

Cemeteries and churchyards and green corridors

- 11.1 Cemeteries and Churchyards and Green Corridors are all types of open space recommended by the PPG17 Companion Guide for inclusion within a local audit and needs assessment.
- 11.2 For each of these typologies, it is not possible to produce a full range of quantity, quality and accessibility standards and as a consequence they have been included within the same section of this report.
- 11.3 Despite it being inappropriate to produce local standards for green corridors and cemeteries, they remain an important part of the open space network across the Borough. Indeed in many instances, creation/improvement of linkages between or to existing green spaces will be essential to address deficiencies.

Cemeteries and churchyards - introduction

- 11.4 This typology encompasses both churchyards contained within the walled boundary of a church and cemeteries outside the confines of a church. These include private burial grounds, local authority burial grounds and disused churchyards. Although the primary purpose of this type of open space is for burial of the dead and quiet contemplation, these sites frequently also have considerable value for the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity. Several cemeteries and churchyards are recognised as being of significant value in terms of biodiversity and conservation. Cemeteries and churchyards are also important in a historical context.
- 11.5 Some churchyards retain areas of unimproved grasslands and various other habitats. They can make a significant contribution to the provision of urban greenspace sometimes providing a sanctuary for wildlife in the urban settlements and often providing historic value to the more rural landscapes.
- 11.6 As churchyards can only exist where there is a church, the only form of provision standard that will be required is a qualitative one.
- 11.7 For Cemeteries, PPG17 Annex states "every individual cemetery has a finite capacity and therefore there is steady need for more of them. Indeed, many areas face a shortage of ground for burials. The need for graves, for all religious faiths, can be calculated from population estimates, coupled with details of the average proportion of deaths which result in a burial, and converted into a quantitative population-based provision standard." This will be returned to later in this section.

Figure 11.1 – Erith Cemetery



Cemeteries and churchyards –consultation

11.8 Consultation on churchyards and cemeteries in the Borough was undertaken through a variety of methods. The emerging findings, which contribute to the formation of the local quality standard and value assessment include:

- 54% of respondents to the household survey do not use churchyards and cemeteries. However, 16% of respondents use them more than once a month
- 51% of respondents to the household survey believe that the quality of churchyards and cemeteries is average, with a further 23% thinking that the quality is good.

Cemeteries and churchyards –current position

11.9 There are currently 20 churchyards and cemeteries located within Bexley. Six of these sites are closed ie full to capacity. The distribution of these sites is summarised below in Table 11.1.

11.10 London Borough of Bexley Council is a key provider of cemeteries in the Borough and is responsible for the management and maintenance of the majority of sites. Hillview and Sidcup are the only two cemeteries where new plots can be purchased. Based upon the current rate of burial it is estimated the Council is only able to meet demand for new graves for the next 15 to 20 years. In addition under section 1 of the Burials Act 1853 the Council is compelled to adopt the responsibility for all churchyards declared closed.

11.11 The management and maintenance of sites is a big challenge for the Council as is the provision of new burial plots on an ongoing basis.

Quantity

Table 11.1 Current provision of cemeteries and churchyards

| Cluster | Current Provision | Number of sites | Smallest site (Hectares) | Largest site (Hectares) |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Bexleyheath | 3.85 | 1 | 3.85 | 3.85 |
| Crayford | 6.35 | 4 | 0.50 | 2.75 |
| Erith | 11.47 | 6 | 0.14 | 4.24 |
| Sidcup | 1.98 | 4 | 0.33 | 0.61 |
| Thamesmead | 0.43 | 2 | 0.14 | 0.29 |
| Welling | 6.82 | 3 | 0.97 | 4.56 |
| Overall | 30.9 | 20 | 0.14 | 4.56 |

11.12 As Table 11.1 above highlights, 30.9 hectares is dedicated to the provision of cemeteries and churchyards across Bexley. However, 76% of this overall provision is ‘closed’ churchyards. Over one third of all provision is located in the Erith cluster (split across six sites).

Quality

11.13 The quality of each site has been assessed through a detailed site visit and the completion of a detailed pro forma. It is important to note that the quality score

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represents a snapshot in time and records only the quality of the site at the time of the site visit. The median score was 62%. The upper quartile level is equivalent to a score of 74%, and the lower quartile level is 59%.

- 11.14 Those cemeteries falling within the top quartile are listed in table 11.2 below. Full details of all scores achieved can be found in Appendix I.

Table 11.2 – The quality of cemeteries and churchyards across London Borough of Bexley

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| Above upper quartile | 74%+ | (89%) St Johns Church – Site ID 150 (79%) All Saints Church – Site ID 149 |
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- 11.15 Key issues arising from site visits with regards the current provision of cemeteries and churchyards include:
- there is a large variation in the quality of cemeteries and churchyard sites across the Borough that ranges from sites scoring 44% to 89%
 - four of the top five quality cemetery and churchyard sites are located in the Welling and Erith clusters
 - St Johns Church (Welling) and Our Lady of the Angels RC Church (Erith) are the highest scoring sites – achieving 87% and 89% respectively.

Cemeteries and churchyards - setting provision standards

- 11.16 PPG17 Annex states: "many historic churchyards provide important places for quiet contemplation, especially in busy urban areas, and often support biodiversity and interesting geological features. As such many can also be viewed as amenity green spaces. Unfortunately, many are also run-down and therefore it may be desirable to enhance them. As churchyards can only exist where there is a church, the only form of provision standard which will be required is a qualitative one."
- 11.17 For cemeteries, PPG 17 Annex states "every individual cemetery has a finite capacity and therefore there is steady need for more of them. Indeed, many areas face a shortage of ground for burials. The need for graves, for all religious faiths, can be calculated from population estimates, coupled with details of the average proportion of deaths which result in a burial, and converted into a quantitative population-based provision standard."
- 11.18 Analysis of recent statistics in London Borough of Bexley indicate that:
- the average number of deaths per year is 1750 (according the Registry Services, between 1700 and 1800 deaths are registered each year)
 - of these deaths, 473 resulted in a burial during 2007. This indicates that 27% of deaths resulted in a burial
 - based on population estimates of 218,307, this suggests that the number of burials per 1000 population would be 2.16. The required number of burial grounds for Bexley is therefore 2.16 per 1000 population.
- 11.19 In setting local standards for churchyards and cemeteries, it is only appropriate to set essential and desirable features based on site assessments and local consultation, taking into account any national or local standards. Full indication of consultation and justifications for the recommended local standards are provided within Appendix G.

Quality Standard (see Appendix G)

| Recommended standards | |
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| Local consultation, national guidance and best practice therefore suggest that the following features are essential and desirable to local residents: | |
| Essential | Desirable |
| Seating | Well kept grass |
| Footpaths | Flowers/trees |
| Clean/litter free | Litter bins |

Accessibility standards

11.20 With regards to accessibility there are no definitive national or local standards for cemeteries and churchyards. There is also no realistic requirement to set catchments for such typologies as provision is dependent upon appropriate opportunity.

Applying provision standards – identifying geographical areas

11.21 As highlighted, the need for graves for all religious faiths can be calculated using population estimates and death rates. The local standard that has been set will enable the Council to project the need for burial space across the Borough.

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| CC1 | Burial spaces within the borough are a finite resource that the Council will closely monitor supply and demand indicators so as to ensure appropriate measures can be taken in the future to safeguard adequate provision. |
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11.22 It is however important to consider the quality of the provision of cemeteries and churchyards and the value of the current provision and to strive to achieve the quality criteria set for all churchyards and cemetery sites.

11.23 Sites scoring well in terms of quality should be considered examples of good practice. Use of cemeteries for informal quiet contemplation should also be recognised.

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| CC2 | The quality of cemeteries is of paramount importance if sites are to be promoted as opportunities for rest and relaxation. Quality improvements should be made where required using the essential and desirable features as a guide. |
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10.1. The wildlife opportunities arising through the provision of cemeteries and churchyards are of particular importance. These sites can be part of important wildlife corridors. In addition to promoting and supporting the use of allotments from a recreational perspective, it is essential to capitalise on the opportunities that these sites offer in terms of biodiversity and habitat creation. Cemeteries and churchyards are a key feature of the local and regional biodiversity action plans and many sites are registered as being important in terms of local nature conservation.

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| CC3 | Stakeholders should recognise and promote the nature conservation value of closed cemeteries and churchyards and consider working towards developing more awareness of ecological management of cemeteries and churchyards. Conservation management agreements can be one way of implementing this. |
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11.24 In areas of limited open space provision (or where churchyards are the only open space type), churchyard and cemetery sites are of particular importance. In these areas, enhancement is particularly important to ensure local residents value them. Provision of cemeteries and churchyards in the Erith cluster, an area of lower open space provision, may therefore take on greater importance to residents.

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| CC4 | In areas of limited open space provision, churchyard and cemetery sites are of particular importance. Enhancements to the accessibility and quality should be prioritised in these areas. |
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Summary

11.25 Cemeteries and churchyards can be a significant open space provider in some areas and provide opportunities for recreation as well as wider benefits. The wider benefits of churchyards are key and it is wrong to place a value on churchyards and cemeteries focusing solely on quality and accessibility. In addition to offering a functional value, many cemeteries and churchyards have wider benefits including heritage, cultural and landscape values. Cemeteries are also important in a historical context.

11.26 Local standards for accessibility and quantity have not been set. Despite this, it remains important to consider the future delivery of cemeteries and churchyards anticipating future demand as well as assessing the current level of provision.

11.27 The essential and desirable features set within the local standards should guide the future development and improvement of cemeteries and churchyards across the London Borough of Bexley. The quality of cemeteries and churchyards in the Borough is currently rated as average, with 51% of respondents to the household survey thinking that the quality is average, however 23% of respondents also felt that the quality was good.

Green corridors – introduction

11.28 The Green Corridors typology encompasses towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines. Green corridors have a primary purpose of providing opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding whether for leisure purposes or travel and opportunities for wildlife migration.

11.29 In addition to providing recreational routes in their own right, green corridors play an important role in linking open spaces together, providing a green infrastructure network across the Borough. Green corridors are an important resource linking the urban areas with accessible countryside and nearby open land. This is also reflected in the draft Rights of Way Access and Improvement plan, which seeks to enhance access across the Borough.

Green corridors – consultation

11.30 Consultation on the provision of green corridors in London Borough of Bexley was undertaken through a variety of methods. The emerging findings include:

- 41% of respondents to the household survey use green corridors more than once a month, however 59% of residents use them rarely or not at all
- 40% of respondents to the household survey believe that the quality of green corridors is good, with a further 29% thinking that the quality is average
- residents at drop in sessions supported the enhancement of green corridors in Bexley. This was particularly the case in the Crayford cluster where residents felt that the riverside green corridor needed to be enhanced and maximised, thus providing a valuable link between other open spaces
- several comments alluded to the fact stop gaps along the riverside restricted the potential of this valuable stretch of green space. There was positive response to the efforts to maintain this green corridor, with evidence of regular cleaning and enhancing despite a perceived requirement for further funding.

Strategic context and current provision

- 11.31 Policies 3D.11 and 4C.4 of the London Plan promote the enhancement and development of green corridors stating specifically that:
- the Mayor will, and boroughs should, recognise the Blue Ribbon Network as contributing to the open space network of London. Where appropriate natural landscapes should be protected and enhanced. As part of Open Space Strategies, boroughs should identify potential opportunities alongside waterways for the creation and enhancement of open spaces
- 11.32 An integral part of the green corridor network within the London Borough of Bexley is the South East London Green Chain. Established in 1977, the South East London Green Chain links the Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich and Lewisham with a 40 mile network of walkways and footpaths incorporating nearly 300 Green Chain open spaces which include sites such as Lesnes Abbey. This green chain provides opportunities for recreational walks for residents, encourages the use of travel on foot and also creates wildlife corridors across the Borough. A total of 33 sites in London Borough of Bexley are included within the South East London green Chain.
- 11.33 The valuable role green chains serve in the urban environment is recognised in many strategic documents across Bexley. Such examples include:
- Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (policy G26) – the policy discusses the protection, conservation and enhancement of those features of the natural environment which contribute to the special character of London or of this part of London, including green chains and corridors
 - Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (policies ENV17 and ENV18) – specific reference to the South East London Green Chain indicates that the Council will seek to protect, conserve and enhance land that forms part of this chain as a recreational resource, visual amenity and area of nature conservation
 - Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (policy ENV26) – states that the Council will seek to enhance the value of linear routes in the Borough, such as riverside footpaths, strategic roads, railways and the Green Chain Walk, for nature conservation, amenity or landscape interest
 - the draft Public Rights of Way Access and Improvement Plan which seeks to improve access through the enhancement of Public Rights of Way.
- 11.34 Alongside this, Central Government's Greening the Gateway strategy promotes the role of green infrastructure in securing sustainable economic and social regeneration.

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The East London Green Grid (ELGG) is the agreed delivery mechanism for this strategy.

- 11.35 The ELGG Primer subdivides the east London sub region be divided into six areas each containing an individual framework. Area 5 contains Bexley, River Cray and the Southern Marshes.
- 11.36 Part of the Area Strategy vision includes strengthening the green links within Bexley and also those in the London Green Chain, Dartford and North Kent, with support given to investment and regeneration by creating accessible high quality open space.
- 11.37 One of the key Area Strategy objectives is to enhance the green infrastructure, providing essential links to green space by enhancing links along rivers, to neighbouring Borough's, within sites and to sites. On a wider level, attention will be paid to developing strong links with the South East London Green Chain and the Dartford Green Grid.
- 11.38 Projects are planned to enhance the local area through access to green spaces, primarily focussing on the River Cray, Erith Marshes and Crayford Marshes which are all located in close proximity to Thamesmead East, North End and Erith wards – some of the most deprived wards in the Borough.
- 11.39 Reducing open space deficiency is a further objective of the Area Strategy, recommendations include creating new linear links, developing sites for community use and enhancing under used sites with little biodiversity or leisure value. These priorities are also reflected throughout these documents.
- 11.40 Identified within the Area Strategy is the planned future regeneration, a fundamental part of which is the green network and residents links to open spaces;
- Erith is a focus for major regeneration – with the Erith Western Gateway project incorporating redevelopment of the town and the building of several hundred new homes. Due to its location, the future proposals intend to integrate the town with the river
 - Crayford will see public investment of circa £2million to improve the environment of the town centre, with major change planned for the riverside. This work will build upon the ongoing improvements in access, biodiversity and naturalisation of the River Cray
 - Thamesmead will see the ongoing estate renewal of Tavy Bridge, bringing over 800 new homes, sports facilities and a library by 2014
 - alongside long term plans for the renewal of Larner Road housing estate and Howbury site within Slade Green, the area has been boosted by a successful funding bid for Erith Yacht Club, which will see sailing opportunities for local residents increase.
- 11.41 As highlighted within the Area Strategy Vision, if these plans for future built development are to be successful...."the quality of, and accessibility to, the green environment is an essential factor in attracting new businesses and residents, and in sustaining a stable population for the future."
- 11.42 The vision of the green chain strategy Area 6, which also includes Bexley is to improve connectivity to the Thames from the Southern Ridge green spaces and river corridors to create a joined up, attractive network of green spaces and walks. The key priorities of the green chain strategy are linked strongly with the recommendations of this document and include:

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- nature – to conserve and enhance the character, biodiversity and ecological linkage of open spaces
 - use – to improve the use of Green Chain Plus and open spaces
 - climate change – to improve the resilience of the local environment to climate change
 - access – to improve physical and cultural access for communities, enhance linkages with public and sustainable transport and create connections with London’s wider green space network and the River Thames
 - connect – to enhance access and movement within public open spaces in the Green Chain Plus area
 - safety – to enhance the safety of open spaces in the Green Chain area.
 - quality – to achieve sustainable and resource efficient design excellence in the restoration and enhancement of Green Chain Plus spaces
 - regeneration – to realise the potential of the green infrastructure in securing sustainable development and to increase the cycling capacity of the green environment
 - to provide new areas of public open space and nature conservation sites in areas of deficiency
 - heritage – to ensure the protection, enhancement and promotion of the historic character and built heritage of the Green Chain.
- 11.43 The importance of the role of the River Thames is recognised within the Green Grid Strategy, and within many other local and regional strategic documents. The Thames is particularly important in terms of nature conservation and biodiversity and is also central to regeneration plans for the Borough.
- 11.44 Policy TA12 of the UDP states that the council aims to maximise the potential of the Thames through the promotion of water based activities and river walks. The River Thames is also an important part of the blue ribbon network, a policy area of the London Plan.. The London Plan promotes the use of the waterways for leisure, passenger and tourist traffic, and the transport of freight and general goods. The River Cray is also included within this network.
- 11.45 The plan promotes the sustainable use of the river corridors and highlights the importance of protecting and improving provision of sport and recreation opportunities. Increased environmental recreation in and around river corridors will be central to the development of London Borough of Bexley in forthcoming years.
- 11.46 Currently within Bexley the River Thames provides a number of sporting and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Sport and recreation activities that already occur on the Thames include rowing, sailing and other water sports.
- 11.47 Walking and cycling is also popular along the River Thames. Green corridors also provide important routes for horse riding, an issue evident in the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- 11.48 In addition to the linear routes such as public rights of way within Bexley, there are 24 spaces considered to green corridors. These fulfil secondary roles of natural and semi natural open space in many instances and link open spaces with residential neighbourhoods.

11.49 Site assessments suggested that the quality of green corridors is poorer than any other type of open space, with scores ranging from 48% to 68%. A full breakdown of scores is provided in Appendix I.

Green corridors - setting provision standards

Quantity standard

11.50 The Annex A of PPG17 – Open Space Typology states:

*“the need for Green Corridors arises from the need to promote environmentally sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling within urban areas. This means that **there is no sensible way of stating a provision standard**, just as there is no way of having a standard for the proportion of land in an area which it will be desirable to allocate for roads”.*

11.51 It is therefore recommended that no provision standard should be set. PPG17 goes onto to state that:

“Instead planning policies should promote the use of green corridors to link housing areas to the Sustrans national cycle network, town and city centres, places of employment and community facilities such as schools, shops, community centres and sports facilities. In this sense green corridors are demand-led. However, planning authorities should also take opportunities to use established linear routes, such as disused railway lines, roads or canal and river banks, as green corridors, and supplement them by proposals to ‘plug in’ access to them from as wide an area as possible”.

Accessibility standard

11.52 There is no requirement to set catchments for green corridors as they cannot be easily influenced through planning policy and implementation. The draft Public Rights of Way Access and Improvement Plan has already commenced accessibility mapping and will highlight areas of priority.

Quality standard

11.53 In setting local standards for green corridors, it is only appropriate to set essential and desirable features based on site assessments and consultation, taking into account any national or local standards. Full indication of consultation and justifications for the recommended local standards are provided within Appendix G. The recommended local standard has been summarised below.

Quality Standard (see appendix G)

| Recommended standards | |
|---|------------------|
| Local consultation, national guidance and best practice therefore suggest that the following features are essential and desirable to local residents: | |
| Essential | Desirable |
| Clean/Litter Free | Litter Bins |
| Footpaths | Level Surface |
| Nature Features | Flowers/Trees |

Applying provision standards

- 11.54 Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards. It is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency or need.
- 11.55 The aim is to provide an integrated network of high quality green corridors linking open spaces together and opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport. As discussed, areas of Bexley can also be enhanced through improved access to open spaces in close proximity. These priorities are recognised within the typology specific Sections 4 - 10.

Summary and recommendations

- 11.56 Green corridors are an integral element of Bexley's future plans as identified in the Area Strategy of the ELGG. These incorporate new linear links to proposed regeneration and development in areas such as Erith, Crayford and Thamesmead.
- 11.57 Part of the Area Strategy vision looks to strengthen the regional green links, specifically those within the London Green Chain, Dartford and North Kent. On a more localised level, discussion focuses on the positive impact improved access to green spaces can have, particularly in deprived areas. Specific examples such as River Cray, Erith Marshes and Crayford Marshes which are all located in close proximity to Thamesmead East, North End and Erith wards have been identified. The draft Public Rights of Way Access and Improvement Plan also seeks to address these issues through improvements to the public rights of way network.
- 11.58 Further emphasis on the importance of green corridors is identified through Bexley's inclusion in the South East London Green Chain alongside Bromley, Greenwich and Lewisham. This strategy aims to improve and develop the green infrastructure of the region through effective linkages. 33 spaces in Bexley are contained within the green chain.
- 11.59 Future development needs to build upon the vision and objectives identified in the ELGG Area Strategy encompassing linkages between large areas of open space, creating opportunities to develop the green corridor network and utilise potential development sites. With any development considering both the needs of wildlife and humans.
- 11.60 A network of multi-functional greenspace will contribute to the high quality natural and built environment required for existing and new sustainable communities in the future. An integrated network of high quality green corridors will link open spaces, helping to alleviate other open space deficiencies and provide opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport.
- 11.61 The River Thames contributes to the achievement of a number of objectives in the borough, including regeneration and nature conservation. The role of the river, and the potential for the further development of this role in terms of recreation is also evident. Integration of the River with the rest of the Borough and the promotion of the benefits the river offers should be a key priority of the Council. Close liaison and partnership working with the Port of London Authority and other key agencies will be required.

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| GC1 | Actions arising from the Area Strategy of the ELGG regarding the use and development of green corridors should be implemented in conjunction with recommendations from the open space study. There should be a focus on involving community groups to help contribute to, enhance and maximise the provision of |
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| | green corridors. |
| GC2 | Linking existing green corridors with open spaces in the Borough should be a key priority for the Council. This will provide opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport, using all types of open spaces. This priority links with the key findings of the draft Public Rights of Way Access and Improvement Plan. |
| GC3 | Access to open spaces should be improved through the use of green corridors, thus helping to enhance areas of Bexley, particularly the River Cray, River Shuttle, Erith Marshes and Crayford Marshes which are located in close proximity to Thamesmead East, North End and Erith wards – some of the most deprived wards in the Borough. |
| GC4 | Protect and enhance the green corridors, which help to make up the South East London Green Chain. |
| GC5 | Providers of green corridors in London Borough of Bexley should aspire to the essential and desirable quality features. |
| GC6 | Continue to develop the River Thames as a recreational and environmental resource while protecting the rich biodiversity and habitats evident in the area. |