc)
  9. What is stopping you from playing (safety)?
    - Bullying is a serious issue for all ages, it was recorded as the top threat to safety
    - All ages second issues was injury from broken glass
    - Vandals and dog foul are also cited as inhibitors
    - Park unsafe appears in the top ten across all ages, and in the top five of the youngest and middle age ranges

- Parents and carers saw teenagers as the top inhibitor for their children's play because younger children already have better play facilities than older children/ young people and because the threat posed by teenagers is the major inhibitor to their children enjoying available play locations. They did not see vandalism or poor maintenance as particular issues.

## **Play 4 Play Summary**

- 13.61. Children, parents and carers generally rate existing facilities as satisfactory
- 13.62. Parents and carers would like existing facilities better maintained
- 13.63. Children cited bullying as their main barrier to play
- 13.64. Parents and carers cite the linked issues of teenagers as the main barrier to using facilities, but it is not clear whether this is based on evidence/ incidents or rumour.
- 13.65. This has established a sound platform of evidence from age-specific residents of the state of the current supply of play areas in the Borough and the future needs and demands of children and young people.
- 13.66. In addition, the following findings from the broader engagement conducted as part of the Open Spaces Strategy project are also relevant in the evaluation of the provision of children and young people space in the Borough.

## **Open Space Survey 2009 - Children & Young People**

- 13.67. In 2009, a survey for all open spaces was undertaken to inform the PPG17 Assessment and the Open Spaces Strategy. To ensure the consultation was effective and representative, specific effort was made to contact hard to reach groups, including children and young people.
- 13.68. Part of the analysis identified those aspects which were more important to children and young people than to other groups in the survey. The main findings were:
- Children enjoy playing outside and some of them enjoy playing at the park. They would like to have football pitches and play equipment in parks and water slides at swimming pools.
  - Young people value open space, particularly parks, and would like to see more play equipment suitable for their age group(s). They would also like to have adventurous things to do.
  - The Youth Council Forum highlighted that young people want more open spaces, not less.
  - Young people appreciate open space, play equipment suitable for their age group, adventurous areas, activities, bookable sports areas and picnic benches.
  - The maintenance of park furniture and play equipment is a frequent issue, often associated with vandalism rather than poor maintenance
  - Young people find there is a problem with parents letting young children use equipment that is intended for older children. This was highlighted by all age groups and was a significant problem for them.
  - Young people do not feel there is sufficient information on where parks are and what they offer. They also want to know where they can go in the countryside as this is not clear.
  - Young people are wary of strangers and feel intimidated by older youths and groups. They are particularly worried about drinking, smoking, drug use and knife crime. Many stated they would feel safer with park wardens or uniformed staff they could go to for help. An ideal park for this age group would be locked at night, have CCTV and uniformed staff.

- Young people would prefer consultation on the design and position of teen shelters before they are installed.

## ***Bright Sparks Project, Essex County Council & the Arts Council 2008-2009***

### **Open Space Accessibility for People with Special Needs**

- 13.69. This local project has drawn to the Council's attention how the provision for people with sensory impairments and disabilities are catered for in the Borough's open spaces. Haring Woods Associates have carried out the Bright Sparks Project for the Arts Council and Essex County Council, in association with The Pioneers School, Basildon's, Artist in Residence, Terry Orchard. The project that evolved is called 'Sensory Navigation'.
- 13.70. It has explored ways to improve activity and access to open space for young people with special needs. There is little evidence that the Council currently provides for adults and children with special learning and mobility needs in open spaces, except for general matters to do with footpaths and access gates.
- 13.71. None of the Council's Play Areas currently provide specifically for the specific needs of those people with limited mobility or learning difficulties and therefore improvements should be made to help the Council meet its Disability Discrimination Act duties. The work this project is doing and its emerging findings are useful to inform PPG17 Assessment in terms of needs and opportunities and will in turn be useful to the Open Spaces Strategy.

## **Analysis**

### ***PPG17 Step 2 Appraisal - Auditing Local Provision***

(Step 48, 49, 51, 52 & 53 of Stage II Review of Planning for Play, 2006)

- 13.72. An analysis of provision is used to determine what actually exists in the Borough in terms of play spaces. Empirical data on the existing play spaces has been established through the Play Strategy and the Task & Finish Group review of play areas and has provided a sound capture of the majority of play areas. Through a comparison of existing provision and public engagement, recommendations for how to better provide play spaces can be made. The assessments made by the Play Strategy and the Task & Finish Group are reflected in this analysis.
- 13.73. Detailed audits have taken place on all those play areas provided by Basildon Borough Council. In reflection of the spirit of PPG17 to ignore land ownership and consider provision available to the local communities, all operating Registered Social Landlords were asked whether they keep and maintain any play areas in the Borough (Dec 09), although response rates were not positive.

### **Definitions of Play Spaces**

- 13.74. Fields in Trust (FiT), formerly the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA), have developed guidance to address the design and provision of suitable play space as part of development. This contains a hierarchical structure for play areas, which Basildon Borough are also using to assess its provision:

## **1) Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAPs)**

- 13.75. The NEAP is an area of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children but ideally with play opportunities for younger children as well. Located within 15 minutes walk from home, the NEAP is sufficiently large to enable provision for play opportunities that can not be provided within a LAP or LEAP.

## **2) Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAPs)**

- 13.76. An unsupervised area equipped for children of early school age and within 5 minutes walking time of home. The area should be appropriate for the ages of 4-8 years, although consideration should be given also to younger supervised children. LEAPs should offer a challenging and stimulating play experience and should have seating for accompanying adults and for slightly younger children too. Experience has shown that for a number of reasons these areas are not always initially practical in a new development, in which case a Local Landscaped Area of Play (which has no equipment) could be provided instead.

## **3) Local Landscaped Area for Play**

- 13.77. These are an alternative form of provision to a LEAP, which is often a temporary measure prior to decisions on what will be provided. For example, if a developer and the planning authority decide to consult on the provision of equipment once an estate is occupied, or where there is doubt over the provision of more than one LEAP in a location, a LLAP can provide a landscaped space for residents prior to implementation.
- 13.78. These spaces are for use by children and young people within five minutes of their home, as for a LEAP. The site should be imaginatively landscaped even where no equipment is provided.

## **4) Local Areas of Play (LAPs)**

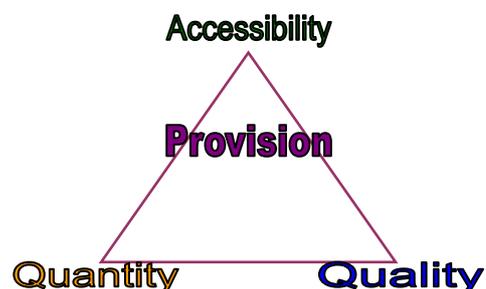
- 13.79. A small area of unsupervised open space specifically designed for younger children between the ages of 4-6 years of age. The location of the area is determined as being within 1 minute walking distance from a child's home. The area should be appropriate for low-key games; flat and level with grass surfacing. A guard rail, fence or shrubbery should be used as a safety buffer zone to protect against road related accidents.

## **5) Other activity areas**

- 13.80. FiT also provide recommended designs for 'destination playgrounds'; combined LEAPs & NEAPs; Multi-Use Sports Areas; Skate Parks; BMX tracks and youth shelters.

## Local Provision

- 13.81. The Play Strategy identified the location and quality of *each play space* in the Borough. In addition, the Open Space Assessment identified the quality, quantity and accessibility of the *parks to which the play spaces are often associated*. This enables a more detailed consideration of provision to be undertaken, in order to assess the overall provision of the typology within the Borough.
- 13.82. The results compare the demand (from engagement) to supply (from the audits) for how well how local provision meets demand.



## **PPG17 Step 3 Appraisal – Setting Provision Standards**

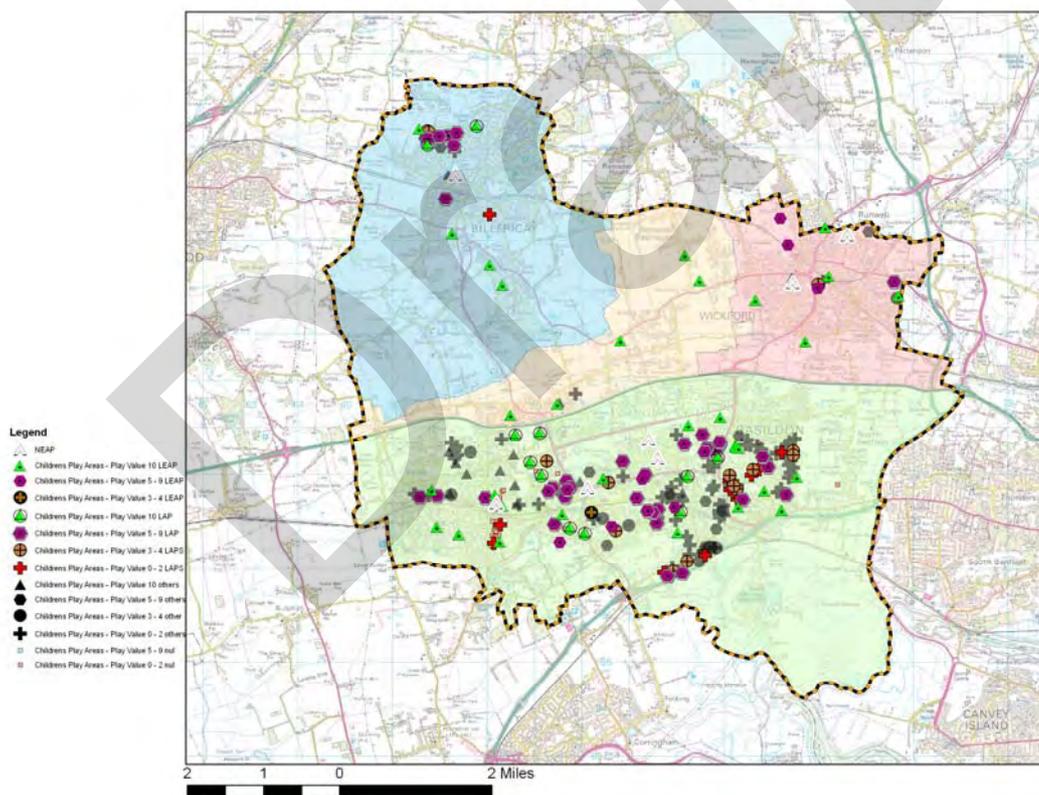
(Step 50 of Stage II Review of Planning for Play, 2006)

- 13.83. Planning for Play 2006 states that “*Drawing up play provision standards is a challenging task*”. The Children's Play Council is carrying out work on play indicators that will take the debate forward. Their guidance does not advocate any particular quality system. Instead, partnerships are encouraged to decide for themselves on approaches that will work for them. Healthy and lively debate about these issues is likely to help build shared values and perspectives within partnerships.
- 13.84. A key thrust of the Strategy included the creation of large play hubs with multiple activities that encourage mass participation, complemented by smaller more localised play areas which are of a quality that is compliant with the national standard for play areas.
- 13.85. It is difficult to separate quality, accessibility and quantity in regard to an overarching strategy, but clearly large centralised play hubs are likely to be few in number and concentrated on the major urban locations, probably within the major open spaces to ensure footfall and due to the substantial land requirements.
- 13.86. The Play Strategy concluded that 108 spaces should be removed from the estate and that other low scoring sites should be considered for removal unless there could be investment in them to improve their play value. All others were considered for retention as play spaces. In terms of PPG17, it is understood that rationalising poor play spaces would not necessarily result in a suitable level of provision in every location. More detail on the decision process and its implications is available in the Play Areas Final Report 2008.

## Quantity Analysis

- 13.87. Unlike other open space typologies, the play spaces are calculated as a quantity of *spaces* per 1000 people, rather than a quantity of *land* per 1000 people. Due to the very singular nature of these spaces and despite some good evaluative work regarding the quantity of land required, the most effective approach is considered to be a statement of the number of sites available of each type, not the quantity of land.
- 13.88. Other authorities have taken more, or less, detailed approaches. For example, Thurrock have evaluated the number of pieces of play equipment available per child, while most have determined a quantity of land laid out for play provision per head of population. Due to the quality and extent of data available, Basildon is able to provide greater detail than simply the locations which include play spaces, but a full analysis of the number of pieces of equipment in particular locations would be resource intensive, requiring additional surveys and not add especially to the objectives.
- 13.89. As previously stated, 259 play areas were identified throughout the Borough, as mapped below.

LEAPS, NEAPS, LAPS, and other Children Play Area sites.



13.90. In terms of the Settlement Areas, this relates to the following number of spaces in each location:

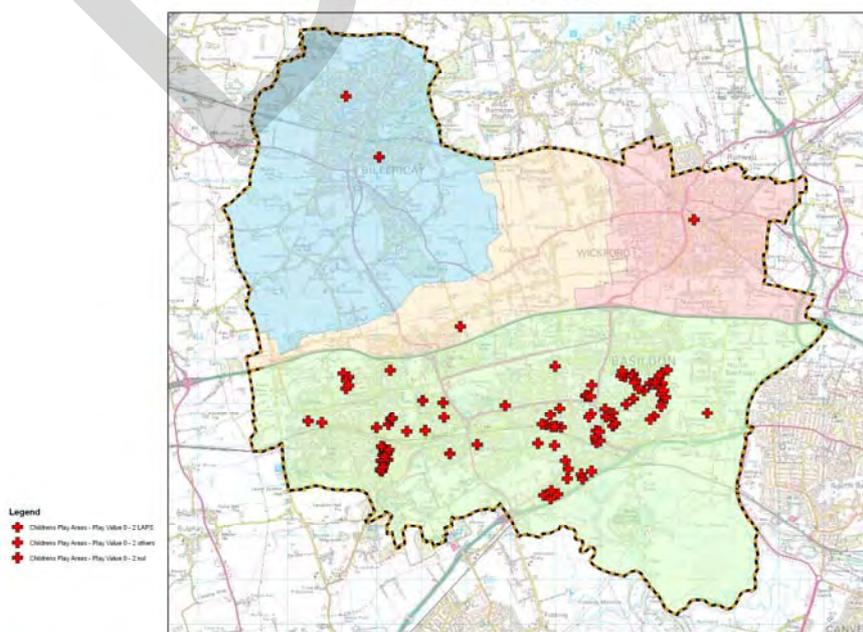
PPG17 Settlement Area	Settlement Wards	Settlement Population Under 16 Years <sup>7</sup>	Number of Play Spaces	Population /Space
<b>Billericay &amp; Burstead</b>	Billericay East, Billericay West & Burstead	8024	20	401.2
<b>Noak Bridge &amp; Ramsden</b>	Crouch	1761	7	251.626
<b>Basildon</b>	Fryerns, Laindon Park, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne, Pitsea North West, Pitsea South East, St Martins, Vange	26709	215	124.2
<b>Wickford</b>	Wickford Castledon, Wickford North, Wickford Park	6465	17	381.5

13.91. However, 42% (109 spaces) of this existing provision was identified as having little or no play value or only a limited degree of play value. It cannot be said therefore that the existing provision is meeting the needs of the District's younger residents.

13.92. It is therefore appropriate to consider the play space estate with these poor spaces removed. The process of removing poor equipment and features began in Summer 2010 and will continue for three years following a Play Strategy policy.

13.93. The low scoring spaces (score 0-2) are shown below.

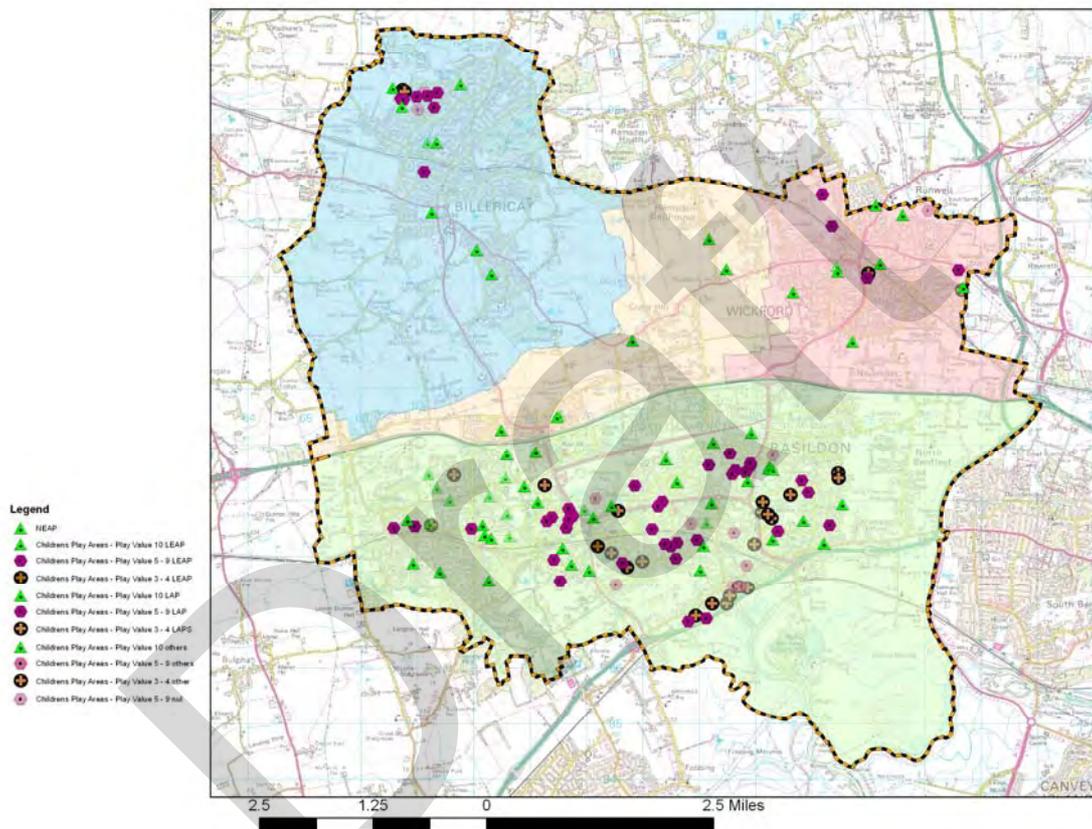
Children's Play Areas - known quality 0-2



<sup>7</sup> From Basildon Ward Profiles, derived from 2001 ONS Census data.

- 13.94. The vast majority of low value spaces were in the New Town area. In its early years of growth, strong emphasis was placed on provision for families and children and a great number of neighbourhood parks, amenity land and play spaces were designated, attracting people from the dense urban environments of the cities from which many were moving. In the past 60 years the need for these spaces has diminished considerably, mostly due to changing demographics but also due to changing demands on public spaces and the types of activities people enjoy. Equally, it is now better understood that underused open space can be strikingly detrimental to an area through miss-use and dereliction.
- 13.95. The provision of valuable play facilities throughout the borough is shown below:

Children's Play Areas - known quality 3-10



- 13.96. This map identifies the location, type and quality of all remaining play spaces which were audited in 2007, following removal of poor spaces as explained above. The dominance of spaces within the Basildon SA is still clear, and follows from its New Town principles of providing good amenity space for all sections of the population, particularly families. There are clear relative deficiencies within the more nucleated, traditional settlement patterns in both Wickford and Billericay when compared to the Basildon area. These two towns follow more traditional locations and historically more specific provision.

13.97. The number of valuable sites per SA is therefore:

PPG17 Settlement Area	Settlement Wards	Settlement Population Under 16 Years <sup>8</sup>	Number of Play Spaces	Population /Spaces
Billericay & Burstead	Billericay East, Billericay West & Burstead	8024	19	422.3
Noak Bridge & Ramsden	Crouch	1761	6	293.5
Basildon	Fryerns, Laindon Park, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne, Pitsea North West, Pitsea South East, St Martins, Vange	26709	110	242.8
Wickford	Wickford Castledon, Wickford North, Wickford Park	6465	15	431

13.98. In the original PPG17 Part I assessment it was calculated that there are 0.98 spaces per 1000 people. The more considered calculation above shows that *valued* play spaces are closer to 0.88 spaces per head of total population.

## Benchmarking

13.99. A benchmarking exercise, which is a comparison between the borough and other neighbouring and similar authorities, was undertaken for Part I. This identified that the method for calculating and setting standards for play space varies considerably between authorities which are otherwise comparable, which limits direct comparison.

Quantity Standards Comparison

Typology	Basildon (Existing)	Basildon (Standards)	Stevenage (NN5)	Chelmsford (ADJ)	Brentwood (ADJ)	Dacorum (NN1)	Thurrock (ADJ)	Castle Point (ADJ)	Northampton (NN2)
Urban Parks and Gardens	1.82ha	1.82	0.73ha	2ha	0.74ha (Urban Parks) 6.88ha (Country Parks)	Part of 2.8ha leisure space.	0.7ha	0.103ha (Urban Parks) 2.94ha (Country Parks)	1.64ha
Natural and semi-natural open space	2.62ha	2.62	1.78ha	2ha	5.61ha	1ha per 1000 population of local nature reserve	2ha	2.38ha	2.86ha
Amenity Green Space	1.33ha	1.33	1.1ha	0.81ha	0.48ha	No standard set, merit based	0.8ha	0.584ha	1.42ha
Provision for Children and Young People	0.98 spaces	0.98 spaces	0.8 play areas	0.81ha	0.13ha	0.2ha under 5s, 0.6ha over 5s	1 piece per 33 children	0.25ha	0.12ha

Green = lower than Basildon; Pink = higher than Basildon; No colour = incomparable

13.100. However, the Task & Finish Group Review of Play Areas highlighted as an example that Chelmsford Borough, a similar sized authority, provides a total of 90 play areas compared to 150 in Basildon. Even with the removal of all poor provision, the Borough provides a large number of play spaces compared to similar authorities.

<sup>8</sup> From Basildon Ward Profiles, derived from 2001 ONS Census data.

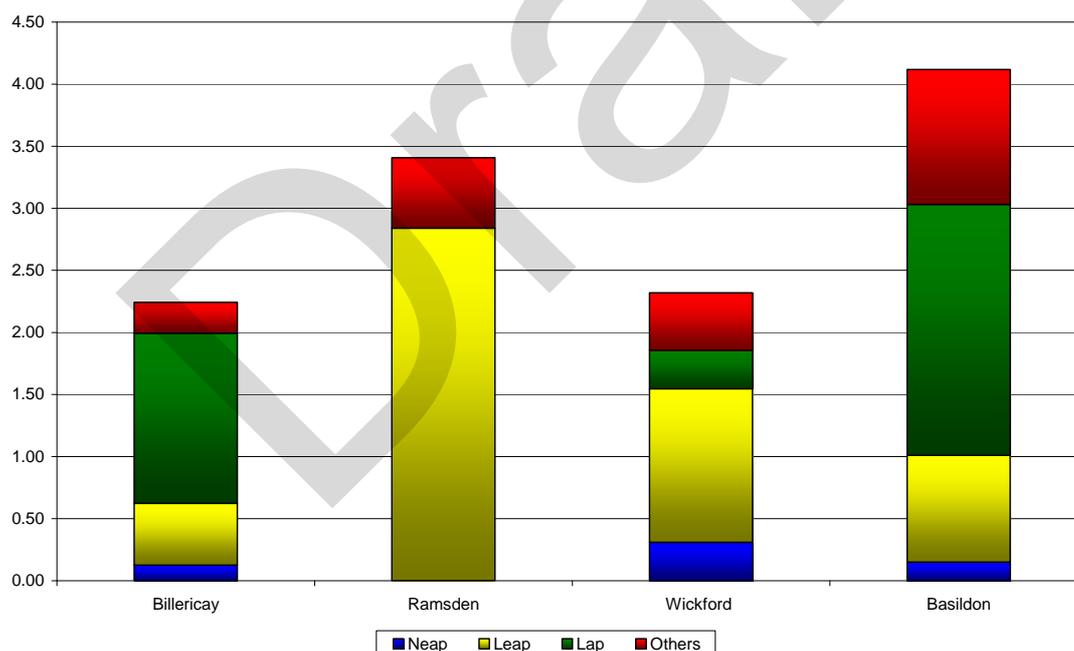
## Children in each Settlement Area

- 13.101. From the information available it is possible to improve the calculation to target the number of Children in each SA rather than the full population. This uses the same information from the 2001 census as the full population assessment and is therefore no less accurate. In addition, due to the Play Review we are able to establish the provision of each type of play space, per thousand children in each of the Settlement Areas:

Quantity of Play Equipment Available per 1000 Children (under 16) in each Settlement Area, by Type of Play Space

Settlement Area	Neap	Leap	Lap	Others	No Info.	Total
Billericay	0.12	0.50	1.37	0.25	0.12	2.37
Ramsden	0.00	2.84	0.00	0.57	0.00	3.41
Wickford	0.31	1.24	0.31	0.46	0.00	2.32
Basildon	0.15	0.86	2.02	1.09	0.00	4.12

- 13.102. For clarity, these ratios are also shown graphically below, with the relative total ratio of spaces given by the height of the column.



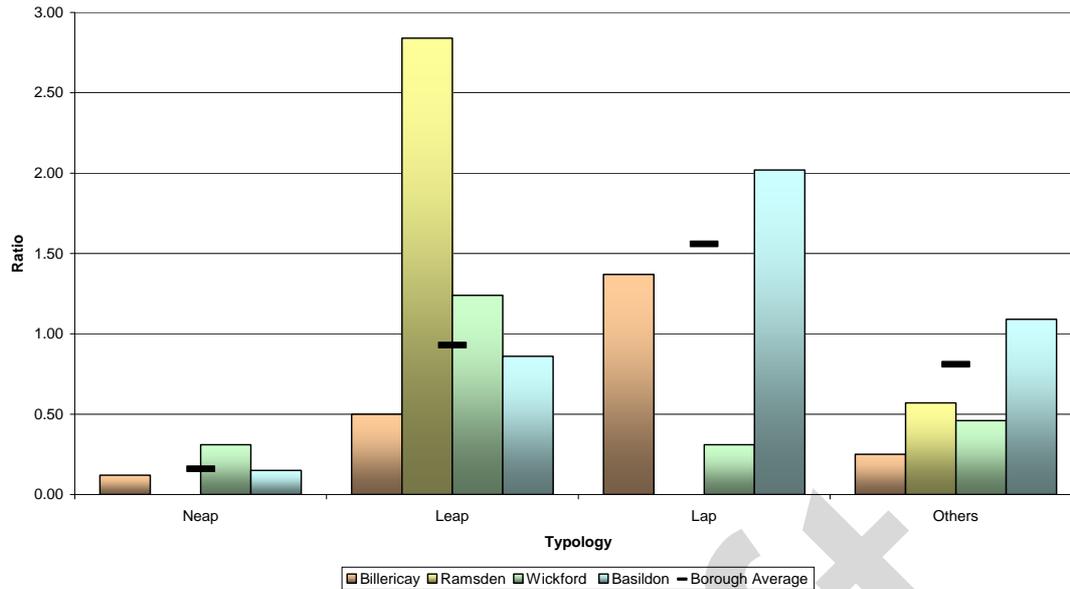
- 13.103. There are between 2.32 (Wickford) and 4.12 (Basildon) play spaces per thousand children in each SA, with an average of 3.49 spaces per 1000 children over the entire Borough.
- 13.104. From these totals and the division of play space types, it is clear there are comparable differences between each SA. Ramsden has relatively good overall provision with a high proportion of LEAPs. Billericay and Wickford have similar overall provision, although the breakdown in Billericay is more focused on LAPs rather than NEAPs or LEAPs, which is the opposite of Wickford.
- 13.105. Basildon SA has the greatest overall number and ratio of spaces to children, but a relatively high proportion of these are LAPs, with low ratios of the better equipped LEAPs. The scale

and elongated settlement pattern of the Basildon Area will affect the number of spaces required to provide for the population compared to Billericay and Wickford, where centralised spaces can provide coverage for a good proportion of the population. Basildon also contains more children both numerically and relatively compared to other SAs (28% of population compared to 24% in all other SAs), all of which impact on the provision required to meet demand.

## Setting a Standard

- 13.106. Standards should be set at levels which reflect the demands of the Borough. From consultation & engagement, most people feel there are sufficient open spaces in the Borough and that quantity demand is being met. Similarly, the Council's Play Strategy 2007-2012 determined an approach of quality over quantity (p.30). As shown above, while the Borough totals are at an acceptable level, there are clear quantitative and qualitative differences in the distribution of play spaces between SAs.
- 13.107. Fields In Trust recommend standards relating to the quantity of land available for play areas as a ratio of the population (combined with accessibility standards). This approach does not compliment the method adopted for Basildon, which highlights the quality of play spaces over the quantity of land available for them. Equally, the provision is established for the main user group, children and young people, rather than for the total population. It should be noted however, that these spaces are complimentary to the standards set for other typologies including Urban Parks and Amenity Green Spaces, which apply equally to every part of the Borough and are available to everyone. The standards considered here are in addition, and specifically consider those spaces which are deliberately laid out for the enjoyment of children and young people.
- 13.108. A simply approach would be to set the Borough average for each Settlement Area. The assessment above calculated averages of 0.91 spaces per 1000 people and 3.49 spaces per 1000 children across the Borough. These ratios could be adopted as the Standard to be achieved in each part of the Borough. This would crudely attempt to equalise the number of spaces per SA (essentially re-distributing spaces from those with higher provision to those with lower provision), although taking no account of the benefit of different types of play spaces. As explained in previous quantity analysis, this is not considered an appropriate, effective or practical approach. It is, however, reasonable to expect a certain level of provision to reflect the demands of the Borough and this should be appropriate to the known provision as unrealistic aims will not be supported.
- 13.109. The chart below shows the ratio of each type of play space in each Settlement Area, with the Borough average shown as a bar. Setting the Borough average across each Settlement Area would involve rebalancing the columns to meet the bar. For most aspects this means improving the number of spaces in each category, although there are, necessarily, some reductions.

Ratio of Play Spaces per Child by Type of Space Including Borough Average



- 13.110. This approach would not fit with that adopted by the Play Strategy and would not represent an intelligent response to provision.
- 13.111. A better use of the information is to determine a functional value for the overall number of play spaces that should be available to children in each Settlement Area and set a minimum number of these which should be NEAPs and LEAPs in order to ensure that quality is maintained (these spaces being more valued by the public than LAPs).
- 13.112. With this approach there is a balance to be struck between the overall number of spaces and the number of equipped areas to be expected in a location, based on the population demographics.
- 13.113. Within Basildon Borough, the number of NEAPs and LEAPs desired within the population has little impact on the number of spaces required. In most Settlement Areas there are a large number of sites such that conversion to an equipped area of play does not generally require the provision of new land. This obviously ignores preferred locations or costs involved. However, the overall ratio of play space provided can have a dramatic influence over the number of new sites required.
- 13.114. For example, with 3.4 play spaces per SA (close to the Borough average), Billericay would require 9 new play spaces; Wickford would require 7; Ramsden has sufficient numbers and Basildon would have a surplus of 19. Whereas with a ratio of 2.0, Billericay, Wickford and Ramsden have a surplus of 2 sites while Basildon has 56 over the requirement. This is irrespective of a very high or very low need for equipped play areas.
- 13.115. From several iterations it is recommended that the following would be appropriate in Basildon Borough:
- A ratio of 2.5 play spaces per 1000 children
  - A minimum of One NEAP for every 6000 children
  - A minimum of One LEAP for every 1000 children
- 13.116. These values reflect the demand for a greater number of equipped play spaces (play hubs and locations with higher play value) and the low desire for additional play spaces overall. They provide an aspiration for each Settlement Area and achieve a balance between the

need to provide a greater number of high play-value locations without being unrealistically demanding.

- 13.117. The effect of these Standards on the Settlement Areas would be to provide a minimum of the following types of play spaces:

<b>Standard Provision for Each SA</b>					
	NEAP	LEAP	LAP	Other	Total
Billericay	2	9	10	0	21
Ramsden	1	2	2	0	5
Wickford	2	7	8	0	17
Basildon	5	27	35	0	67

- 13.118. The table above states how many of each space should be available in each SA to meet the recommendations. The 'Other' column values are zero as these spaces are undefined and do not add valued play spaces to the Borough, although there are many existing play spaces that were uncategorised in the Play Strategy.

- 13.119. These Standards can be compared to the existing provision in each SA. This enables the authority to understand the practical implications of meeting these Standards. The table below identifies the difference between the supply of each play space (existing) and the recommended Standards stated above:

<b>Surplus and Deficits in Each SA</b>					
	NEAP	LEAP	LAP <sup>9</sup>	LAP & Other	Total
Billericay	-1	-5	1	4	-2
Ramsden	-1	3	-2	-1	1
Wickford	0	1	-6	-3	-2
Basildon	-1	-4	19	48	43

- 13.120. This analysis highlights that the number of spaces is generally high, but there is a low provision of equipped play spaces in some areas. The aspiration identified through these standards is that each SA should be considered for a change to its provision. Only Wickford has an appropriate number of NEAPs, although it has a comparatively substantial lack of LAPs for children and young people to enjoy. Basildon has a low number of LEAPS for its population but a very high proportion of LAPs and other play spaces. This is due to the historically high number of designated play spaces but coupled with a low level of equipped provision. Today, residents' expectations are for greater numbers of equipped spaces.

- 13.121. These numbers are necessarily generalised and should be considered as a guide for the appropriate level of provision in each SA to meet minimum standards. Accessibility and individual play space quality carry equal weight with quantity.

<sup>9</sup> The LAP and LAP & Other' columns represent similar data in order to highlight the impact of undefined 'other' play spaces in the Borough.

## Recommendation

- 13.122. The above analysis and the Play Strategy identify that the focus in the future should be to provide good quality, accessible provision based on the current needs of the Borough's residents, rather than continuing to maintain a legacy of spaces built for the greater number of young families that came to Basildon in the 1950s through 1970s.
- 13.123. The same quantity standards should be applied to each settlement area, irrespective of the existing differences in characteristics and provision. This is to ensure that all people living in Basildon Borough can enjoy the same level of amenities. The way that this is achieved in each Settlement Area is likely differ based on opportunities and characteristics.
- 13.124. Setting a quantity of play spaces available to a set head of population can seem an arbitrary and unrefined approach to provision, but for defining contributions from planning proposals and the simple expectation of adequate play spaces in each settlement, this is the approach taken by most local authorities. The details of any particular play space should be determined by prevailing needs and best practice, whether utilising the FiT design standards, consultation with nearby residents, or an alternative approach. This is covered in more detail under quality.
- 13.125. The Council's Play Strategy sets an aim to create more 'play hubs'. These are spaces where mass-participation is possible. Location and size are a key factor in these spaces. The Play Strategy recommends that a space of at least 4ha is necessary to provide for everyone and to be laid out in a non-confrontational manner. It identifies the best parks in the Borough on this aspect to be:
- Laindon Part of the Royal Court development
  - Langdon Hills Recreational ground
  - Fryerns Part of the Craylands development
  - Vange Swan Mead
- 13.126. In setting a local quantity standard for play spaces, the evidence outlined here, including other adopted strategies, suggest the following approach will reflect the needs of the main users of these spaces, i.e. children and young people:

### **LOCAL QUANTITY STANDARD**

**A minimum of 2.5 defined play spaces (NEAP, LEAP, LAP) per 1000 children in a Settlement Area and no less than:**

**1 Neap per 6,000 Children**

**1 LEAP per 1,000 Children**

**LLAP will be acceptable in place of a LEAP, as an interim play space, provided that the provision of equipment is adequately planned for at a set future date and with a valid justification for its phased development.**

## Quality Analysis

- 13.127. Quality audits were undertaken by an independent auditor, *The Play Inspection Company* in 2007. 259 play areas were considered for how well play spaces provide valuable play for children and young people. The components of play value were defined as follows and a score given to each aspect for every play space, following inspection:

<b>Play Value Criteria</b>	<b>Components of Play Value Criteria</b>
Site Features	· Informal supervision · Ground contouring · Planting · Child and adult seating · Internal paths · Lighting · Fencing · Signage · Bins · Shelters · Visual appearance
Equipment Features	· Rocking · Gliding · Rotating · Sliding · Swinging · Balancing · Jumping · Crawling · Ball play area · Wheel play area
Play Co-operation	· Sand · Water · Social play · Educational or learning facilities · Disabilities equipment · Ground graphics · Sound · Play challenge

- 13.128. The final scores were consolidated and categorised according to the following quality ratings:

<b>Play Value Score</b>	<b>Colour Code/ Quality Rating</b>	<b>No. of Play Areas Affected</b>	<b>Recommended Action Based on Play Value Audit Only</b>
0-2	Red - Little or No Play Value	108 (42%)	Consider for re-designation as informal open spaces
3-4	Brown - Limited Degree of Play Value	30 (12%)	Consider for re-designation as informal open space, unless there could be investment in them to improve their play value.
5-9	Purple - Reasonable Degree of Play Value	57 (22%)	Consider for retention as play areas, but would benefit from investment
10+	Green - Good Degree of Play Value	64 (25%)	Consider for retention as play areas.

- 13.129. A full explanation of the method and results of the Play Value Review are available from the *Review of Play Areas: Conclusions and Recommendations of the Task and Finish Group December 2008*,

- 13.130. The conclusions were to remove all poor play spaces as many are simply open ground without equipment, while others have equipment which is a liability to children. For this PPG17 Assessment, the remaining 150 play spaces are considered. These are categorised in the following ratings:

Play Value Score	Colour Code/ Quality Rating	No. of Play Areas Affected
0-2	Red - Little or No Play Value	0 (0%)
3-4	Brown - Limited Degree of Play Value	29 (19.3%)
5-9	Purple - Reasonable Degree of Play Value	57 (38.0%)
10+	Green - Good Degree of Play Value	64 (42.7%)

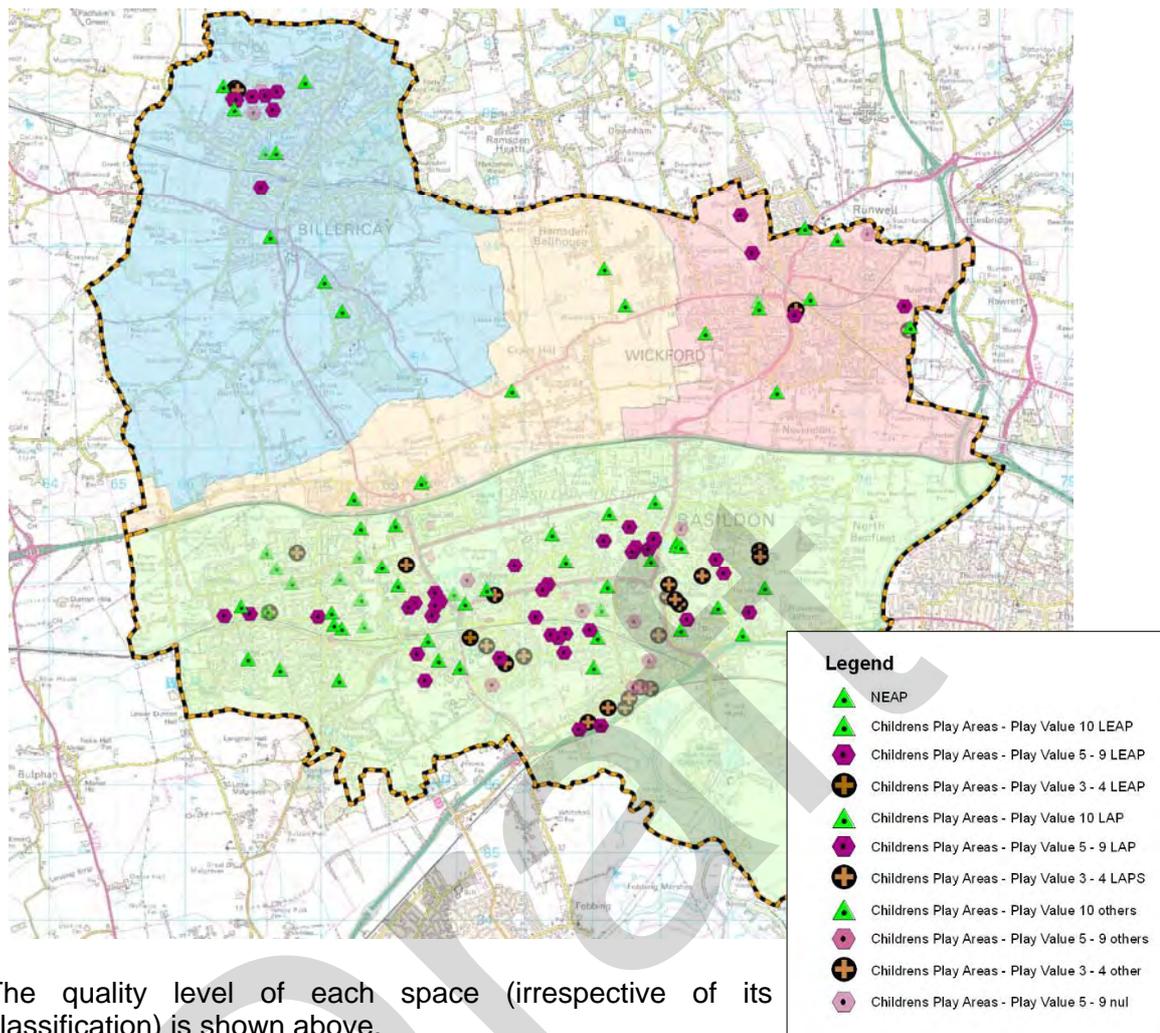
- 13.131. This quality assessment is more accurate than the process undertaken by the Open Space Assessment in regards to the specifics of play spaces and has been used to determine the approach adopted by the Play Strategy, which has substantial links to this assessment. Rather than combining the results of the two assessments, they have been used in different ways.

- The Open Space Audit offers a rating for the entirety of an open space, including the general condition and features of play equipment. This has been used to identify excellent, good, reasonable, poor and very poor open spaces.
- The Play Inspection Audit assessed the play value of every play space the authority maintains and has led to the Play Strategy.

- 13.132. When dealing with play equipment and play spaces, the latter approach is considered to be more reflective of quality for the purposes of this assessment and has better links to other Council strategies which are already adopted and being executed.

- 13.133. The implication for using the existing Play Inspection assessment for the PPG17 is that a method for updating the information will need to be produced and a clear, consistent method of judging the quality of any new play spaces provided. This will be considered further on.

13.134. The distribution of quality throughout the Borough is shown below:



13.135. The quality level of each space (irrespective of its classification) is shown above.

13.136. This shows that there are a number of clusters of play spaces within the Borough but that all areas have a selection of good, reasonable and limited spaces. Of note, Vange appears to have a high number of limited value play spaces, coupled with the highest percentage of children for the ward population (34%<sup>10</sup>). Langdon Hills / Laindon has a relatively high number of good quality sites and the Crouch SA only contains good quality play spaces.

13.137. As previously noted, Wickford has a low number of spaces for its population (including for the population of children). This is countered to some extent by the play value of some of the existing spaces (Wickford Memorial Park has the highest play value of any space with 46pts) and reflects similar findings in the Open Space Audits.

13.138. Billericay has a similar ratio of spaces to population as Wickford but of more concern is the clustering of these spaces around Queens Park and therefore the relatively few spaces, albeit of high quality, in the south of Billericay and Great Burstead. South Green and Little Burstead have no identified play spaces regardless of quality. This might be acceptable due to the high quality natural green spaces in the area (and children told us they want more adventurous places to go) but the lack of suitable play equipment could be a failing in these locations, not meeting the demand of resident children and young people.

<sup>10</sup> From ONS (2001) Census

## Recommendations

- 13.139. The Play Strategy has adopted a 'quality not quantity' approach to open space provision. The appropriateness of this approach is not considered here. However, the quality assessments undertaken by the Play Inspection are robust and based on sound, informed judgement and engagement. The approach to quality in this assessment therefore follows the Play Inspection findings and recommendations.
- 13.140. An assessment of the spatial distribution of quality highlights a number of locations that need improvement to the general quality of play spaces on offer.
- 13.141. There is a need to address all low quality provision, as per the adopted approach towards all Open Space and the recommendations of the Play Strategy. However, this is more acute in a number of particular locations and these should be prioritised. A spatial correlation could be drawn between the number of play spaces in close proximity to each other and the relatively low play value of those spaces, for example, Vange, Queens Park, Craylands and Laindon Link. This could be due to equipment or resources being split between several nearby sites, or the high use of each of these sites due to clustering, or other sociological factors. Irrespective of the reasons, there is a need to prioritise improvement to at least a few play spaces within geographical locations that have a large number of limited quality play spaces. These improvements will also need to reflect considerations for accessibility and quantity,
- 13.142. The removal of all poor quality spaces is ongoing and should be completed in 2011. These had little or no play value and this exercise should be continued in order to produce a more effective Play Space estate.
- 13.143. The quality of new play spaces should reflect the Play Strategy and meet the demands of residents. Currently, there are no planning policy standards for play area provision in the Borough. The Play Strategy set out a principle of quality over quantity and that play spaces should be well-designed, safe, secure, and stimulating recreational spaces but devolves standards of provision to the Local Development Framework.
- 13.144. Engagement results show that young people would like more play equipment suitable for their age group. Recognition of this means providing equipment suitable for a range of children and young people without excluding particular age groups or abilities. While this is not an easy task, a lack of variety of equipment is perhaps linked to the problems some are experiencing with older or younger children using equipment that is not designed for them and the difficulty that some disabled / less mobile users have in finding appropriate facilities within the District. The largest single response to what is stopping local children from playing is recorded as bullying. Other social factors such as fear of older children, confrontation and the perceived safety of the larger open spaces which the play facilities are located in are also factors which are affecting the free play of the Borough's children and young people. By providing large play spaces that attract a variety of people by providing facilities for different age groups to enjoy, some of these problems might be eliminated.
- 13.145. Young people would also like more adventurous things to do, rather than just traditional play equipment, with 'wild spaces' being identified through engagement. They would also appreciate supplementary facilities nearby, such as picnic benches, shelter and seating. Greater consultation could occur with young people before deciding the design and position of equipment like teen shelters. This might create a sense of ownership and respect for the facilities.
- 13.146. General principles of good provision remain, including the need for litter free, clean, well maintained and lit spaces that have a cared for appearance. They should be safe and secure with information nearby informing people about who manages the space or the

equipment and how to contact them. During the Open Space Survey 2009, many young people were explicit that there is a lack of information about the location and facilities available in the borough. A number of methods to better inform people were given. The need for signage regarding the management of the space, who to contact if problems occur and particularly age-related signage for different equipment would be welcomed.

### **LOCAL QUALITY STANDARD**

**A play area should provide a clean, well-maintained and enriched play environment for children and young people which is free from litter and vandalism. The site should contain a variety of formal equipment tailored to meet its play area type (NEAP, LEAP, Local Landscaped Area for Play or LAP) and should be safe and secure, near to housing or (ideally) in a space that is designated as an Urban Park or Garden, or Amenity Green Space typology.**

**Seating and shelter for supervising adults or users should be provided. Signage and information about the space and the appropriate age range for the equipment should be available.**

**All play spaces in the borough should be of good quality and offer a good level of Play Value, as explained in this section and defined in the Task & Finish Group Play Area Report 2008.**

**All 'limited' and 'reasonable' rated play spaces should be improved to a good rating through positive management and investment. Where this is not possible, the collective quality of a range of facilities in close proximity should be prioritised.**

**All new NEAP, LEAP and LAP Play Spaces should be capable of achieving at least a score of 10 on the assessment methodology of the play strategy.**

**The design and ongoing management of the play area should involve the community, including children and young people wherever possible.**

## Accessibility Analysis

- 13.147. Accessibility to play areas is paramount in maximising usage. Accessibility is about the distance needed to travel, and the ease of reaching a particular space. High quality spaces that are difficult to reach are of little value. This assessment shows the location of play spaces throughout the borough, suggests standards based on demand and makes recommendations for improving accessibility.
- 13.148. Standards are locally derived and provide a realistic travel time / distance threshold to reach these spaces, based on local demand. It can assist in highlighting areas that do not have adequate accessibility, as well as ensuring that any new provision is placed in priority locations.
- 13.149. Paragraph 5.32 of PPG17 Part I stated that:

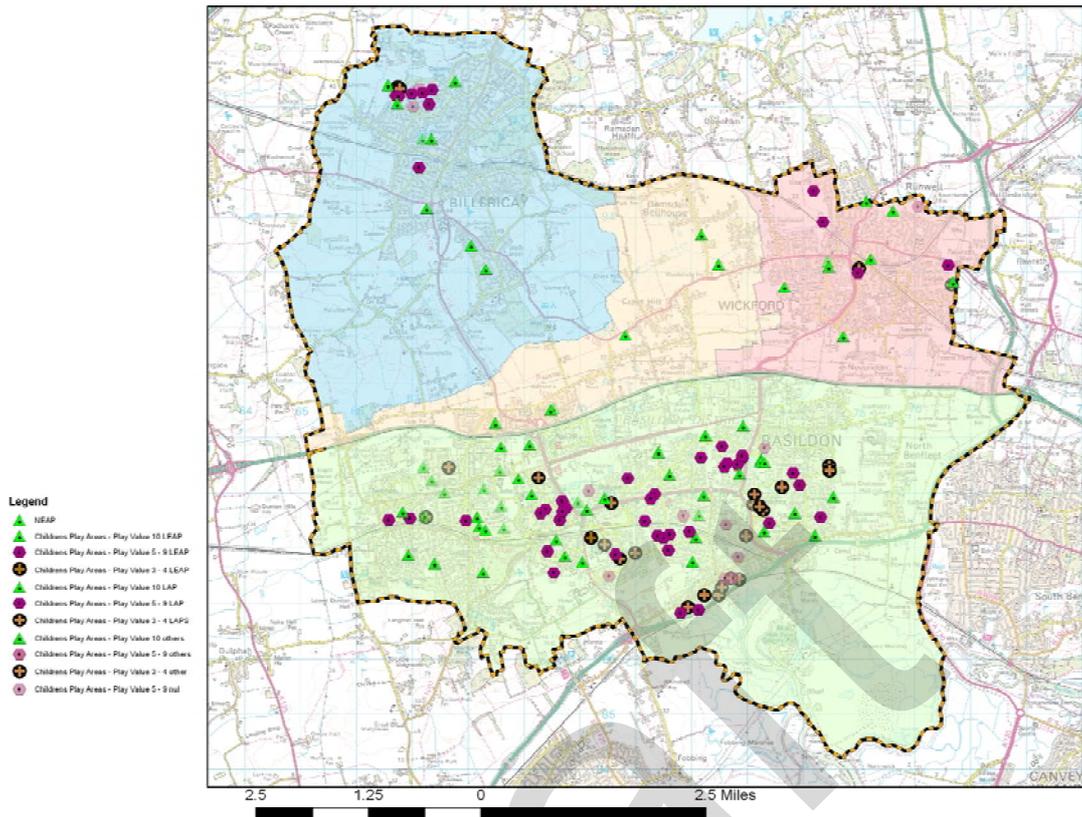
*Access to spaces that provide for children and young people should be available within the distances recommended by the Fields in Trust guidance: Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play, which relates distances to specific grades of play space. The recommendations and standards for these spaces will be set out in PPG17 Open Space Assessment Part II."*

- 13.150. Although Part I stated the use of Fields in Trust (FiT) recommendations, changes to the recommendations in 2010 have presented significant alterations to the way they are calculated. FiT standards are arguably more reflective of dense urban environments in cities rather than the settlement patterns of somewhere like Basildon Borough. The FiT standards will be benchmarked and discussed, but a locally derived standard, as required by PPG17, will be suggested. This is more appropriate than adopting national recommendations and better reflects local distinctiveness and engagement with the public and stakeholders.

## Demand

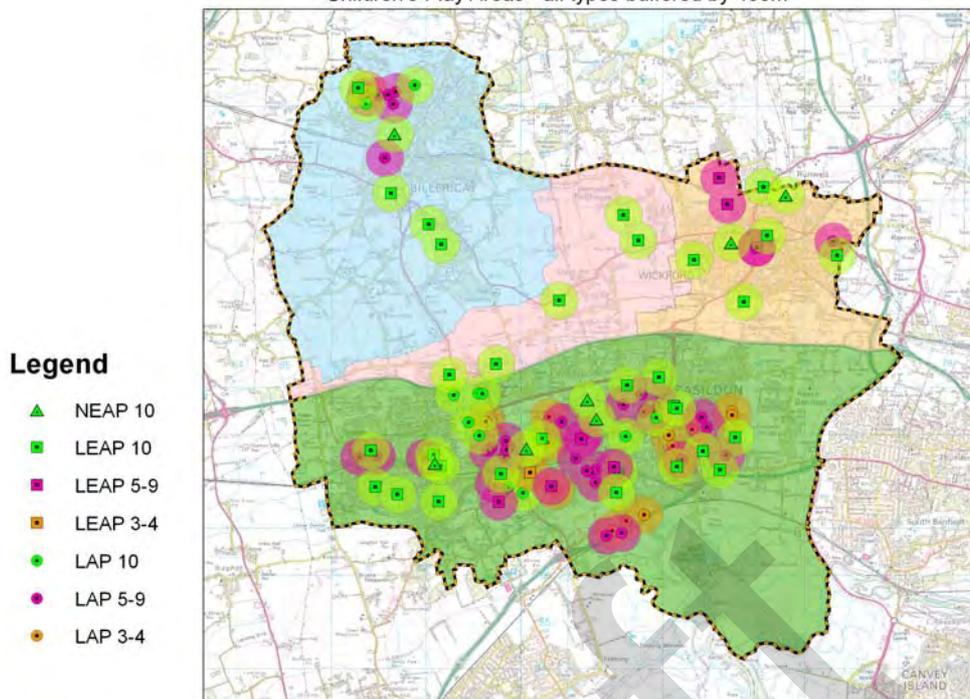
- 13.151. In terms of accessibility, walking is indicated as being the most likely method of getting to play areas, as identified by users and parents/carers. This differs slightly from other open space typologies where driving also played a lesser but significant element of travel. Previous analysis for PPG17 Part I established an ideal maximum walking time of 6 minutes to reach an open space for Basildon Borough, following a wide range of public and other stakeholder engagement (see Chapter 5).
- 13.152. Children and young people are arguably more restricted to certain locations than adults when choosing where to visit. Young people can't drive and large parks can often be too far away to be able to stay for very long. Through the OS Survey 2009 they told us that they tend to choose spaces which are nearby, whether these are considered to have what they desire or not. An exception to this is evident in the summer, when all people are more likely to visit the more active, larger open spaces. This would imply that it is important not to underestimate the need for spaces in all locations, not relying on extensive individual projects or centralised spaces to provide for a very wide area.

## Spatial Distribution



- 13.153. The above map identifies the distribution of spaces in the Borough. With the exception of Wickford, areas with low play space numbers are also those with reasonably large tracts of natural green space. By linking the location of play spaces to the types of open space, it is evident that natural green spaces are not a preferred location for children's play spaces, while recreation grounds, urban parks, amenity land and other landscaped locations are more likely to contain a play space. This explains, to some extent, how the provision of children and young people spaces (particularly equipment) follows from the historic idea that parks within urban areas are most appropriate, while natural green spaces do not provide such features. There are, therefore, more play spaces in locations that have landscaped urban environments compared to those which are more natural in character, such as Langdon Hills and central Billericay. Wickford is, again, identified as quantitatively deficient in open space compared to the rest of the borough.
- 13.154. Accessibility concerns the maximum distances people should expect to travel to reach a particular type of open space. It is therefore related as much to the location of homes and any physical barriers which might prevent access as it is to the number and location of play spaces themselves.
- 13.155. The distribution of play spaces is shown below, plotting the type of play space and its play value. A six minute walking distance around the existing play spaces gives an approximate indication of accessibility. This is considered to be appropriately represented by a 400m straight-line buffer around each play space.

Children's Play Areas - all types buffered by 400m

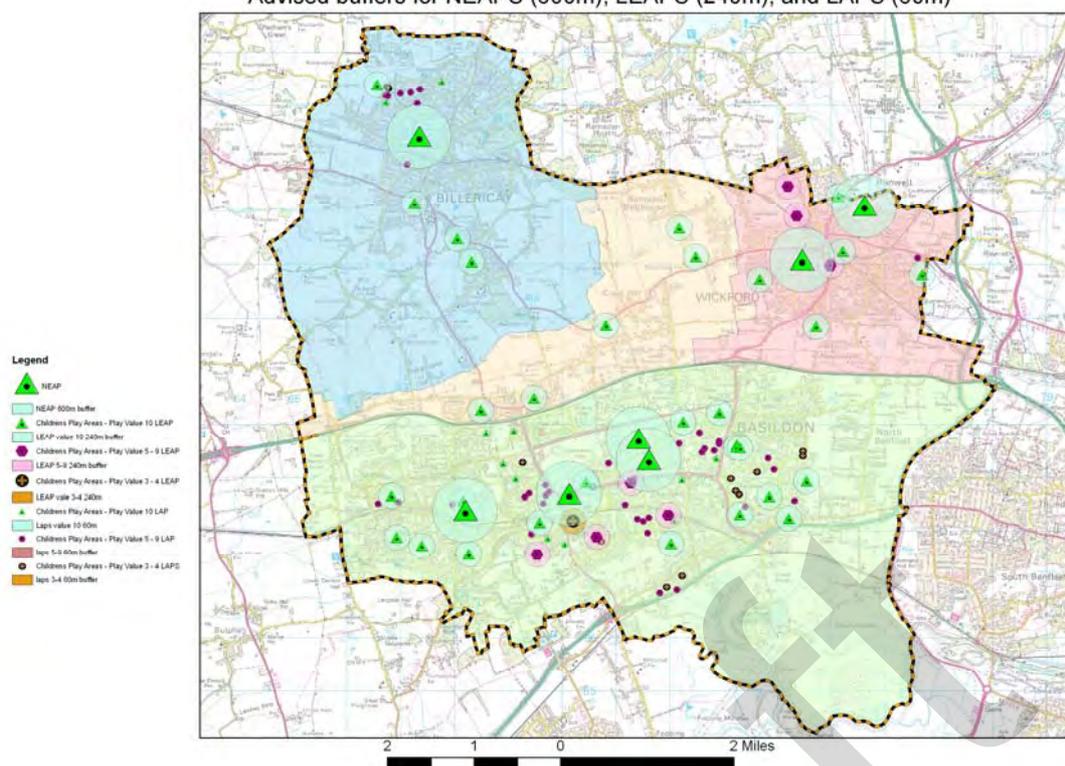


- 13.156. This indicates that coverage is concentrated on the urban environment (as expected) and that the majority of the New Town area is within a suitable distance of play spaces. However, it is clear that parts of the Borough have large distances to play spaces.
- 13.157. FiT recommend setting different standards for different facilities, as they relate to different age groups and users. The table below states the various maximum distances to residential properties that FiT recommend as benchmark standards:

Type of play space	Walking distance (m)	Straight line distance (m)
LAP or door-step spaces	100	60
LEAP and local landscaped area of play	400	240
NEAP	1000	600

- 13.158. At these distances the accessibility across the Borough changes considerably. The plan below shows the effect of the FiT accessibility standards on Basildon's play space estate. It should be noted that Local Landscaped Areas of Play were not an identified type of play area at the time of the inspections and therefore there are none in the assessment.

Advised buffers for NEAPS (600m), LEAPS (240m), and LAPS (60m)



- 13.159. NEAPs have the greatest range for accessibility, relating to 15 minute straight line distance (600m), which is greater than the locally derived maximum for nearby open space. There are a number of NEAPS throughout the Borough, normally positioned in the popular Urban Parks, but not exclusively. Some of these sites could also be considered 'destination playgrounds' for example, Lake Meadows, with a skate park and zip line. Such spaces could be logically considered to have a wider catchment to represent the reality of their usage but there is insufficient empirical evidence to set a particular value and realistically this will depend on alternative sites as much as demand. The number of NEAPs is necessarily limited as they require a reasonable amount of land, regular maintenance and a populous location to be an effective amenity to borough residents.
- 13.160. LEAPs are the most numerous form of equipped play area in the borough. They are particularly found in the urban areas, especially the more recent estates where such amenities are the result of requirements on developers and good planning principles for recreation and leisure. For example, the number of LEAPS in northwest Billerica is comparatively greater than in the more historic parts of Billerica. The Wick Estate is a notable exception. Both Wickford and Billerica generally lack decent access to LEAPs.
- 13.161. LAPS are quite numerous throughout Basildon and Pitsea and make up the bulk of all play areas in the borough. This is not reflected elsewhere, with Wickford containing only one identified LAPS and all but one LAPS in Billerica are clustered in the northwest corner. At a range of 60m, each LAPS is within the FiT catchment of only a few properties.
- 13.162. These distances are very approximate and are not necessarily appropriate everywhere due to differences in character, pattern and density. Although the FiT standard is a recommended benchmark for the whole country, it is arguably more appropriate for dense inner city locations than to more suburban or rural locations. With a few exceptions, Basildon borough has a townscape which sits (deliberately) somewhere between the two. While this does not reduce the demand or need for play spaces close to where children live, there are economies of scale that reduce the ability of the borough to meet inner-city levels of provision.

- 13.163. A gap analysis by the Play Strategy determined that there are a good number of sites available for play, but that most are too small for mass participation, something which the strategy wishes to address by promoting play hubs. Plotting the FiT standards would suggest there is a need for a greater number of play spaces in the Borough to improve coverage. NEAPs could present a better opportunity to increase coverage compared to a number of LEAPs or LAPs, with NEAPs giving the greatest overall coverage, offering considerably better accessibility than the Borough's LAPs.
- 13.164. Local distinctiveness is important. A variety of engagement with the public and stakeholders has been analysed in regards to the distances people are willing to travel to reach an open space they wish to use. This determined a distance of 400m as being appropriate for 80% of people to reach any accessible open space but noted that young people often find spaces they wish to use to be too far away. The FiT standards do not adequately represent the maximum distances derived locally, but this is unsurprising as the standards are equalised over a large number of areas and relate better to denser urban environments.
- 13.165. For Basildon Borough, the FiT *approach* is considered appropriate and offers a way of distinguishing between the types of play space and the likely attraction they each hold. However, the proposed distances are not consistent with expectations of residents, children and young people. The following are recommended for spaces in the Borough:

Type of play space	Straight line distance (m)
LAP	200
LEAP and local landscaped area of play	350
NEAP	800

- 13.166. These maximum distances are based on the particular demands and circumstances in Basildon Borough and the desires expressed by residents to have more equipped areas available nearby. For both LAP and LEAP typologies the standard is below the distance that 80% of all users of open space are willing to travel (400m), reflecting the demands of children and young people that spaces are often too far away to visit for very long.
- 13.167. The NEAP standard is recommended at 800m to reflect the greater desirability (and catchment) of these spaces. This is approximately a 10-12 minute walk.
- 13.168. Currently the authority has not established whether any play areas are more appropriately classified as 'destination playgrounds'. Such playgrounds have an even greater catchment area synonymous with greater play value and attraction. In the future it might be prudent to consider the attraction of major play areas, particularly those in the most popular Urban Parks, to further inform the hierarchy of play provision in the Borough.
- 13.169. Application of these recommended standards to the existing play estate distribution is yet to be carried out. However, the expectation is that they will produce a reasonable accessibility level for the New Town areas, with gaps around the employment areas, The Wick and East Billericay.

## Accessibility Gaps

- 13.170. Properties which are outside of these distances can be plotted in order to identify locations which are relatively deficient and/or those which should be prioritised for improvement. This exercise is useful in setting out the effectiveness of the play space estate and priorities for improvement. This is yet to be carried out but initial indications are that the majority of residential properties are within a suitable distance of a play space. A large number of the deficient properties will be in economic areas such as business parks and industrial districts.
- 13.171. Of particular interest are the expected deficiencies in Felmores, Benfleet, The Wick and Vange. These areas preliminarily show a large number of properties outside of the preferred access distances even though they are urban locations with many families (Wickford Park and Pitsea North West have a greater proportion of children their population than their SA average<sup>11</sup>). While many people within these locations may not consider themselves deprived of open space and play facilities, in comparison to the majority of the borough, spaces may be relatively harder to reach.

### Summary of Accessibility Matters – Initial Indications

- 13.172. **Billericay & Burstead** – whilst the majority of the urban part of the Settlement Area has reasonable accessibility to each type of play space, and of a ‘reasonable’ or ‘good’ rating, there are broad locations that have no accessible provision. These areas are to the north and south of Norsey Woods and around Tye Common and Little Burstead. While open space provision is quite high in these areas, access to equipped play areas is poor.
- 13.173. **Crouch** – There is a low number of play spaces in this Settlement Area, predominantly due to its rural character. However, each of the urbanised locations within Crouch have access to some good quality LEAP provision. There are no NEAPs in this SA.
- 13.174. **Basildon** - with the exception of Pitsea Mount, part of Felmores and North Benfleet, the Settlement Area has ample provision of accessible play areas covering the vast majority of the population. All four NEAPs are within the centre and east of the SA and good quality LEAPs are found across the area. However, this SA also contains the majority of play spaces which offer no, little or limited play value.
- 13.175. **Wickford** – the centre of the Settlement Area has good provision of all types of play areas. Two NEAPs provide access for the majority of the urban area and several LEAPs are spread around the SA. However, the northeast (Shotgate) has low accessibility to LEAPs and parts of the southeast (The Wick) have no access to any identified play spaces at all.

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<sup>11</sup> Derived from ONS 2001 Census data

## Benchmarking

13.176. These recommendations can be benchmarked against the standards adopted by similar authorities in order to determine whether they are appropriate. For Children & Young People's Spaces, the borough compares to a number of nearest neighbour (NN)<sup>12</sup> authorities and nearby authorities as shown below:

Typology	Basildon	Stevenage (NN5)	Chelmsford	Brentwood	Dacorum (NN1)	Thurrock	Castle Point	Northampton (NN2)
Provision for children and young people	LAP – 200m LEAP – 350m NEAP – 800m (3min – 12min walk)	5 min walk	5-10min walk / 400-800m	10min walk / 480m	100m (LAP, urban) 400m (LEAP, urban) 800m (rural)	1min walk (toddler play space) 5min walk (small play space) 15min walk (large play space)	10min walk / 480m	Children's Facilities: 5 Minute Walk (240m) Young People's Facilities: 10 Minute Walk (480m)

13.177. It is difficult to compare these adopted standards as each authority has taken differing approaches. However, besides the differences in calculating travel times, the Borough recommendations are similar in nature to these other authorities. It should be noted that the standard is not necessarily indicative of the actual situation in a particular authority but an indication of its Standards only. All the benchmarked standards stated above are an aspiration for their authority, to be achieved through their LDF and other strategies.

<sup>12</sup> Nearest neighbour authorities are those with substantially similar demographic and historic characteristics to the Borough, regardless of where they are in the Country. Only those with adopted PPG17 Assessments were considered.

## Recommendations

- 13.178. Recommendations will be informed by the final accessibility analysis for Play spaces.
- 13.179. Initial indications are that the following is likely to be appropriate for Basildon Borough:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LOCAL ACCESSIBILITY STANDARD</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>A maximum of 200 meters from a LAP</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>A maximum of 350 metres (straight-line) from a LEAP classified play area</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>and</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>A maximum of 800 metres from a NEAP classified play area</b></p>
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- 13.180. Play Spaces for young children should be close to residential properties as small children will not be allowed or able to walk very far (even when accompanied) to access play spaces, unlike older children. While a Standard distance has been set of 400m, this could be reduced for certain play space types, or for areas with high numbers of young children
- 13.181. The other recommendations for Quality and Quantity should be considered in combination with the Accessibility Standards in order to ensure a good level of provision for Borough residents.

### **PPG17 Step 4 Appraisal – Applying Provision Standards**

(Step 55 of Stage II Review of Planning for Play, 2006)

*This stage has yet to be completed, with a combination of quality, quantity and accessibility to visualise the impact of the recommended provision level across Basildon Borough.*