

Open Spaces (Green) Strategy 2022 - 2026



by

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Foreword

The Council is pleased to announce the publication of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council's first Open Spaces (Green) Strategy.

The Open Spaces (Green) Strategy has been endorsed by Members of the Development and Leisure and Community Development Committees on 7th February 2023 and by full City Council in February 2023.

This marks the first step in shaping the future direction of our open space for all of our community to enjoy. It builds on the open space audit undertaken by the Council as part of the Local Development Plan process, and its focus is on a planned and managed network of multi-functional open spaces, which can deliver a range of environmental, economic and social benefits for local communities. It feeds into a 5 year Action Plan which identifies priorities and projects to build and enhance our open space where a need has been identified.

The Council recognises the importance of creating a healthy, active and accessible environment connecting places and people, where biodiversity, conservation and adapting to climate change are key.

Executive Summary

Lisburn & Castlereagh stretches from the shores of Lough Neagh in the west to the hills above Dundonald in the east, and from the Belfast Hills in the north to an area close to the source of the River Lagan in the south. The Council covers an area of almost 200 square miles (520 square km). The City of Lisburn, has a history of Irish linen production during the 19th and 20th centuries and a number of historic parks and gardens. The east of Council area has also a rich heritage including Dundonald Motte, one of the largest in Northern Ireland dating back to the 12th century.

The towns and villages have a rich built and natural environment, including the landscapes and architecture of Royal Hillsborough, including the Royal Castle and gardens and the rolling drumlin topography, woodlands and farmland of the Lagan Valley Regional Park. The area is characterised by the strong urban core of Lisburn and a diverse and rich rural hinterland of scenic landscape and villages rich in built heritage.

The Council has a wealth of parks, gardens, outdoor sports facilities and other open spaces. There are also in excess of 50 equipped children's playgrounds spread across the Lisburn and Castlereagh City council area providing children with the opportunities to learn and play in a safe environment. Each year the Council implements a rolling programme of playground refurbishments and often adds to this stock of purpose built play areas across the council area, an example being the new multi-purpose play facility River Road Play Park at Seymour Hill, Lisburn, developed in consultation with local community groups and housing association.

In 2019 we carried out an open space audit which assessed open space provision, accessibility and future actions. The findings were used to develop this Open Spaces (Green) Strategy and to set a vision.

The vision for green open spaces in Lisburn & Castlereagh is that ...

The city, towns, villages and suburbs of Lisburn and Castlereagh will enjoy a range of attractive and accessible parks and open spaces close to where people live. "Flagship" parks, greenspaces and play areas will draw local residents and visitors to both urban and rural centres, providing places for social interaction, play, sport, recreation and quality of life for all.

Existing open spaces will be protected and enhanced to diversify urban habitats and extend the green network. Where possible, open spaces will be linked by a network of paths and green corridors to encourage active travel, healthier lifestyles and exploration of the outdoors."

To ensure that parks and open spaces are fit for the future, six guiding strategic principles have been set out to help achieve the vision:

Strategic Principles

1. Protect and enhance open space recognising its value in promoting health and well-being and social benefits to communities
2. Provide exciting, active and inclusive places for children and young people's play and recreation in both equipped and natural settings
3. Support and encourage access to high quality open space close to where people live that meets the needs of different ages, abilities and backgrounds
4. Safeguard key tourism, heritage and recreation assets, reinforcing local identity and civic pride
5. Protect and enhance the natural environment, helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change and reduce and prevent biodiversity loss.
6. Promote opportunities for sustainable travel through greater connectivity of open spaces

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Open Spaces (Green) Strategy

The Open Spaces (Green) Strategy for Lisburn and Castlereagh has been prepared on behalf of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC). In 2019 an Open Space Audit was carried out, providing the evidence base for the Local Development Plan (LDP) Open Space Technical Supplement. An Open Space Strategy is the formally approved policy document defining the Council's approach, commitment and management to protect, enhance and manage open space assets.

The Open Spaces (Green) Strategy seeks to secure best value and provide a prioritised framework for investment, maintenance, management and Best Value. The Strategy will provide clear and concise guidance on best value utilisation of the Council resources in order to provide allocation and future spend decisions.

The Council envisages that an Open Spaces (Green) Strategy will:

- reinforce local identity and civic pride
- enhance the physical character of an area
- improve physical and social inclusion, including accessibility
- protect and enhance biodiversity and ecological habitats
- provide for children and young people's play and recreation
- boost the economic potential of tourism, leisure and cultural activities
- help mitigate and adapt to climate change
- contribute to the creation of healthy places that benefit people's mental and physical health
- assist in informing the Council's future investment decisions

The Council recognises that good quality and easily accessible open space can contribute to a better quality of life. The Council

owns and maintains a large variety of open space, sport and outdoor recreational areas throughout the Council area. There are also privately-owned areas of open space including private playing fields in sports clubs and the education sector and grassland areas, glens, parks, walkways and amenity green space located within housing areas.

The Strategy focusses on LCCC owned and managed green open space but takes cognisance of privately owned open space. However, there are other areas of public sector land, including land in Housing Executive ownership.

1.2 The Council Area

The Strategy included the City of Lisburn and the towns and villages in the wider Council area. The open space sites have been split into the District Electoral Areas of Killultagh, Downshire West, Downshire East, Lisburn South, Lisburn North, Castlereagh East and Castlereagh South.



1.3 Investment in Parks

In the past 2 years alone, the Council has invested in the development of its parks and open spaces to protect our environment, improve our biodiversity and make Lisburn & Castlereagh an attractive place to live in, visit and work in. For example, such improvement schemes include:

- Rebranding and creation of Billy Neill MBE Country Park – opening up kilometres of DDA accessible walking and cycling paths, access and car parking for the Comber Greenway and the establishment of a wetlands meadow
- Creation of outdoor community event space at Moat Park and a new Garden of Reflection
- Provision of a 60m pedestrian & cycling bridge to create linkages between the Comber Greenway to Dundonald leisure park
- Provision of six new outdoor gym sites
- Creation of a sensory garden at Moira Demesne
- A complete refurbishment of Bells Lane Allotments and the creation of a community building with outdoor teaching space, DDA accessible raised beds, toilets, car parking and polytunnel
- A total of 4,407 trees were planted between 2019 – 2020 and 28,670 trees were planted in 2020 – 2021

1.4 Award Winning Parks

In 2022, Lisburn City was named ‘the Best Kept Large Urban Centre in Ireland’ at Ireland’s Best Kept Town Awards demonstrating the community and council’s commitment to excellence and team work.

The standard of the Council parks has been independently judged and benchmarked by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, the environmental charity that runs the Green Flag Award scheme in Northern Ireland. The Green Flag Award is an internationally

recognised certification for environmental quality management for parks and open spaces.

Parks and open spaces wishing to achieve Green Flag status must have a site management plan in place and be able to demonstrate they comply with a range of strict criteria including horticultural standards, cleanliness, environmental management, biodiversity, community involvement and safety standards.

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council hold 7 Green Flag awards for:

- Wallace Park, Lisburn
- Castle Gardens, Lisburn
- Bells Lane Allotments (including Bells Lane Park), Lisburn
- Moira Demesne
- Moat Park, Dundonald
- Billy Neill MBE Country Park, Dundonald
- Sir Milne Barbour Park, Lisburn



Bells Lane Allotments

1.5 The Benefits of Green Open Space

Green open spaces contribute to a range of national and local policies, including sustainable development, climate change adaptation, carbon management, outdoor learning, healthy living, active travel, biodiversity, habitat protection, tourism and social equity policies. They can perform multiple functions, including¹:

- (i) **Strategic functions** – defining and separating urban areas, providing community greenways, ‘green lungs’ and better linking of town and country.
- (ii) **Urban quality** – helping to support regeneration and improving quality of life for communities by providing visually attractive green spaces close to where people live.
- (iii) **Promoting health and well-being** – promotion of active travel routes providing high quality paths and connections to and between open spaces, and along paths, bridleways and river / canals. Allotments also provide health benefits.
- (iv) **Havens and habitats for flora and fauna** – sites may also have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another and may contribute towards achieving objectives set out in the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy
- (v) **Community cohesion and community resource** – a place for congregating and for holding community events.
- (vi) **Visual amenity** – even without public access, people enjoy having open space near to them to provide an outlook, variety in the urban scene, or as a positive element in the landscape.
- (vii) **Climate resilience** – open space can operate as a carbon sink, and nature-based solutions can counteract the effects of climate change, for example through SuDs.



Source: Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland – May 2020

¹ Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation

1.6 How Green Open Spaces are Used

Consultation on the draft strategy was open from December 2021 to the end of February 2022. The online engagement was facilitated through a “virtual room”, which presented a summary of the strategy and the findings of the open space audit. There was opportunity to complete a questionnaire, which raised awareness of the strategy, consult on the 5 year Action Plan, identifying priorities and projects to build and enhance our open space.

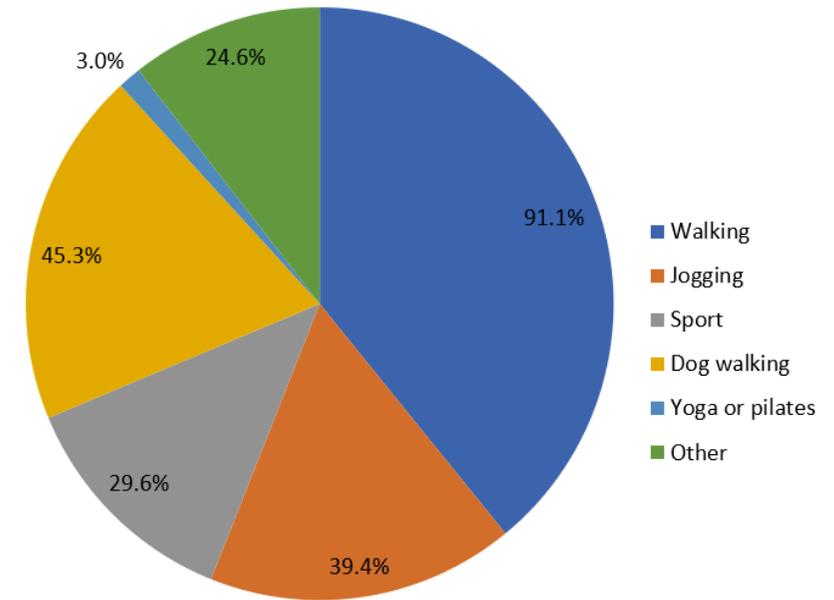


During the consultation period the online consultation was accessed 486 times and the article hosted on the LCCC website was accessed 301 times.

A wide range of questions were asked, including whether the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way people use their local open spaces.

59% of people said that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way they use their local open spaces.

Lisburn and Castlereagh’s open spaces are used for a wide variety of activities, including: picnics, cycling, kids playing, for fresh air, “sitting and watching the world”, running, wildlife, meditation, family activities, Scouting, meeting with friends, painting, relaxing, socialising, mountain biking, tandem cycling, bird watching, photography, roller skating and various volunteering activities outdoors. The chart below illustrates the main uses of open space.



What do you mainly use our outdoor spaces for?

2.0 Policy Context

2.1 Northern Ireland Regional Context

The significance of open space provision and management has become a key feature of planning policy over the last few decades. This is due to the recognised multiple benefits of open space, derived from the diverse range and type of open space available to communities. The Programme for Government (PfG) tasked the Executive with delivering improved wellbeing for all citizens. The benefits of open space directly relate to the following PfG outcomes:

- Our children and young people have the best start in life
- We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment
- We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect
- We all enjoy long, healthy lives
- People want to live, work and visit here

One of the key aims of the **Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035** is to 'Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake'. It states that protecting the environment is essential for enhancing the quality of life of current and future generations. Northern Ireland's environment is one of its greatest assets, with its stunning landscapes, an outstanding coastline, a complex variety of wildlife and a rich built and cultural heritage.

Regional planning policy as set out in the **Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)** states that open space, whether or not there is public access to it, is important for its contribution to the quality of urban life by providing important green lungs, visual breaks and wildlife habitats in built-up areas. Open space can enhance the character of residential areas, civic buildings, conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological sites. It can

also help to attract business and tourism and thereby contribute to the process of urban and rural regeneration.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought the concept of the 20 minute neighbourhood to the forefront of public policy and planning. Cities around the world are adopting variations on 20 minute neighbourhood concept. It is about living more locally by giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 20 minute walk from home, with safe cycling and local transport options. The concept will be considered in more depth in the Local Development Plan and the DEA development programmes.



There will be a policy presumption against the loss of open space to competing land uses in Local Development Plans LDPs irrespective of its physical condition and appearance. Further provision is required to provide adequate and well-designed open space as an integral part of new residential developments. Operational policies provide the detail around the implementation and interpretation of the regional aims and objectives for open space provision and protection.²

2.2 Local Policy Context

This Open Space Strategy is supported by the Open Space Audit contained in the Local Development Plan (LDP) Technical Supplement 7 Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. This provides an evidence base which will support and influence the future policy direction, particularly at Local Policies Plan stage.

The **Lisburn and Castlereagh Community Plan** requires an integrated approach in the delivery of its aims and objectives in particular health, education, community safety the voluntary sector arts and leisure. The Community Plan includes three relevant primary outcomes with relevance to open space:

- 1: 'Children and young people have the best start in life.'
- 3: 'We live healthy, fulfilling and long lives.'
- 4: 'We live and work in attractive, resilient and environmentally-friendly places.'

Working within the policy framework set by the Executive's RDS, the Lisburn and Castlereagh Corporate Plan, the Community Plan and the Local Development Plan set out policies to deliver the

Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government. The **Local Development Plan** takes account of all regional policy and guidance and the policies contained with the Plan Strategy seek to deliver and reflect the spatial aspects of the Community Plan.

The Local Development Plan recognises the importance of our open space. Plan Objective D: An Attractive Place seeks to protect and enhance all open space, recognising its value in promoting health and well-being and resolving flood issues through the introduction of sustainable urban drainage infrastructure; and support and encourage accessibility to open space including the Lagan Valley Regional Park and Lagan Navigation as key assets within the Council area.

The Plan also recognises the importance of community and strategic greenways in contributing to open space provision and the health and well-being of residents. These utilise existing blue and green infrastructure which can facilitate opportunities for walking, cycling, connecting people and places with reduced reliance on the private car. Further details on the LDP can be found on the Council's website at: www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk.

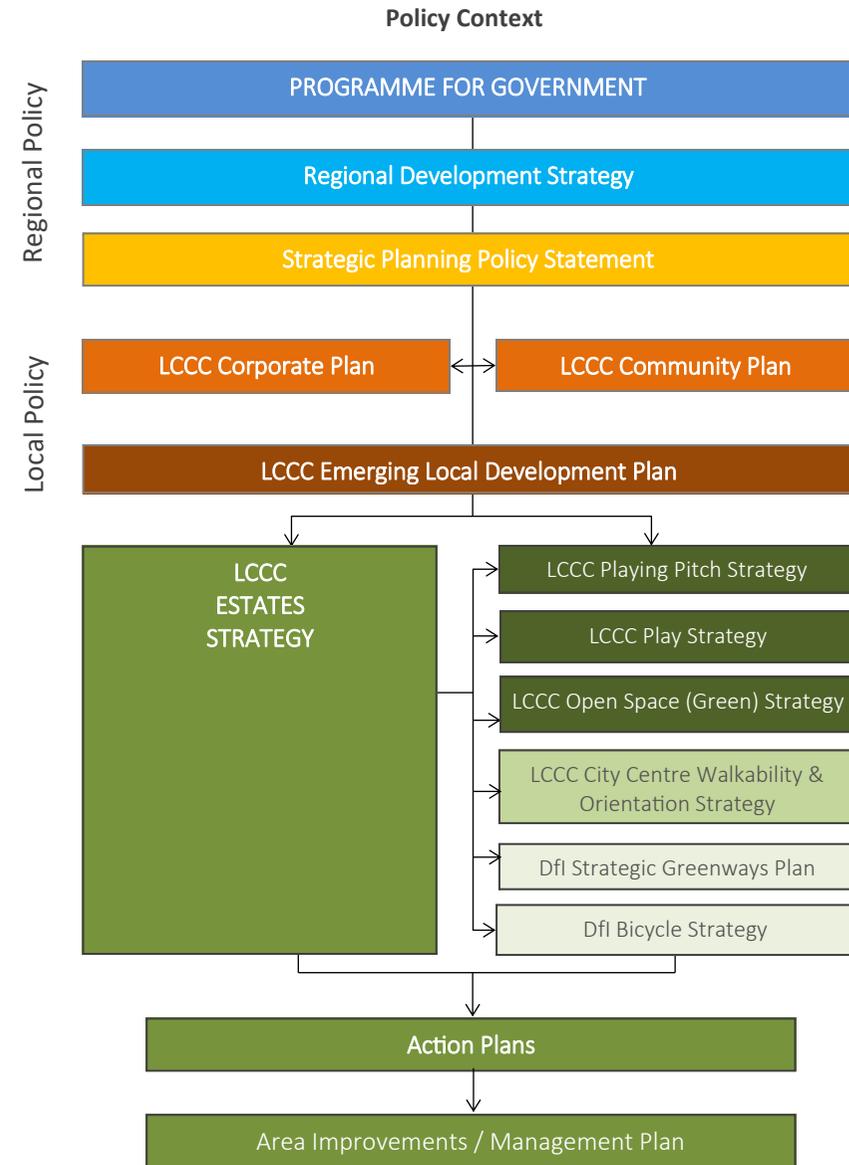
The **Corporate Plan** contains the following strategic themes, which are the Council's main priorities that:

- 'We live healthier, more fulfilling and longer lives.'
- 'We live in resilient and environmentally friendly places.'

² Operational policies contained within PPS 8 Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation will be replaced by the Plan Strategy operational policies on its adoption.

The Council published its **Local Biodiversity Action Plan** in 2017, which recognises the importance of biodiversity linking to open spaces which support the range of habitats and species important to local communities. The Council has taken a holistic approach to fulfilling its obligations under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 Act, to ensure the protection and enhancement of biodiversity including actions and considerations in the 'Where we Live' section in the Council's Community Plan and in the Local Development Plan recognising that biodiversity is key to sustainable development.

There are many Natural Heritage designations including Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV), Sites of Local Nature Conservation (SLNCI), Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPA) and approximately half of the Lagan Valley Regional Park area which is designated as an Area of Outstanding Beauty is contained within the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area. Beyond these protected sites, in the wider countryside, land is managed for agriculture some of which will be under agri-environment scheme agreements. These are designed to encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly management practices which can have great benefits for our biodiversity.

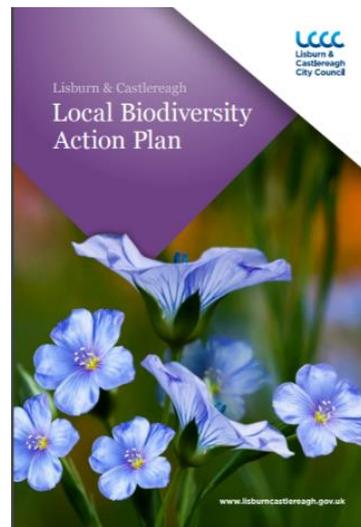
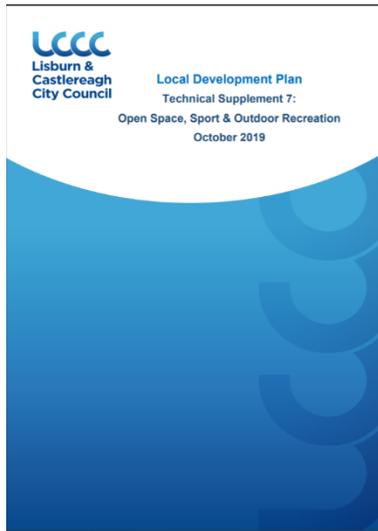


2.3 Regional & Local Green Infrastructure Context

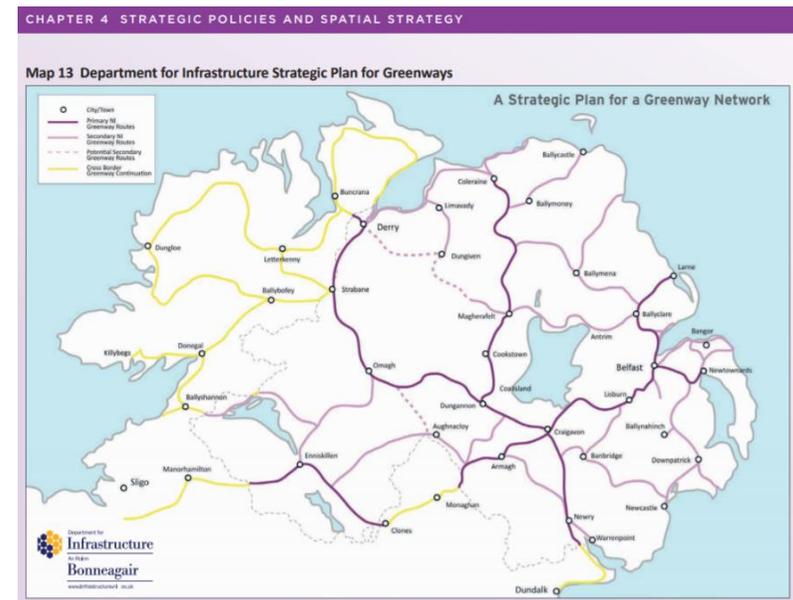
The development of the Open Spaces (Green) Strategy has been progressed in line with the following regional and local green infrastructure plans and strategies.

In 2015, LCCC prepared a **Playing Pitch Strategy**³ with the purpose of enabling the Council to make informed planning decisions regarding pitch provision and assists with the targeting of financial investment and the planning of the delivery of sports development programmes.

The Council commissioned a **Play Strategy**⁴ in 2015, including playability audits for fixed play provision under the council’s ownership, providing an overview of current and future potential levels of supply and demand.



In 2016, the Department for Infrastructure developed **Exercise Explore Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways**, setting out a series of greenways in Northern Ireland as traffic-free routes connecting communities to all kinds of destinations for commuting, everyday journeys for leisure and recreation. Three strategic greenways are proposed in the Council area: a Primary route extending the existing Sustrans NCN9 from Sprucefield, through the Maze Lands to Moira and onwards towards Portadown; a Secondary Greenway connecting Carryduff to the Primary Belfast Greenway; and a secondary route connecting Lisburn to Banbridge.



³ Playing Pitch Strategy and Audit of Pitch Provision (2015 / 16)

⁴ Playability Audit of Existing Fixed Play Provision (2015)

The **Northern Ireland Changing Gear: Bicycle Strategy** aims to set out progressively how Northern Ireland can be transformed into a place where travelling by bicycle is a healthy, everyday activity. Measures will include improvements to cycling infrastructure in urban areas, rural routes and greenways.



The **Castlereagh Integrated Development Framework (2020)** identifies opportunities for future development and growth, focusing on the main urban centres within the Castlereagh urban area: Carryduff, Forestside and Dundonald. The framework for Dundonald includes improved connections to Moat Park and the Village area by creating a landmark linkage between green spaces and improved connections to Comber Greenway.

3.0 Vision for Green Open Space

3.1 The Vision for Lisburn & Castlereagh's Open Space

It is widely recognised that open spaces, sport and outdoor recreation are essential to encouraging healthier life styles and for the protection of the natural environment in Northern Ireland. The provision of networks of good quality green open space is considered to be of vital importance.

The Lisburn and Castlereagh area contains a wealth of parks, gardens, outdoor sports facilities and other green open spaces. There are also numerous playgrounds spread across the City council area providing children with the opportunities to learn and play in a safe environment.

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council hold a number of family fun events in its parks including Moat Park, Dundonald, Wallace Park, Lisburn and Moira Demesne over the summer months with crafts, theatre, music and arts on offer. The 'Park Life' programme consists of events to suit all ages and range from a Natures Kingdom event, a pets' farm to a Teddy Bears Picnic. The parks provide a perfect backdrop for events and are a hugely popular venue for families with annual events such as the Mayor's Family Fun Day and the Halloween Twilight by Fairy Light event and one off events such as the Northern Ireland Armed Forces Day 2019 which attracted in excess of 20,000 visitors to Wallace Park.

The benefits of open space to tourism and recreation are also recognised, for example, the synergies between the potential of Hillsborough Forest Park as a valuable recreational space, working in tandem with the Historic Park, Garden and Demesne of Hillsborough Castle.

For those who desire a more active outdoor sporting activity, the Council provides a wide range of sports facilities and playing fields facilitating numerous sports, as well as bowling greens which are available for hire. The sports pitches include both grass and synthetic pitches and other popular facilities include tennis courts, baseball diamonds and two 18 hole golf courses at Aberdelghy in Lisburn and Castlereagh Hills Golf Club. An artificial cricket wicket was also added at Billy Neill MBE Country Park in 2022.

The vision for open space is built upon the Local Development Plan vision that will help deliver the Plan Objectives in relation to Open Space.

The vision for green open spaces in Lisburn & Castlereagh is that

"The city, towns, villages and suburbs of Lisburn and Castlereagh will enjoy a range of attractive and accessible parks and open spaces close to where people live. "Flagship" parks, greenspaces and play areas will draw local residents and visitors to both urban and rural centres, providing places for social interaction, play, sport, recreation and quality of life for all.

Existing open spaces will be protected and enhanced to diversify urban habitats and extend the green network. Where possible, open spaces will be linked by a network of paths and green corridors to encourage active travel, healthier lifestyles and exploration of the outdoors."

...

3.2 Strategic Principles and Aspirations

The Local Development Plan sets out six Plan Objectives to establish an appropriate balance between improving quality of life, economic prosperity for all, the protection of the Council's environmental assets, and to ensure that development is sustainable in the interests of future generations. The vision for Open Space is built upon the LDP spatial vision, and in particular objectives D, E and F.

- *Objective D: **An Attractive Place:** Promoting Sustainable Tourism, Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation*
- *Objective E: **A Green Place:** Protecting and Enhancing the Historic and Natural Environment*
- *Objective F: **A Connected Place:** Supporting Sustainable Transport and Other Infrastructure*

Evidence suggests that well designed, high quality open spaces are vital in creating healthy and liveable cities, towns and villages. It is recognised that a shared, strategic approach to open space maximises its potential to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable future. Building on objectives D and E of the LDP, six guiding strategic principles have been set out to help achieve the vision for open space:

1. Protect and enhance open space recognising its value in promoting health and well-being and social benefits to communities

The provision of easily accessible green open spaces close to where we live is vital to encouraging healthier lifestyles and mental wellbeing. Open spaces offer a wide range of opportunities for sport and recreation (dog walking, running, cycling, active play etc.). The benefits of open spaces are also recognised to bring benefits in terms of mental health, wellbeing and happiness.

2. Provide exciting, active and inclusive places for children and young people's play and recreation in both equipped and natural settings

Everyone living in the city, towns, villages and suburbs should have access to attractive, good quality play space, providing opportunities for a wide range of users and abilities. A local network of well designed, useable, clean, safe and accessible play spaces that are fit for purpose, well-resourced / managed and meet the needs of the community which benefit our urban and rural settlements.



3. Support and encourage access to high quality green open space close to where people live that meets the needs of different ages, abilities and backgrounds

There is an increasing body of knowledge suggesting that the quality of civic places and open spaces has an impact on how people perceive their neighbourhoods. Higher quality open spaces lead to higher satisfaction levels, greater feelings of safety and

higher levels of activity in the outdoors. Together with the built environment, this helps create a sense of place and creates opportunities for social interaction and community events. Increased footfall in open spaces brings benefits with regard to the perception of safety and increases natural surveillance, which in turn helps to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour.



4. Safeguard key tourism, heritage and recreation assets, reinforcing local identity and civic pride

The Lisburn Castlereagh's Vision for Tourism aims to develop Royal Hillsborough village into a world-class tourist destination, which will increase tourism growth across the whole council area. High quality parks and open spaces, such as Lisburn Castle Gardens, Wallace Park, Moat Park and Hillsborough Forest are tourist attractions, helping retain visitors for longer and increasing visitor spending.

5. Protect and enhance the natural environment, helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and reduce and prevent biodiversity loss.

A connected network of diverse open spaces, extending from large woodland ecosystems to small pocket parks, helps sustain habitat networks and enhance biodiversity. Well managed open spaces provide opportunities for diversifying existing landscapes, such as woodlands, wetlands and grasslands and undertaking habitat management to support a variety of plant and animal species. The benefits of such landscapes are extensive, providing attractive and diverse places for recreation and enjoyment of the outdoors.



6. Promote opportunities for sustainable travel through greater connectivity of green open spaces

Quality green open space within or close to settlements plays a vital role in promoting healthy living and tackling inequality through facilitating play and sporting activities, leading to healthier more active lifestyles. Better connected places (e.g. strategic greenways) support walking, cycling and public transport use. Promote opportunities for sustainable travel through development of Active Travel Networks to improve health and well-being support by reducing the need to travel by private car.

4.0 Lisburn and Castlereagh Green Open Spaces

4.1 Lisburn & Castlereagh

Lisburn & Castlereagh stretches from the shores of Lough Neagh in the west to the hills above Dundonald in the east, and from the Belfast Hills in the north to an area close to the source of the River Lagan in the south. The Council covers an area of almost 200 square miles (520 square km).

Belfast as the region’s capital city, is recognised as a growing tourism destination, and the attractions of Lisburn and Castlereagh, including Hillsborough Castle and Gardens contribute to the region’s visitor numbers. The more local destinations of Hillsborough Forest, Lisburn Castle Gardens, Wallace Park, Moat Park in Dundonald and the Lagan Valley Regional Park also act as a significant tourism draw.



Castle Gardens was once the site of Lisburn Castle in the 17th century and recently restored by LCCC with grant aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund in June 2008.

The heart of the area is the City of Lisburn, which has a history of Irish linen production during the 19th and 20th centuries and a wealth of parks, gardens, outdoor sports facilities and other open spaces.



The 26 acre **Wallace Park** was gifted to the town by Sir Richard Wallace in 1884 and largely retains its original layout and Victorian character. The park was refurbished in 2012.



Moat Park is situated in the heart of Dundonald and contains a historic Motte and an attractive green oasis, close to the historic Church of St Elizabeth.

The council area has a rich built and natural environment, including the landscapes and architecture of Hillsborough Castle and Gardens and the rolling drumlin topography, woodlands and farmland of the Lagan Valley Regional Park.



Hillsborough Castle and Forest provide a heritage destination hub, providing access to the historic house, gardens and castle. The nearby forest (200 acres) has a network of waymarked routes around the forest



Moira Demesne is located in the picturesque village of Moira, comprising of over 40 acres of parkland with beautiful walkways, play and sports facilities.

The **Lagan Valley Regional Park** (established in 1967) is often described as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the Lisburn City & Castlereagh Council area.

Making up 2,116 hectares of riverside land between Lisburn and Belfast, the Park is a vital connective corridor for both wildlife and people. The towpath – a walking and cycling path running alongside the River Lagan - is the busiest Active Travel Route in Northern Ireland. In 2020, it was the most visited outdoor attraction in Northern Ireland. Almost 2 million people used it to commute or to make the most of its green space, access to nature and sites of historical importance.



As the Regional Park is managed jointly Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and Belfast City Council, it has an independent staff team, Board and a dedicated group of volunteers who support conservation efforts and deliver on its long-term strategy to protect the Lagan Valley Regional Park for future generations and for the well-being of our community.

It hosts regular events to encourage local people to access nature and to discover some of the biodiversity and archaeological treasures which make their home there.

4.2 Type of Green Open Space

The SPPS recognises that green open space, whether or not there is access to it, is important for its contribution to the quality of urban life by providing important green lungs, visual breaks and wildlife habitats in built-up areas. This strategy focuses on the open spaces that are on the land only and eight open space typologies have been used, each having a variety of uses and secondary uses / characteristics.

Each open space audit site has been assigned an identification reference, a name, location, typology and type, as set out in the table below and include publicly accessible sites. A GIS shape file has been prepared for the open spaces included in the audit, to which the site survey data will be attached. Each open space audit site has been allocated a typology.

The types of open spaces are further expanded in Table 1.



Table 1: Green Open Space Typology The following categories have been allocated in the LCCC open space database:

Open Space Type	Sub-type	Description
Parks & Gardens	Regional Park	Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP) is Northern Ireland's first and only Regional Park. The LVRP was established in 1967 as one of three unique semi-urban designations in the UK at that time. The Park is located between Stranmillis, Belfast and Union locks, Lisburn and covers some 4,200 acres of countryside and eleven miles of riverbank. Provides a major leisure facility, with a wide catchment of users, often travelling long distances by car and or public transport for a 'family day out'.
	City Park / Historic Park <i>1.6km walking catchment (approx. 20min walk)</i>	Parks such as Moira Demesne which are large areas of parkland of significant size, offering a combination of facilities and heritage features at the sub-regional level. The parks draw visitors to the town / city, are accessible by public transport and contain superior quality of facilities.
	Town Park <i>1200m walking catchment (approx. 15min walk)</i>	Large to medium sized areas of open space that provide a variety of activities and natural features, including sports facilities, children's play for all ages, informal recreation, gardens and seating areas.
	Local Park <i>400m walking catchment (approx. 5min walk)</i>	These parks are small areas of open space, and may contain children's play, seating, courts or pitches and nature conservation areas. They are often well used parks within walking distance of the immediate residential area.
Outdoor Sports Facilities	All Outdoor Sports	Sports facilities with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned. Including tennis courts, bowling greens, sport pitches, golf courses, athletic tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas, which are generally bookable.
	Indoor Facilities	
	Other Outdoor Provision	
	Playing Pitches	
	Golf Course	
Amenity Green Space		Landscaped areas providing visual amenity or separating different buildings or land uses including informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing, and village greens.
Equipped / Designated Play Area	Flagship Play Areas <i>1.6km walking catchment (approx. 20min walk)</i> <i>*SLD 1,000m</i>	Flagship play park, combining traditional play concepts with state of the art equipment for an easily accessible yet entertainingly challenging play experience. Containing, often themed equipment suitable for 2 to 10 years.
	Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP) <i>1,000m walking catchment (approx. 13min walk)</i> <i>*SLD 600m</i>	Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play are areas of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children (aged 12+ years), but also with play opportunities for younger children. May include kickabout areas, Multi Use Games Area, skateboard parks and outdoor basketball hoops).
	Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP) <i>400m walking catchment (approx. 5min walk)</i> <i>*SLD 240m</i>	Local Equipped Area for Play, aimed at children who are beginning to go out to play independently (aged 5 – 12 years), close to where they live. May include opportunity for informal recreation.
Community Greenway		Designated segregated walking and cycling routes identified in the RDS 2035. They are primarily active travel corridors, but will play an increasingly important role, allowing people to move safely between open spaces, to destinations in the city and out to the countryside and are designated through the LDP.
Natural & Semi Natural Greenspace		Areas of undeveloped or previously developed land with residual natural habitats or which have been planted or colonised by vegetation and wildlife, including woodlands, urban forestry, grasslands (e.g. meadows), wetlands, open and running water.
Allotments	Allotments and Community Gardens	Allotments and areas of land for growing fruit and vegetables, or a community garden.
Cemeteries	Cemeteries and Churchyards	Includes cemeteries and churchyards.

* SLD Straight Line Distance

4.3 Quantity and Distribution of Open Space

This section provides an analysis of different open space typologies across the council area. It has been generated by compiling spatial data primarily from the 2019 Open Space Audit, with additional information from LCCC mapping data for golf courses, Cemeteries and Community Greenways, which were not included in the Open Space Audit.

The LCCC area contains **1,209.85 ha** of open space. The table opposite summarises the supply of specific open space typologies across the LCCC Council area.

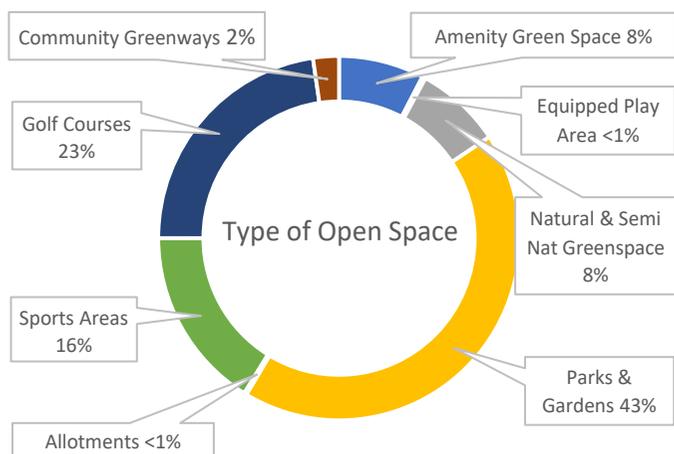


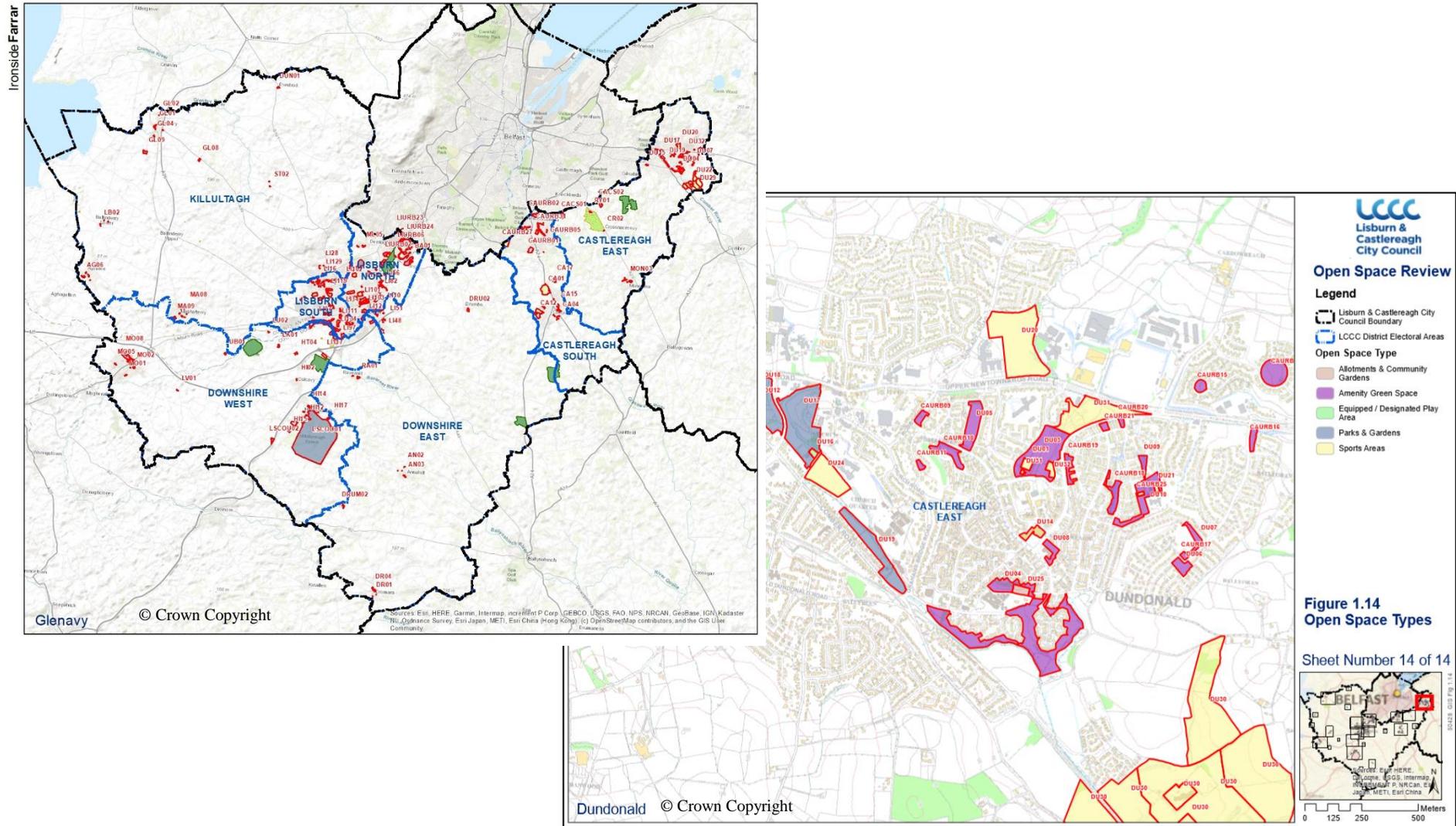
Chart 1: Different Types of Green Open Space (see table 2)

Table 2: Existing Green Open Space included in the Open Space Audit

Open Space Type	Sub-type	Number of sites	Area (ha)
Parks & Gardens	Regional Park	1	-
	City Park / Historic Park	3	16.11
	Town Park	11	441.83
	Local Park	12	18.05
Total Parks		26	475.99
Outdoor Sports Facilities	All Outdoor Sports	13	21.24
	Indoor Facilities	13	5.23
	Other Outdoor Provision	5	2.32
	Playing Pitches	63	150.81
Total Outdoor Sports		94	179.60
	Golf Courses	6	251.46*
Amenity Green Space	Amenity Green Space	162	84.69
Equipped / Designated Play Area	Flagship Play Areas	5	0.80
	Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP)	8	0.49
	Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP)	36	2.01
Total Play Areas		49	3.30
Natural & Semi Natural Greenspace	Natural & Semi Natural Greenspace	14	85.14
	Community Greenways	10	25.61*
Allotments & Community Gardens	Allotments & Community Gardens	3	2.55
Cemeteries		10	101.51*
Total Open Space		377	1,209.85 ha

Note: The figures in the table above marked with a * have been derived from LCCC Open Space database. The Regional Park has not been included in the calculations.

The map below illustrates the provision of the various types of green open space and the quality of provision in Dundonald.



Fields in Trust Standards

The SPPS sets out a policy aspiration to meet the National Playing Field Association (NPFA) ‘six-acre standard’, **a target of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 people** comprising of 1.6 hectares suitable for outdoor sports and recreation and 0.8 hectares for children’s play space. We are committed to protecting our existing open space and we will use benchmarking as a reference to help inform future investment and improvements in our open space network.

In 2015, FiT⁵ replaced the ‘six-acre standard’ with more comprehensive metrics for open space typologies. Where appropriate a comparison has been outlined on Table 3. The FiT standard also sets out provision for 1.8 hectares per 1,000 people of natural and semi-natural spaces, which has not been assessed as part of this strategy.

A separate exercise was undertaken by LCCC to establish whether the council open space provision meets the FiT standards. Figures from the LCCC Open Space database, as illustrated in Table 3, demonstrate that Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council’s overall open space provision exceeds the FiT benchmark.

Settlements included in the audit vary considerably in their size, number of open spaces and quantity of open space. The quantity assessment, undertaken by LCCC, indicates that Downshire East and Killultagh DEAs have smaller quantities of open space in comparison with the other DEAs. The size and the availability of Council owned land has a bearing on the quantity of open space in these smaller settlements. However, provision of high quality equipped open spaces can address these shortfalls.

Publicly accessible playing field provision is lower than the benchmark. Play area provision, and other outdoor provision, particularly MUGAs, is lower than the FiT benchmark. However, it is important to note that this typology is not directly comparable, as the FiT benchmark also includes local areas for play (LAPs), which are accounted for in the amenity green space typology in Lisburn and Castlereagh. It is also important to highlight that although not equipped, we provide significant areas of open space for informal play within our parks. Lisburn and Castlereagh’s amenity space provision is also higher than the FiT benchmark and is likely to be higher still, as it has not been possible to map all amenity space in this assessment.

Table 3: LCCC Open Space provision and the FiT benchmark

FiT Category	FiT Standard per 1000 people (ha)	LCCC Total (ha)	LCCC per 1000 people (ha)
All Pitches	1.2	93.3 (Public)	0.69
		64.08 (Private/School)	0.47
		157.38 (Total)	1.16 (Total)
All Outdoor Sports	1.6	1.92	0.01
Equipped Play Areas	0.25	5.13	0.04
Other Outdoor Provision	0.3	20.66	0.15
Parks & Gardens	0.8	466.38*	3.44
Amenity Greenspace	0.6	81.21	0.60
Natural & Semi Natural Greenspace	1.8	221.85	1.64

Note: The figures in the table above have been derived from LCCC Open Space database. * Figure includes Hillsborough Forest Park (388.1ha)

⁵ <http://www.fieldsintrust.org>

4.4 Quality of Green Open Space

Quality is a key component of open space. Green open spaces need to be “fit for purpose” and serve local communities by providing a level of service and functional provision to meet informal leisure and recreational needs. The quality assessment was based on the recommendations included in the “Greenspace Quality: A Guide to Assessment, Planning and Strategic Development” (2008). Summary data is contained in the LCCC Open Space Audit.

The City of Lisburn, towns and villages currently have mostly good provision of open space, ranging from formal parks and playing fields to woodlands and green corridors associated with paths, cycleways and waterways. There are excellent examples of high quality historic parks, “flagship” play areas and attractive woodlands and riverside paths.

Chart 2 summarises the number of sites in each of the quality bands. Approximately half of the sites scored between 65% and 91% (136 out of 278 sites). The average quality score was 65%. There are 30 sites that scored between 50 and 54, and only 5 sites that scored between 44-49. The quality scores ranged from 44% (Willow Gardens, Lisburn North) to the highest score of 91% (both Moira Demesne and Wallace Park), with the majority of sites scoring in the 50s, 60s and 70s.

The settlements of Moira, Stoneyford, Moneyreagh, Ballyskeagh and Royal Hillsborough have the highest average quality scores. Lisburn contains 9 out of 20 of the worst scoring open space sites, but it also includes 12 out of the 20 top scoring open spaces. Drumlough, Halftown, Upper Broomhedge, Lurganville and Ravernet are the settlements with the lowest average quality scores. There may be opportunity for partnership working within the

Community Planning framework to improve open space in these areas, where the Housing Executive have housing stock.

The graph below demonstrates that the majority of LCCC open spaces included in the open space audit scored 50% and above, with only 5 not considered fit for purpose. There is opportunity to improve the quality of these sites, and to improve the quality of some of the lower quality parks and amenity greenspaces.

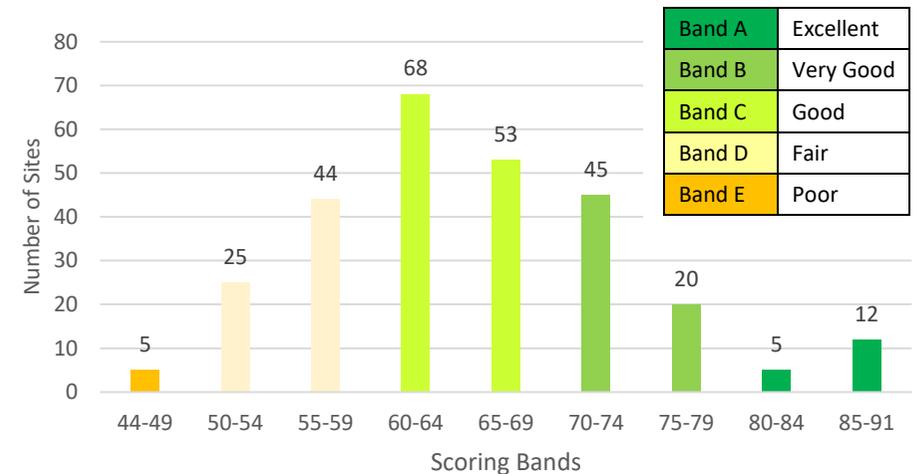


Chart 2: Quality Scores in the Bands

Calculating an average quality score for each settlement can give an indication of overall quality of open space in a settlement. The DEA with the highest average quality score is Downshire West and the DEA with the lowest average quality score is Lisburn South.

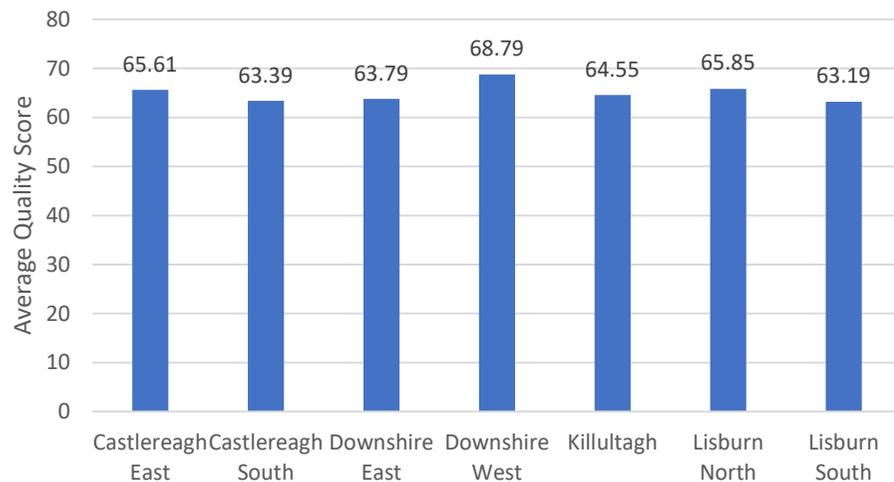


Chart 3: Average quality score per DEA

The settlements with the lower scoring sites have been considered in more detail to identify which sites could be improved with regards to quality of the open space. A summary of the analysis of the audit findings is contained in Chapter 5.

Even since compiling this data, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council has identified and progressed a number of projects to enhance accessibility and biodiversity and raise the quality of these areas for the benefit of its citizens.

Examples include:

- Additional new play parks at Tonagh, Dungoyne and Hydebank
- Refurbished play parks at Grove and Halftown
- 2.25 km of accessible walkways to create Glenmore Parkland Trail (formerly Deadwall Plantation)
- 1 km orbital trail at Hydebank Playing Fields
- Six dog exercise areas
- Creation of Annahilt Community Garden
- Refurbishment of Killeaton Open Space
- Restoration of Derriaghy Glen ancient woodland

4.5 Green Open Space Accessibility

Access is a key component of open space. Green open spaces need to serve local communities and deliver locally accessible open space providing a local resource that addresses daily needs, supports access by walking, cycling, horse riding and public transport, supports unsupervised use with safe accessibility and promotes informal recreation and exercise (dog walking, health walking or general passive use).

The Councils Parks & Amenities Unit has worked in close partnership with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) over the last 4 years to identify potential locations throughout its parks to install tactile maps with information in braille to enhance the visitor experience for people with impaired sight.



Pictured at the launch (May 2021) of the tactile map at McIlroy Park (L-R), Stephen Strong (RNIB Volunteer), Gavin McBride (DfC) and Alderman Michael Henderson MBE (LCCC)

Each map is carefully designed to combine both visual and tactile elements that results in an “access for all” map that is a mix of layers, colours with good visual contrast, textures, large print (which is also raised), braille lettering, tactile and visual symbols.

International research into the impacts of greenspace on health and on wider quality of life shows that having greenspace within a 5 minute walk of home is a strong indicator for health and quality of life benefits. 0.5 hectares is big enough for a ‘kick about’ pitch or other informal play. Generally, in urban design, a 5 minute walk is considered to equate to a distance of 400 metres ‘door to space’.

The open spaces included in the Audit were mapped and the following accessibility standards applied:

Table 4: Open Space Accessibility Standards

Open Space Type	Accessibility Standard
City Park / Historic Park	1.6km walking catchment (approx. 20min walk)
Town Park	1200m walking catchment (approx. 15min walk)
Local Park	400m walking catchment (approx. 5min walk)
Flagship Play Area	1.6km walking catchment (approx. 20min walk)
Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP)	1,000m walking catchment (approx. 13min walk)
Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP)	400m walking catchment (approx. 5min walk)

Parks & Gardens

Lisburn North and South

The City of Lisburn is well served in terms of City Parks / Historic Parks, which is dispersed throughout the residential areas. These City Parks include Wallace Park, Duncan's Park and Castle Gardens and provide a range of high quality recreational, sporting and play opportunities, set within a historic park setting. The urban open space is further enhanced by access to the countryside and the Belfast Hills to the north and the Lagan Valley Regional Park to the south, which connects the city to Castlereagh and Belfast.



There are also two Town Parks in the City, including Barbour Memorial Playing Fields and Magheralave Road Green Space. There are 5 Local Parks, including Lambeg Park, Tom Robinson Park, Grand Street, Maralin Avenue / Drumbeg Drive and Sir Milne Barbour Memorial Park. Many of these parks contain equipped children's play areas, providing formal and informal play space for children and young people. Wallace Park and the Queen Elizabeth

II Playing Fields contain Flagship play areas, which combine traditional play concepts with state of the art equipment for an easily accessible yet entertainingly challenging play experience. The park provision is supplemented by a range of sports areas, natural / semi-natural greenspace and amenity greenspace, which is evenly distributed throughout the city and of overall high quality.

The Derriaghy, Kilmakee and Dunmurry areas of Lisburn have a good spread of open space throughout the area. Derriaghy contains Bell's Lane local park. The area has a good spread of amenity greenspace and play facilities throughout.



Castlereagh East

Dundonald is well served with regards to the accessibility of parks and play space in the town. The Billy Neill MBE Country Park (Green Flag winner) is located in Dundonald and the Comber Greenway passes through the site. Moat Park town park, with its flagship play area provides high quality well equipped open space.

Castlereagh South

The Four Winds area has an under provision of park space, with Colby Park being the only local park. Hydebank and Cairnshill playing fields provide a well used open space resource as does Carryduff Park and Lough Moss in the Carryduff area. There is limited play space in the surrounding residential areas, with 5 LEAPs and 1 NEAP in the area. There are planned residential developments in the south east of the settlement, which include play provision.

Downshire East

All the villages in Downshire East contain areas of open space, providing areas of recreational space and play facilities. Dromara contains a Town Park (Lagan Park).



Downshire West

The two main towns within the Downshire West DEA, Royal Hillsborough and Moira have good levels of very high-quality open space, providing a range of facilities for sport, recreation and play. There is a Town Park (Hillsborough Fort) and a Local Park (Hillsborough Park), a Flagship play area (LEAP) easily accessible from adjacent residential areas. Moira Demesne provides high quality park facilities for the town and visitors to the area.

Killultagh

All the villages in Killultagh DEA contain areas of open space, providing areas of recreational space and play facilities. Local parks are provided in Maghaberry (Maghaberry Village Green and Maghaberry Road Community Centre) and Stoneyford (Stoneyford Road Green Space).

By way of example, the maps below illustrate the quality of provision in Dundonald and the provision of the various types of open space in Lisburn South DEAs. Maps for each DEA are provided within the Local Development Plan Technical Supplement 7 Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation.

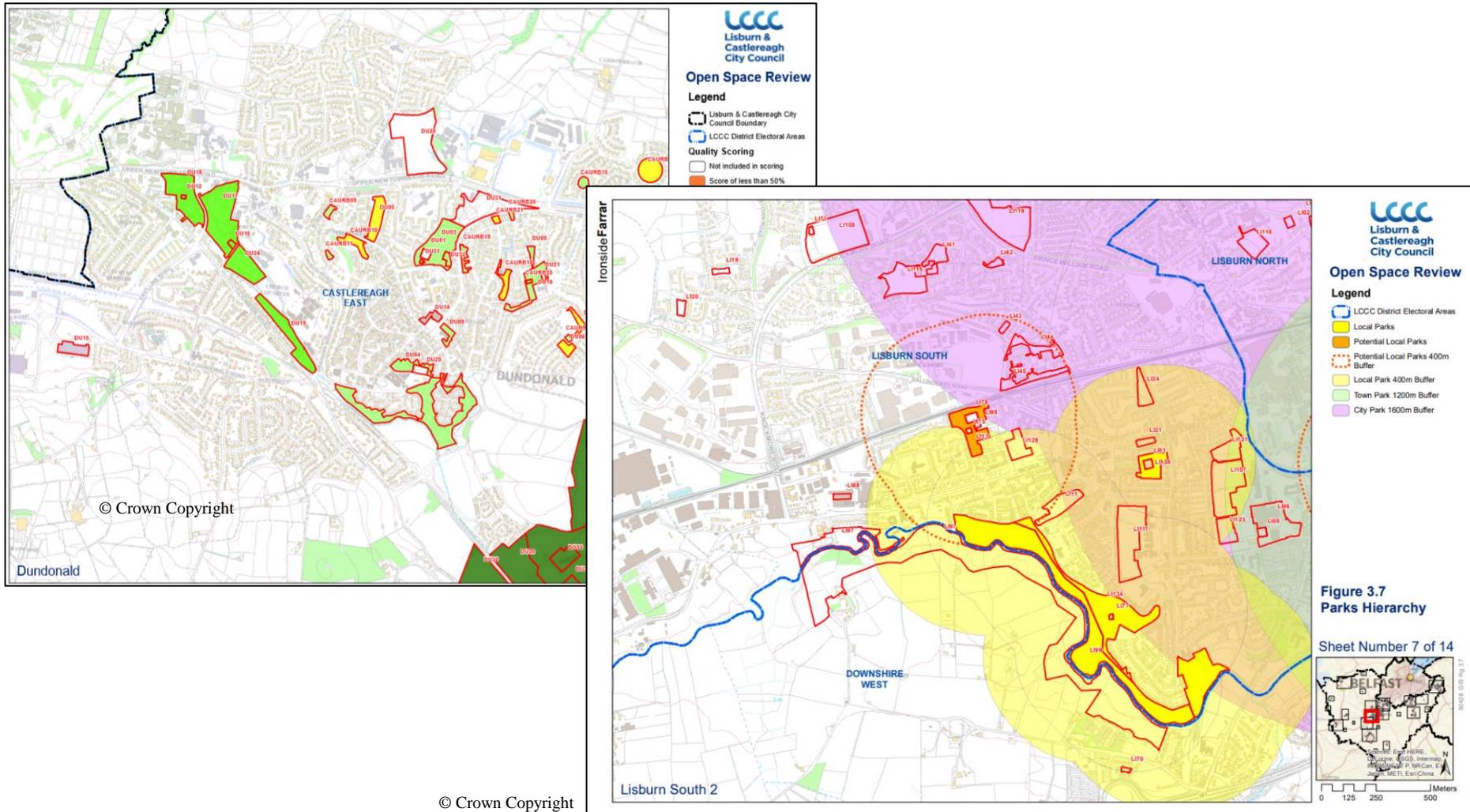
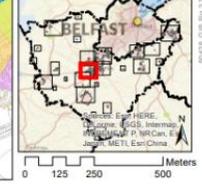


Figure 3.7 Parks Hierarchy

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Sports Facilities

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council owns and maintains a large variety of open space, sport and outdoor recreational areas throughout the Council area. Most of these are located within Lisburn City, the towns and villages and includes all council owned and privately owned facilities that are open to the public. There are also privately-owned playing fields including those belonging to Lisnagarvey Hockey Club and Carryduff GAC and other areas of open space including private playing fields in the education sector and grassland areas, glens, parks, walkways and casual play areas located within housing areas.

In 2015, LCCC commissioned an Audit of Pitch Provision and Preparation of a Playing Pitches Strategy, based on best practice guidance developed by Sport England and the Central Council for Physical Recreation. The Playing Pitch Model requires focused research on supply, demand and quality to assess adequacy of provision for matches. Supply of and demand for pitches was assessed for the Council area as a whole for each of the following five sports: Association football, Gaelic sports, Hockey, Rugby and Cricket.

The audit concluded there are 60 clubs operating 414 teams across the five sports in the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area during the period of the review. The project included the preparation of an inventory of all known pitches for the five sports in the Council area. The summary shows there are 108 pitches suited to competition at some level across the five sports. Adequacy of provision across the Council area for each sport is good overall.

Association football is well provided for with regards to SSG (U11,U12), Junior and adult pitches. There is an under-supply of Small Sided Games pitches for the younger age group, but this is

mitigated by accessing junior pitches on a Saturday morning. Gaelic sports has an adequate supply of pitches for adults but an undersupply of 1No. pitch for Go Games & Junior Pitches. Hockey has an over supply of pitches for both adult and juniors. As does Rugby. Cricket has an adequate supply for junior pitches but a shortfall of 2No. pitches for adults.

Equipped Play Areas

The amalgamation of the two legacy councils in April 2015 brought with it an existing portfolio of outdoor, fixed equipment play areas which range in size from Local Areas for Play (LAP's), Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP's) and Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP's). In total 46 fixed play areas transferred into the new LCCC area on April 1st 2015, with an additional play area opened in the autumn of 2015 at Killynure Park, Carryduff.



Maghaberry Road Play Area

There are numerous playgrounds spread across the Lisburn and Castlereagh area providing children with the opportunities to learn and play in a safe environment. Over the last year the council has opened several new purpose built play areas across the council area, an example being the new multi-purpose play facility River

Road Play Park at Seymour Hill, Lisburn, developed in consultation with local community groups and housing association.

Flagship Play Areas include:

- Wallace Park, Lisburn
- Moira Demesne, Moira
- Hillsborough Forest Play Park, Royal Hillsborough
- Queen Elizabeth II Play Park
- Moat Park, Dundonald

Greenways

Community Greenways (as they are termed in the existing Development Plan) seek to re-establish links between the countryside and urban areas of open space such as parks, playing fields and natural areas to create a network of open spaces. These local-scale community greenways provide places for recreation and exercise alongside opportunities for pedestrian and cycle routes as well as wildlife habitats. Both publicly owned open space and private land are included, even where public access is not permitted. Such green space can provide important linkages and visual amenity within the urban area.

Community Greenways provide recreational links, an ecological / environmental linkage and offer a source of visual / recreational amenity. These designations are carried forward from the existing development plan, however further work in reviewing existing and future community greenways will be undertaken as part of the Local Policies Plan.

Strategic Greenways, as identified in the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Greenway Plan, are also being considered as part of the Open Space Strategy, in terms of how the community

greenways link to these and provide alternative routes to travel instead of reliance on the private car.

Sustrans has been commissioned to prepare a 15 year Active Travel Strategy and accompanying mapping for the Council area.

Natural & Semi Natural Greenspace

Trees and woodland contribute significantly to the natural environment and blue / green infrastructure networks. They have a number of important benefits, including creating a varied and attractive landscape, and defining a sense of place. Trees can help screen and integrate development, provide wildlife habitats, contribute to the health and well-being of society, reduce air pollution, provide shade and mitigate flood risk.



Moira Demesne

The Lisburn & Castlereagh Journey to Sustainability.

Northern Ireland is one of the least wooded regions in Europe with less than 9% woodland cover. This is lower than the Republic of Ireland (11%), the UK (13%) and European Union (38%). Within Northern Ireland, the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC)

area has the lowest levels of tree cover. With trees playing a vital role in tackling climate change and supporting wildlife, it is vital that tree cover is increased within the Council area. In 2022, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council were successful in its application to the Emergency Tree Fund to establish a naïve tree nursery with the aim of planting 192,000 trees over a three year period on a combination of land owned by the council and other public and private landowners whilst engaging with all major stakeholders via a Council led steering group and positively engaging with all local communities.

The project aims to be financially self-sustaining within 2 years and boast a number of strands including the establishment of a volunteer network, creation of UKISG accredited tree nursery and ancient woodland restoration projects. The Council is currently working on publication of its Tree Management Strategy.

Allotments & Community Gardens

There are currently 3 public allotments in the LCCC area⁶. Bells Lane Allotments in Derriaghy were reopened in 2019 after a £290,000 refurbishment. Visitors can now enjoy a newly developed meeting space with a covered area and benches, additional parking bays and toilets with disabled and baby changing facilities. The hub also features kitchen facilities, a garden shed, poly tunnel and raised beds to accommodate a calendar of demonstrations and activities for schools and community groups in the Lisburn Castlereagh area.

Future allotment provision will be based on demand for provision of additional facilities. Further study is required to assess need and demand for facilities

Cemeteries

The maintenance of cemeteries in the Council area is a statutory responsibility of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council. Currently Belfast City Council manage and maintain Roselawn Cemetery and Crematorium (Green Flag winner) which lies within the Council area.



The Council is currently exploring a range of options to expand cemetery provision for LCCC, including the consideration of sub regional options with neighbouring councils in relation to identifying future need requirements. Should a collective need be established through collaboration, such provision could be appraised to enable a more joined-up approach. If a need is identified for the requirement of additional cemetery provision, the LDP will take account of this, zoning sufficient lands where appropriate at Local Policies Plan stage.

⁶ Bell's Lane Allotments, Milltown Avenue Allotments & Jubilee Allotments, Dundonald

5.0 Green Open Space Recommendations

5.1 Delivery of the Strategic Principles

To ensure that Lisburn and Castlereagh's parks and open spaces are fit for the future, the following headline actions for the next five years (2022 - 2026) have been agreed to deliver the Green Open Space Strategy Vision:

1. Protect and enhance open space recognising its value in promoting health and well-being and social benefits to communities

- Recognise the importance of good quality green open space, sport and outdoor recreation provision on the health & well-being of residents and explore opportunities for further enhancing this provision.
- Review planning policy with a view to protecting existing open spaces and the connecting links / paths.
- Continue to invest in new green open space provision where possible across the area addressing any quantity / quality deficiencies (e.g. Downshire East and Killultagh where multi-use open spaces could be developed on the existing LCCC estate where land for new open space is limited.)
- Ensure that all development masterplans include the creation of high quality new open space / enhancement of existing open space, and access improvements to inform Section 76 developer contribution agreements.
- Continue to provide facilities that encourage participation in sport and recreation (dog walking, running, cycling, active play etc.)
- Develop a programme of activity focused on using green open spaces to improve health and wellbeing.

2. Provide exciting, active and inclusive places for children and young people's play and recreation in both equipped and natural settings

- Address the gaps in opportunities for formal play, identified in the Play Strategy, ensuring at all communities have access to fixed play provision catering for children and teenagers of all ages, close to where they live.
- Ensure that all play facilities are fit for purpose, well-resourced / managed and meet the needs of the community, catering for people of all abilities.
- Identify and create opportunities for natural and informal play in existing parks, open spaces and semi-natural spaces.
- Work with communities and stakeholders and the education sector to encourage more outdoor learning.

3. Support and encourage access to high quality green open space close to where people live that meets the needs of different ages, abilities and backgrounds

- Continue to maintain, invest and source funding to keep our open spaces, play and sports facilities well maintained.
- Actively support the development of a sustainable approach to the management and promotion of all types of open space.
- Ensure the development of existing and new open spaces applies good design principles to create safe, well lit spaces, which have good levels of natural surveillance and linkages.
- Facilitate involvement in the management of open spaces by partnership working with Friends' groups and community groups.
- Continue to provide and fund a range of community events and activities in our open spaces.
- Promote the use of open spaces through the provision of walking/cycling maps, open space connections and blue/green networks.
- Provide recreation opportunities for all ages and abilities, including addressing the specific needs of older people.

4. Safeguard key tourism, heritage and recreation assets, reinforcing local identity and civic pride

- Recognise the importance of our high quality parks and open spaces (e.g. Lisburn Castle Gardens, Wallace Park, Moat Park and Hillsborough Forest) as part of the tourism offer of the area.
- Explore opportunities along Lisburn's Lagan Corridor for extending access and circulation to the towpath and the wider river and canal environs that have the potential to become an attraction for tourists and residents alike.
- In partnership with stakeholder and community groups, seek to plan and fund the restoration of heritage assets in open spaces.
- Celebrate the heritage value and culture of our heritage parks through the encouragement of community events, guided heritage walks and civic celebrations.

5. Protect and enhance the natural environment, helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change and reduce and prevent biodiversity loss

- Protect and manage the existing open space networks to enhance native biodiversity, support wildlife, provide measures to mitigate climate change and meet the objectives of the LBAP.
- Develop planning policies and management practices that protect sensitive habitats and areas of ecological importance.
- Work with Northern Ireland Water's 'Living with Water Programme' (LwWP) to identify opportunities to manage drainage and reduce flood risk, for example through SuDS schemes.
- Identify opportunities to diversify existing landscapes (e.g. woodlands, wetlands and grasslands) to support a variety of plant and animal species.
- Extend urban green networks through the 'greening up' of buildings and civic spaces and the planting of street trees.
- Identify opportunities to adopt more sustainable maintenance

methods (e.g. wildflower planting, composting, tree management).

- Work to educate our future generations, grow capacity within our communities and encourage active participation to enhance our environment.

6. Promote opportunities for sustainable travel through greater connectivity of green open spaces

- Identify specific opportunities within neighbourhoods to enhance and improve access to existing open spaces through the development of a Blue / Green Network Strategy, identifying missing path links and potential upgrades of existing routes.
- Improve the legibility of open spaces which support walking, cycling and wheeling as a means of getting around, through the provision of networks of high quality paths and infrastructure (e.g. path surface, lighting, signage and street furniture).
- Continue to work in partnership with Sustrans, Lagan Valley Regional Park, Lagan Navigation Trust and the Department for Infrastructure to develop the Strategic Greenways and strategic path routes (e.g. West Lisburn to Moira Greenway, Carryduff Greenway, Comber Greenway, Lagan Towpath).
- Creation of new paths and linkages, either through:
 - Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983 (Public Path Creation Agreement or Public Path Order)
 - Recreation and Youth Services (NI) Order 1986 (Permissive Paths)
- Promote opportunities for sustainable travel through development of Active Travel Networks to improve health and well-being support by reducing the need to travel by private car.
- Explore better linkages between communities and the large areas of open space within the countryside (e.g. Lagan Valley Regional Park, National Trust site at Lisnabreeny, access to Belfast Hills.)

6.0 Next Steps

6.1 Delivery of the Action Plan

The Open Space Audit has been used to inform the Action Plan recommendations and will inform area-based working, prioritisation and planning.

The Action Plan will be reviewed on a two yearly cycle, identifying the tasks required for implementation of the Strategy, in conjunction with Service Plans and the Community Plan. A mid-term review of the Open Space Strategy will be undertaken, along with stakeholder and community consultation on the selection of priority projects.

6.2 Working with Communities

The Strategy will aim to achieve effective community involvement through consultation, encouraging a sense of public 'ownership' and stewardship, through involvement in the design and management of major open space developments, ongoing improvements and specific open space issues. The Council will encourage and support the formation of local volunteer groups, such as "friends of" groups to support the enhancement of open spaces.

The Council will continue to support the use of open spaces by local groups and organisations for holding appropriate local events and activities. We will continue to promote within wider community education initiatives the awareness of the value and benefits of open spaces to help tackle anti-social behaviour and vandalism and reinforce community responsibility.

6.3 Partnership Working

Joint working between the public and the private sector will be promoted and could be facilitated through the Community Planning and Local Development Plan processes. Data sharing amongst public bodies and a partnership approach will allow a better understanding of public open space in the Council areas and enable opportunities and challenges to be identified.

6.4 Monitoring and Review

The Open Spaces (Green) Strategy will be delivered alongside our partners and stakeholders, with the council playing a key leadership and co-ordination role. The Action Plan will be monitored to review the implementation of the Strategy tasks and targets to inform a future review of the Open Spaces (Green) Strategy.

Although the strategy sets out what we intend to do over the next five years, some of the actions will be longer term and will be taken forward into the next delivery plan. We also recognise the importance of being flexible and adapting to new challenges and opportunities as they arise.