4. Parks and gardens

Introduction and definition

4.1 This type of open space (as defined by PPG17) includes urban parks and formal gardens that provide opportunities for various informal recreation and community events. For the purposes of this study in Charnwood, country parks have been considered within the natural and semi natural open space category.

4.2 The Active People 1 Survey (Sport England) revealed that walking is the most popular recreational activity for people in England. Over 8 million adults aged 16 and over completed a recreational walk for at least 30 minutes in the weeks leading up to the study. The effective provision of parks therefore represents a key opportunity to increase levels of physical activity across Charnwood.

4.3 Parks provide a sense of place for the local community and help to address social inclusion issues within wider society. According to the Park Life Report (published June 2007), 83% of those questioned feel that parks are a focal point of community life. Parks also provide an important recreational resource.

4.4 In addition to the recreational opportunities provided by parks, these large green spaces provide structural and landscaping benefits to the surrounding local area. They also frequently offer ecological benefits, particularly in more urban areas. The provision of parks to break up urban landscapes is becoming increasingly important, particularly in light of growing fears regarding climate change. Appropriate provision of green space can contribute to a reduction of the impact of climate change.

4.5 Parks often contain a variety of facilities and amenities, including some that fall within different classifications of open space (e.g. children’s play facilities, sport pitches and wildlife areas). For classification purposes, the different open spaces within parks have been separated according to the PPG17 typology under which they most appropriately fall. Large green areas, footpaths, lakes and less dense woodland will provide the park area (total hectares) and the other facilities will be calculated separately under their own classification. This ensures that open space sites are not counted twice within this study.

Context

4.6 The benefits of parks are now recognised on a national scale, as is clear from the range of documents summarised in Appendix H. There are also a number of regional and local documents that refer to the importance of green spaces and the role of green spaces in achieving wider corporate priorities, including those set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy.

4.7 Consultation undertaken as part of the study revealed that parks and gardens are highly valued across the Borough – the most well used facility type - with 43% of respondents to the household survey indicating that they use parks and gardens at least once a week.
SECTION 4 – PARKS AND GARDENS

Quantity

4.8 There are a wide range of parks and gardens provided across the Borough. These vary considerably both in terms of physical size and also in terms of the facilities and amenities provided; comprising large parks containing a wide range of facilities, such as Queen’s Park in Loughborough to much smaller local parks such as Sidings Park and Shortcliffe Park, also in Loughborough. Given its size and range of facilities provided it is clear that the catchment area of Queen’s Park extends well beyond its immediate locality.

4.9 The network of parks and gardens are supplemented by a series of natural and semi-natural green spaces and amenity areas. The interrelationship between these different types of open space is integral to the character of Charnwood. In addition to the identified parks and gardens, 16 sites were perceived to fulfil a secondary function as a park. These sites ranged from natural and semi natural spaces, amenity green spaces, green corridors and outdoor sports facilities.

4.10 In total, 49.34 hectares is dedicated to parks and gardens across Charnwood (primary purpose only). In general, most residents feel that there is an adequate amount of parks and gardens and many highlighted the value of these sites to the local community. This total excludes areas specifically dedicated to formal pitch provision (included within the Playing Pitch Strategy) / sports facilities as these are included within the outdoor sports facilities standard. Average sizes have been used to estimate the area dedicated to specific sports facilities.

4.11 The distribution of parks and gardens and their interrelationship with other types of open space will be returned to later in this section.

4.12 Table 4.1 summarises the distribution of parks and gardens.

Table 4.1 - Parks and Gardens across Charnwood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement Hierarchy</th>
<th>Current provision (hectares)</th>
<th>Number of sites</th>
<th>Smallest site (hectares)</th>
<th>Largest site (hectares)</th>
<th>LDF population (2021)</th>
<th>Provision per 1000 population (2021)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larger settlements</td>
<td>26.44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>101,368</td>
<td>0.2608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service centres</td>
<td>21.69</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>61,779</td>
<td>0.3511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller settlements</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>12,253</td>
<td>0.2097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>50.70</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>175,400</td>
<td>0.2891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.13 The key issues emerging from table 4.1 and consultations undertaken across the Borough relating to the quantity of parks and gardens include:

- Borough wide, nearly two thirds of residents (63%) feel that the quantity of parks and gardens is sufficient (more than enough/about right) to meet demand suggesting that overall there are positive perceptions relating to the quantity of provision.
by 2021, provision per 1,000 population will be highest within the service centres and lowest within the smaller settlements, ranging from 0.35 ha per 1000 to 0.20 per 1000. This suggests however that current provision is relatively consistent. The views of residents are also generally consistent across the Borough, although a slightly higher proportion of residents within the smaller settlements are satisfied, despite having a slightly lower share – see below:

- **in the larger settlements** - 62% of respondents indicate that provision is about right or more than sufficient, while 15% suggest that there is ‘not enough’ parks and gardens. Queen’s Park is identified as particularly important site in Loughborough, with a number of residents indicating that this site is frequently visited

- **in the service centres** - 64% of respondents indicate that provision is about right or more than sufficient, while 17% suggest that there is ‘not enough’ parks and gardens

- **in Smaller Settlements** - 74% of respondents indicate that provision is about right or more than sufficient, while 13% suggest that there is ‘not enough’ parks and gardens. Almost all residents in the smaller settlements who indicated that the quantity of parks was insufficient suggested that the reason for their view was the lack of parks within close proximity to their home.

4.14 General comments from residents emphasise the importance of parks in the Borough. Comments made reinforced the high level of satisfaction with the provision of parks and gardens, with a number of residents stating that there are plenty of parks and gardens in the Borough and there is quite a lot of choice. Additionally, some residents in the smaller settlements suggest that linkages between small villages and larger open spaces are good. For those residents suggesting that the quantity of parks is insufficient, the main reasons relate to a lack of provision in their local area (in particular comments re. Syston and East Goscote) and the perception that parks and green spaces are frequently lost to development.

4.15 In addition, discussion at the stakeholders’ workshop suggested that the quantity of natural space in the Borough is viewed as one of the key positive features of the Borough. Stakeholders commended the variety of formal and informal open space. As such, attendees at the stakeholders workshop indicated that they would prioritise quality and security improvements over the creation of new parks.

4.16 In addition, some parks were perceived to be overused in certain areas. In particular Queen’s Park in Loughborough was seen to be overcapacity at times. Stakeholders also referenced the haphazard growth patterns of villages and the subsequent need to ensure that all parks and other informal open spaces were equitably distributed.

4.17 It is also clear from Table 4.1 that the size of sites across the Borough varies widely, with parks ranging from 0.089 ha to over 5ha in size. The average size of a park is 1.6 hectares. The parks and gardens are supplemented with a range of smaller amenity areas and natural sites which also fulfil the role of parks in many of the settlements.
Setting provision standards

Parks and gardens

4.18 The recommended local quantity standard for parks and gardens has been derived from the assessment of local needs and analysis of the audit of provision and is summarised overleaf. Full justifications for the standard are provided within Appendix E and F.

4.19 Parks are a key priority for the Council and the role that these sites can play in the achievement of wider aims and objectives is recognised and as such it is important that existing provision is protected. Given that local consultation highlighted a general satisfaction with the quantity of current provision for parks and gardens, the local standard has been set at the Borough wide level of existing provision. This ensures that the standard is deliverable and achievable and promotes consistency across the Borough. It should be considered a minimum standard.

4.20 Setting the standard at the existing level of provision places an emphasis on maintaining and improving the quality of provision in the short term. However, new provision will be required in the event of population growth and new provision may also be required in settlements where provision falls significantly below the minimum standards, which will be highlighted through the application of the standards.

4.21 Application of the local standard alongside minimum size criteria will provide an understanding of the minimum size settlement in which parks should be provided. Outside of these settlements, access routes will take on greater importance. As well as evaluating the provision of parks, consideration will be given to the context of provision in relation to amenity spaces and natural areas.
Quantity Standard – Local parks (see Appendices E and F – standards and justification, worksheet and calculator)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing level of provision (hectares per 1000)</th>
<th>Recommended standard (hectares per 1000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larger settlements – 0.29</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service centres – 0.39</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller settlements – 0.23</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Justification**

Overall, the general perception gathered from consultation is that quantity of local parks is sufficient (63% of residents in the household survey). This was reflected in all sizes of settlement although there are some areas where residents feel that they are outside of the appropriate catchment of a park.

The overall satisfaction was apparent throughout consultations although the importance of parks and open spaces to residents was reinforced. While setting the standard at the existing level of provision (borough-wide) places an emphasis on maintaining and improving the quality of provision in the short term, new provision will be required in the event of population growth. New provision may also be required in settlements where provision falls significantly below the minimum standards.

The standard has been set at the same level for each of the three settlement hierarchies and should be treated as a minimum standard.

Application of the standard on a settlement by settlement basis will enable identification of areas where provision falls below the minimum standard and where provision is sufficient to meet minimum requirements. It will encourage provision in the event of population growth. Application of the accessibility standard should be used alongside the quantity standard to determine areas where new provision is required. The need for parks in each settlement should be determined by the use of minimum size criteria as well as accessibility standards.

**Quality**

**Current position**

4.22 The quality of exiting parks and gardens was assessed through site visits undertaken by Charnwood Borough Council in 2009.

4.23 The Green Flag Award is a national standard for parks and green space. At present, Charnwood Borough Council manages two Green Flag parks (Queen’s Park and Outwoods, both in Loughborough). In addition, it should also be noted that Bradgate Park (Newtown Linford), Garendon Park (near Loughborough) and Prestwold Park (Prestwold) are all included on English Heritage’s national register of historic parks and gardens (Whatton House, within North West Leicestershire is also included on the list – for which part of the garden falls within Charnwood Borough boundaries).

4.24 The quality of parks in the Borough is varied, with the average quality score of a site being 62%. Quality scores range from 20% - 98%. The lowest quality site in the Borough is Pear Tree Lane Park and the highest quality site is Queen’s Park (both in Loughborough). At the time of inspection, Pear Tree Lane Park was not adopted by the Council and still fell under the ownership of a developer. As a consequence, it had not been formally laid out as a park. Quality scores are contained in Appendix D. Areas for improvement for sites identified as scoring poorly are contained in Appendix J.
4.25 The quality of local parks is summarised in Table 4.2 below. This table summarises the total percentage achieved at each site (in accordance with the methodology set out in Section 2). The overall quality rating in line with the local standard is discussed later in this section.

Table 4.2 – Quality of local parks in Charnwood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement hierarchy</th>
<th>Range of quality scores (%)</th>
<th>Average Quality Score (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larger settlements</td>
<td>20% - 97%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service centres</td>
<td>53% - 86%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller settlements</td>
<td>50% - 56%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>20%- 97%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.26 The key issues arising from consultation with regards to the quality of parks and gardens are as follows:

- 56% of respondents to the household survey consider the quality of parks to be good. 36% of residents regard the quality of this type of open space to be average, with only a very small percentage of respondents deeming parks and gardens to be poor. This suggests that overall, there are positive perceptions relating to the quality of parks.

- The site assessment scores however were more varied, with the average quality score of a site being 67%. Overall, scores ranged from 20% to 97%, demonstrating the variations in quality that are evident.

- The majority response in each of the three sizes of settlement is good, with the greatest level of satisfaction with quality of parks being found in the smaller settlements. Despite this, scores achieved in this area are lower:
  - within the larger settlements parks are considered to be the highest quality type of open space, with 51% of residents indicating that the quality of parks is good and 40% average. This is reflective of the quality of existing sites. Queen’s Park, Loughborough is perceived to be an example of good practice.
  - in the service centres 60% indicated that the quality of parks is good, while 32% suggested that it is average.
  - 73% of residents of smaller settlements think that the quality of parks is good and 24% view it as average. Despite this, the quality scores of parks in the smaller settlements are relatively low.

- Household survey respondents indicated that they were most likely to have experienced the following problems in parks - vandalism and graffiti (20%), dog fouling (19%), misuse of site (17%) and litter (15%)
the majority of respondents to the household survey indicate that they feel safe
when using parks. Some of the respondents from the young people survey
however said that they sometime feel unsafe in parks – Queen’s Park was
mentioned most frequently in relation to this issue

other surveys conducted for the study with children/young people and officers
generally reflect the site visit findings, that whilst there are good quality parks
in the Borough that are well valued, there are some sites requiring
improvement

feedback provided at discussion group sessions with key stakeholders, Parish
Council representatives and Council staff also suggested that the quality of
to parks is generally good. Queen’s Park, (and some of the larger natural and
semi-natural sites, such as Bradgate Park (Newtown Linford) and Watermead
Country Park, (Thurmaston) in particular were deemed to be very good sites.
Although there were some concerns that the current provision will be
threatened by funding shortfalls in the future and that resources are being
concentrated on Green Flag parks to the detriment of other spaces; in
particular, Southfields Park was identified as being unwelcoming to visitors and
having limited facilities

previous research undertaken by the Council in 2006/07 at Queen’s Park,
Loughborough highlighted that users perceive the paths, benches, bins
trees/shrubs/flowerbeds to be good/excellent, aspects such as the gates,
entrance, signage and play area were deemed good/average whilst the toilets
were considered to be poor quality. Issues identified as part of this study have
now been addressed and Queen’s Park is a high quality facility

site visits undertaken as part of this study indicate that over half of all parks in
the Borough contain play equipment. 75% also contain bins and seats and
almost half provide dog bins. Less than 30% have information boards. Access
by car is relatively easy, with nine sites having parking on site or nearby

site visits reveal that the quality of entrances, boundaries, paths and security is
high. Parking, lighting and litter bins are key areas for improvement on many
sites. This will be returned to later in this section.

Setting quality standards

The recommended local quality standard for parks and gardens is summarised
overleaf. Full justifications and consultation relating to the quality of provision for the
local standard is provided within Appendix E.

The quality standard summarises the features that residents consider to be an
important determinant of the quality of provision. These key criteria will then be
incorporated with the quality scores during the application of local standards.
Quality standard – Parks and gardens (see Appendix E)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean/litter free</td>
<td>Toilets (within the park or in close proximity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate planting</td>
<td>Safety features eg CCTV, lighting or rangers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well kept grass</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footpaths and cycleways</td>
<td>Variety of facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating</td>
<td>Appropriate Lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter and dog bins</td>
<td>Clearly defined and inviting main entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear site boundaries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accessibility

4.29 The accessibility of sites is paramount in maximising usage as well as providing an opportunity for people to use the site. The recommended local standard is set in the form of a distance threshold and is derived directly from the findings of the local consultations.

4.30 In addition to considering the distance that is travelled, consideration should also be given to other accessibility issues.

4.31 Consultation and analysis has shown that the key issues with regards to accessibility are:

- results of the household survey show that of those residents that currently use parks more frequently than any other type of open space, 66% walk and 23% drive to access this type of open space. 71% of users travel for fifteen minutes or less and only four residents travel more than thirty minutes

- consistent with the patterns portrayed by current users, overall, 68% of respondents to the household survey expect to walk to access a park and 22% would expect to drive

- expectations do however differ between residents in different size settlements. While 75% of residents in larger settlements and 62% of residents in service centres would expect to walk, only 35% of residents in smaller settlements would expect a park to be accessible on foot from their home.
4.32 A lack of awareness regarding the location of parks is evident in some responses to the household survey. Location was also clearly a key determinant of usage of specific sites. 19% of residents indicated that the location of facilities is one of the main barriers to use of open spaces. This was the highest of all responses.

4.33 As well as location, some residents highlighted the importance of providing smooth footpaths and car parking if sites are to be accessible to older residents and to residents with disabilities.

4.34 The importance of providing appropriate parking for those who do wish to drive was discussed at the stakeholder workshop. In addition, access to some sites was considered to be particularly poor for residents not wishing to travel by car. Additional cycle storage was recommended. Perceived security issues were also highlighted as a barrier to access by residents.

4.35 Parish Council representatives reinforced the findings of the stakeholder workshop, indicating that public transport links are not adequate. It suggested that links need to be more flexible and included within facility plans. While it was suggested that cycle ways were good where they exist, there were perceived to be insufficient and a need to raise awareness of opportunities that do exist. Green linkages between villages (footpaths and cycleways) were considered to be of particular importance.

4.36 Previous research undertaken by the Council in 2006/07 identified that many users (40%) of Queen’s Park (Loughborough) are willing to travel for more than 20 minutes with the mode of transport split between car and on-foot. This reinforces the wider catchment that this park has in comparison to other more local facilities.

**Setting accessibility standards**

4.37 The recommended local accessibility standards for parks and gardens are summarised overleaf. Full justification for the local standard is provided within Appendix E. The standards reflect the difference in aspiration between residents in the different settlement hierarchies.
Accessibility Standard – Parks and gardens (see Appendix E)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended standard – Parks and gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 minute walk time 720m (larger settlements and service centres) and 10 minute drive time (smaller settlements).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Justification**

In the larger settlements and service centres consultation demonstrated a clear preference for local access to formal parks with 68% of residents Borough wide (75% in larger settlements and 62% in service centres) expecting to walk to facilities. This is also reflective of the nature of the local authority, which is relatively flat.

The recommended standard of 15 minutes reflects local aspirations in these areas. This is also in line with discussions in the workshops held as part of the assessment.

Application of the standard will enable the identification of areas where parks should be provided but are not. The distribution of parks will be considered in the context of the location of amenity spaces and country parks. Shortfalls in provision may be delivered by upgrading amenity spaces and new space may be required in some areas.

In contrast to residents in the urban areas, consultation exhibits a greater willingness by residents in the smaller settlements to drive to parks. A local standard of 10 minutes drivetime has therefore been set. The application of this standard will ensure that residents in the rural settlement are in reasonable distance of a formal park but will not require the provision of parks within all small rural settlements. The standard set links with the modal response. Improvements to access routes will be particularly important in these areas.

Applying provision standards

**Quantity**

4.38 The application of the recommended quantity, quality and accessibility standards is essential in understanding the existing distribution of parks and identifying areas where provision is insufficient to meet local need.

4.39 The application of the local quantity standard for each settlement hierarchy is set out in Table 4.3 overleaf.
Table 4.3 – Application of quantity standard – Parks and gardens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement hierarchy</th>
<th>Current shortfall/surplus against local standard in (ha per 1000 population)</th>
<th>Future shortfall/surplus against local standard in (ha per 1000 population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larger Settlements</td>
<td>-2.69 hectares</td>
<td>-6.00 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Centres</td>
<td>3.94 hectares</td>
<td>1.92 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Settlements</td>
<td>-0.95 hectares</td>
<td>-1.35 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>0.30 hectares</td>
<td>-5.43 hectares</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Green = above the standard, Red = below the standard

4.40 Table 4.3 indicates the following:

- provision is currently just sufficient to meet the minimum standard. Population growth will however generate a shortfall in the quantity of parks
- provision in the service centres is sufficient in quantitative terms to meet demand
- the largest quantitative shortfalls is found in the larger settlements.

Accessibility

4.41 The application of the local accessibility standards for parks and gardens is illustrated in Maps 4.1 and 4.2 overleaf. The interrelationship between parks and gardens and amenity green space is considered in Map 4.3.

4.42 Maps 4.1 and 4.2 indicate the following:

- there is an even distribution of parks and gardens in the larger settlements and service centres
- despite an even distribution of parks and gardens, key areas of deficiency are evident to the north and south of Loughborough, south Shepshed, Queniborough, East Goscote and Rearsby. There are also deficiencies in Mountsorrel and Quorn
- all residents in the smaller settlements have access to a park or garden within the recommended 10 minute drive time. More localised provision may be required in some of the larger villages, for example in Woodhouse and Wymeswold
- nearly all residents in the larger settlements and service centres have access to a park or amenity green space within a 10 minute walk time.
4.43 Amenity green space provides more localised and informal play opportunities for residents and these sites are particularly valuable for children and young people. The presence of amenity green space in areas deficient of parks provides an opportunity to formalise these spaces to better meet the needs of local residents.

4.44 Where parks are provided within a 10 minute catchment (the recommended distance threshold for amenity green space as set in Section 6) they may negate the need for further provision of amenity green space (as a higher order facility they provide a greater range of facilities) as they fulfil similar roles. This is discussed in Section 6.

Quality

4.45 The overall quality rating for each site is based on the overall quality score achieved (outlined in Table 4.2) and the essential and desirable criteria listed in the quality standard. This is summarised in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 – Measuring the quality standard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Quality Rating</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>All essential criteria 3 or above. All desirable criteria 3 or above.</td>
<td>80% or above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>All essential criteria 3 or above.</td>
<td>70 – 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>All essential criteria 3 or above.</td>
<td>60 – 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>50 – 59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Below 50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.46 Table 4.5 overleaf therefore summarises the application of the quality standard based on the quality criteria set out in Table 4.4.
Table 4.5 – Quality of Parks in Charnwood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement hierarchy</th>
<th>% of sites excellent</th>
<th>% of sites very good</th>
<th>% of sites good</th>
<th>% of sites average</th>
<th>% of sites poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larger settlements</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service centres</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller settlements</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nb. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding

4.47 It can be seen that the quality of parks is higher than many other types of open space, with few sites achieving a rating of poor in relation to the overall quality standard. Despite this, 67% of sites were considered to be average. 26% of sites were rated as very good or excellent. The proportion of sites in the service centres achieving this rating was particularly high and the quality of parks when measured against the local standard is highest in these areas.

4.48 The quality of parks in the Borough is summarised in Map 4.4. Although there are fewer poor quality parks than other typologies, there remain sites in need of improvement. Sites in the smaller settlements are generally of lower quality, primarily because they have offer fewer facilities.
Map 4.1 – Accessibility of parks and gardens in the larger settlements and service centres
SECTION 4 – PARKS AND GARDENS

Map 4.2 – Accessibility of parks and gardens in the smaller settlements

Provision of Parks and Gardens in Charnwood
Map 4.3 – Accessibility of parks and gardens and amenity green space in Charnwood
Map 4.4 – Quality of parks and gardens in Charnwood
Priorities for future delivery

Borough Wide Issues

4.49 This section considers the Borough wide issues that need to be addressed. Consideration is then given to issues within specific settlements.

Protection and disposal of parks

4.50 The quantity standard has been set at the existing level of provision and indicates that while existing provision is only marginally below recommended levels, population growth will generate a significant shortfall unless new parks are provided.

4.51 Parks and gardens are the most frequently used type of open space in the Borough (43% use them daily or weekly) and stakeholders also reinforced the value of these sites in terms of their role in achieving wider aims and objectives. At the stakeholder workshop the need for more space for informal space to encourage residents to participate in physical activity was highlighted.

4.52 In recognition of the role of parks in the Borough, policy should protect all parks and gardens from development through the LDF. There are no recommendations for disposal.

| PG1 | Ensure that policy protects parks from development and that contributions towards new parks / improvement of existing sites are required as part of new development. Contributions / new provision should be based on the suggested local standard of 0.32 hectares per 1000 population. |

Education and signage

4.53 The opportunity to educate residents on the natural environment was a key theme of stakeholder workshops, with many highlighting examples of good practice at larger sites in the Borough, including information boards and visitor centres. There are 9 parks with information boards in the Borough.

4.54 Furthermore, signage to many sites was perceived to be limited. A lack of awareness of the location of existing parks was a key issue arising from the household survey relating to both parks and natural spaces.

| PG 2 | Introduce signage (to raise awareness of sites) as well as information boards at large sites in the Borough. Consider also a programme of marketing to maximise awareness of opportunities available to residents. |

Improving access to existing spaces

4.55 Parks are primarily located in the larger settlements and service centres. Consultation highlighted that the variety of facilities provided is the main positive feature of parks in the Borough and it is this that drives visitors to these sites.
4.56 While residents in the larger settlements can expect parks to be in close proximity to their home, the size of sites means that many residents, particularly those in the rural villages, will need to travel further. This is expressed in the suggested accessibility standard.

4.57 In order to ensure that this is possible, sustainable access routes (footpaths and cycle routes) should be provided as well as public transport to the main towns. Attendees at the Parish Council workshop suggested that travelling east to west in the Borough is particularly challenging without the use of a car. The need to improve green corridors (both in terms of awareness and to fill in gaps in connectivity) is discussed in Section 13.

4.58 If residents are to be encouraged to travel by bike, or by public transport, parks should contain appropriate infrastructure to facilitate this. This should include cycle racks and areas for storage.

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**PG 3**

Create new green corridors and improve existing to link residents in the smaller settlements with parks, focusing particularly on travel from East to West. Ensure that parks provide appropriate infrastructure to encourage cycling and use of public transport, such as cycle racks and areas for storage.

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**Maximising Biodiversity**

4.59 Although parks are primarily recreational sites, they also play an important role in conservation and biodiversity.

4.60 Promotion of recreational opportunities on site should be balanced with the wider functions of the site. The Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan identifies a series of key habitats and indicates that parks play an important role in proving these habitats. In particular, parks contain mature trees (21 sites) hedgerows (19 sites) and grassland (15 sites). Eight sites also contain running water.

4.61 In areas devoid of natural and semi natural open space, inclusion of natural areas within parks may be a key means of providing access to this type of open space. Areas identified as lacking in natural open space include Shepshed, Loughborough, Thurmaston, Syston and Mountsorrel. This is discussed further in Section 5.

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**PG 4**

Ensure that all improvements to parks take into account the requirement to balance biodiversity and recreation.

Consider the provision of natural areas within parks in the Borough, particularly in areas deficient in provision (see Section 5).

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4.62 The remainder of this section considers the key issues for the delivery of parks and gardens within Charnwood across each of the three settlement hierarchies.
Larger settlements

4.63 Application of the quantity standard indicates that the quantity of parks in the larger settlements falls below the recommended minimum standard. Furthermore, projected population growth is likely to generate an increase in the existing shortfall, resulting in a need for an additional 6 hectares of parks in total in the larger settlements by 2026.

4.64 Application of the quantity standard to individual settlements indicates that while provision in Loughborough and Birstall is above the recommended level, the quantity of parks in Thurmaston and Shepshed falls below the recommended minimum standard. Areas in need of new parks are those where there are quantitative deficiencies and / or accessibility deficiencies. Requirements by settlement are discussed later in this section but the key priorities (and hence where the additional parks should be located) are Shepshed and Loughborough.

4.65 Accessibility mapping indicates that the majority of residents in the larger settlements have access to a park or garden within a 15 minute walk time. Almost all residents have access to either a park or amenity space. As higher order facilities, parks negate the need for additional amenity space, however an amenity space does not substitute for a park (although it means that the deficiency is of lower priority). Almost all residents in Birstall and Thurmaston are within the appropriate catchment of a park. Furthermore, residents in Thurmaston are located in close proximity to Watermead Country Park, which functions as a park (although is classified as natural open space for the purposes of this assessment). Despite adequate provision in quantitative terms, there are still parts of Loughborough where residents are out of the catchment for a park.

4.66 Maps 4.5 – 4.6 illustrate the locations of residents outside of the catchment area for parks in Loughborough and Shepshed and highlight the role that amenity spaces play in the provision of informal open space in these areas.
Map 4.5 – Lack of access to parks in Loughborough
Map 4.6 – Lack of access to parks in Shepshed
4.67 As illustrated in Map 4.5, in the south of Loughborough there is an even distribution of amenity space although there are no parks. This suggests that the amenity space is particularly valuable in this area. Upgrading one amenity space to create a park (ie by providing a wider range of facilities) would offset the deficiencies in parks in this area. In the north, there is an overall lack of open space, this area is predominantly industrial and no new provision is therefore required.

Upgrade an amenity space in the south of Loughborough to enable it to function as a park.

4.68 Like in south Loughborough, in Shepshed, there is a lack of parks in the south of the town although there is an abundance of amenity space. Upgrading one or more of these spaces would offset deficiencies in park provision.

Upgrade an amenity space in the south of Shepshed to enable it to function as a park.

4.69 Outside of these areas, and in line with the findings of the household survey and workshops, qualitative improvements should be prioritised.

4.70 The quality of parks and gardens in the larger settlements is below that of the service centres. Although 21% of sites are very good or excellent, 14% are poor and the remainder are average.

4.71 In light of the value placed on parks, improvements to these sites will be particularly important. Discussions at both stakeholder workshops and Parish Council workshops suggested that investment should be targeted at smaller sites as well as maintaining the larger Green Flag accredited facilities.

Key areas of improvement for parks were as follows:

- Shepshed Glenmore Park – lighting and improvements to the quality of paths and play equipment. The site entrance was also perceived to be particularly poor
- Birstall Playing Fields – overall a good quality site, although the main areas for improvement were paths, security and overall cleanliness
- Key areas for improvement at sites in Loughborough include access to toilets and lighting. The basic infrastructure at these sites is more substantial than in other areas of the Borough. Southfields Park was identified throughout consultation as being particularly poor. Site visits reveal that Pear Tree Lane Park is the poorest site in the larger settlements – at the time of site visits, this site had not been adopted and was not laid out as a park. Queen’s Park achieved an excellent rating and is the highest quality site in the Borough
- Thurcaston (Silverdale Play Area and Hadrian Road Recreation Ground) – there is a need to improve the sense of security and safety, as well as the entrance and to provide more bins and parking.

Focus on maintaining and improving the quality of parks in the larger settlements in line with the quality vision.

4.73 Population growth in the larger settlements may result in a requirement for additional parks longer term.
Service centres

4.74 Quantitative analysis indicates that the current provision is above the minimum standard of provision.

4.75 Application of the accessibility standard illustrates this, with parks and gardens well distributed within the service centres, meaning that the majority of residents have access to a site within a 15 minute walk time.

4.76 The application of the standard at a settlement level indicates that the towns falling below the recommended standard are Mountsorrel, Rearsby, Queniborough, Rothley Barrow Upon Soar and East Goscote. With the exception of Queniborough, all of the other identified towns have amenity green space which exceeds the overall minimum standard. In Queniborough there is a sports facility and play area.

4.77 Maps 4.7 – 4.11 illustrate the lack of parks in the service centres of Mountsorrel, Quorn, Rearsby, Queniborough, Rothley and East Goscote and highlight the role that amenity space plays in meeting the needs of residents.

4.78 Map 4.12 illustrates provision in Quorn, where there are residents to the south west of the settlement outside of the catchment for either amenity space or a park.
Map 4.7 – Lack of access to parks and the role of amenity green space in North West and South East Mountsorrel
Map 4.8 – Lack of access to parks and the role of amenity green space in Rearsby
Map 4.9 – Lack of access to parks and the role of amenity green space in Queniborough
Map 4.10 – Lack of access to parks and the role of amenity green space in Rothley
Map 4.11 – Lack of access to parks and the role of amenity green space in East Goscote
Map 4.12 – Lack of access to parks and role of amenity green space in Quorn
4.79 When considering the provision of amenity green space and parks and gardens, nearly all residents have access to at least one of these types of open space within the recommended distance threshold. As higher order facilities, parks negate the need for additional amenity space. However an amenity space does not substitute for a park (although it means that the deficiency is of lower priority).

4.80 Maps 4.7 – 4.11 therefore illustrate the role of amenity space. In all areas except Queniborough, amenity spaces are functioning as parks. Amenity green spaces are particularly important to the south of Mountsorrel. This therefore reinforces the importance of ensuring that the quality of amenity spaces in these areas is high, and provides the opportunity to upgrade facilities to enable them to fulfil the role of a park. Analysis of the quality of the existing sites demonstrates that sites in East Goscote are particularly good.

| PG 8 |
| Upgrade an amenity space in Mountsorrel, Rearsby, Rothley, South West Quorn and East Goscote to enable it to fulfil the function of a park. |
| In Queniborough, where there is no amenity space, there is sports pitch and play area which have a similar function. |

4.81 The quality of parks and gardens is higher in the service centres, with 35% of sites considered to be very good or excellent. The remainder are rated as average. No site achieves a poor rating.

4.82 Outside of towns where priorities have been identified for upgrading amenity space, the ongoing improvement and maintenance of parks should be prioritised in line with the quality vision. Parish Councils indicated that security and maintenance was a particular priority. Site visits suggested that signage, planting areas and the quality of infrastructure should also be addressed. The key issues and areas for improvement at each site are provided in Appendix J.

| PG9 |
| Improve the quality of facilities in line with the quality vision, focusing particularly on the sites not achieving the quality vision. |

**Smaller settlements**

4.83 Unsurprisingly, given the more rural nature of the Smaller Settlements, only four parks (primary and secondary purpose) are located in these villages. Despite the limited local provision of parks and gardens, consultation demonstrated overall satisfaction with the current provision of parks and gardens in the area, which suggests that residents are prepared to travel to access a park or garden. This was reinforced in the Parish Council workshop and is reflected in the accessibility standard, which sets a 10 minute drivetime for residents in the smaller settlements.

4.84 All residents have access to parks within the recommended 10 minute drivetime.
4.85 Minimum size criteria, alongside the application of the quantity standard can be used to determine which of the smaller settlements should contain a park.

4.86 Cabe Space / GLA Guidance (Open Strategies, Best Practice Guidance 2009) indicates that the minimum size for a small pocket park is 0.4 hectares. The quantity standard for Charnwood BC is 0.32 hectares per 1000. Based on this standard, 1250 residents creates demand of over 0.4 hectares and it can therefore be concluded that settlements of / exceeding this size should contain a park. This provides an indication only and guides decision making relating to new development.

4.87 The above suggests that only Woodhouse and possibly Wymeswold (shortfall marginally below 0.4 ha) would be expected to contain parks. Although neither have parks, both contain amenity green spaces which fulfil similar functions. Maintaining and improving the quality of amenity spaces in these villages should be prioritised in light of the size of the settlements.

**PG10**

Prioritise upgrades to amenity green spaces in Woodhouse and Wymeswold to ensure that they are able to function as parks. Improvements should draw upon the quality standard for parks as guidance.

4.88 The quality of parks and gardens in the Smaller Settlements is below that in other settlement hierarchies, with all sites achieving an average rating. The lower scores were achieved primarily as a result of the limited infrastructure these sites offer. Despite this, satisfaction with the quality of parks in these areas was high. The key issues and areas for improvement of sites not achieving the quality score is provided in Appendix J.

**PG11**

Provide advice and guidance to Parish Councils in the ongoing maintenance and improvement of existing parks.

4.89 Given that the provision of parks is not required in smaller settlements, access to existing sites takes on greater importance. The implementation of recommendation PG 3 is therefore of particular significance in these areas.

**Summary**

4.90 Parks are particularly valuable to local residents and are the most frequently used open space by residents of Charnwood.

4.91 The variety of facilities available at this type of open space is seen as particularly important and perceived to provide a wide range of recreational opportunities for residents. The role of parks and gardens in meeting targets to increase level of physical activity and improve health should also not be underestimated. The wider benefits of parks are wide reaching and these sites are as valuable for the habitats they offer as the recreational opportunities that they provide.

4.92 The quality of parks and gardens is of particular importance to local residents. Many highlighted that the functionality of sites, along with the maintenance and perception of safety is of particular importance to them. Overall, the quality of parks is perceived to be higher than the quality of many other types of open space and this is supported through the site visits. Key issues identified included the need to improve signage, planted areas and equipment.
4.93 There is an even distribution of parks across the Borough with all residents of the smaller settlements within the suggested drive time of a site. The need for these residents to travel accentuates the importance of providing appropriate linkages to encourage use of sustainable modes of travel and also the appropriate provision of facilities at sites such as cycle racks and storage. Where parks are expected more locally there are some gaps in the existing network of provision, particularly in south Loughborough and South Shepshed. Additionally, there are opportunities to upgrade amenity spaces within some of the service centres to provide more variety of facilities.

4.94 The key issues arising from the analysis of the provision of parks and gardens for the LDF are therefore as follows:

- ensure policy protects all sites from development and requires contributions towards new and / or improved provision from new developments
- seek to enhance the quality of parks and gardens in Charnwood in line with the quality vision
- consider the provision of new parks and gardens in South Loughborough and South Shepshed and upgrade amenity spaces in other areas of the Borough
- facilitate the development of appropriate links from smaller settlements to larger towns for the use of parks.