

Natural and semi natural provision

Definition

- 5.1 Natural and semi natural open space includes woodlands, urban forestry, scrubland, grasslands (eg downlands, commons, meadows, grazing marshes), wetlands, nature reserves and wastelands. Sites offer significant opportunities for wildlife conservation and biodiversity as well as providing recreational opportunities for local residents. Achieving an appropriate balance between recreational use and the maximisation of biodiversity is an ongoing challenge.
- 5.2 To an extent, natural and semi natural open space offers similar recreational functions to more formal parks and there are many interrelationships between the two types of open space.
- 5.3 In light of the multidimensional nature of parks in Bexley, many contain vast elements of natural and semi natural open space. Although natural areas falling within the larger formal parks have been classified as parks, their role in maximising access to natural open space will be discussed within this section and it is essential to consider the provision of the two similar types of open space both in isolation and in the context of each other.
- 5.4 This section outlines the strategic context and key consultation findings relating to natural and semi natural open space and then details the recommended local standards. The application of these standards highlights priorities for the future delivery of natural and semi natural open space across the London Borough of Bexley.
- 5.5 There are a number of regional and local documents that refer to the importance of natural and semi natural open space. The key issues arising from these documents and the links with this study are set out in Table 5.1 overleaf.

Figure 5.1 – Crayford Marshes



Table 5.1 – Regional and Local Strategic Context

Document Reviewed	Summary of key strategic drivers	Links to open space strategy and PPG17 assessment
<p>Mayor of London – Biodiversity Strategy (2002)</p>	<p>The objective of the strategy is to ensure that all Londoners have access to wildlife and natural green spaces. The strategy aims to maintain and increase access.</p> <p>The strategy recognises that biodiversity and conservation is an essential part of sustainable development.</p> <p>The key elements of the strategy with specific relevance to this study include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy 1 of the strategy states that The Mayor will work with partners to protect, manage and enhance London’s biodiversity • Proposals 1 and 2 suggest that Boroughs should give strong protection to Sites of Metropolitan, Borough and Local Importance for Nature Conservation • Proposal 3 recommends Boroughs resist development that will have an adverse effect on protected species • Proposal 4 states that when development is permitted the Borough should seek compensation to reduce the effects • Proposal 5 suggests Boroughs take into account wildlife habitats and biodiversity when considering planning applications • Proposal 6 recommends the Borough should identify opportunities to create, manage and enhance wildlife habitats and the natural environment • Proposal 19 states Boroughs should protect and enhance the Blue Ribbon Network • Proposal 27 states The Mayor will work with strategic partners to manage and enhance biodiversity value in parks and green spaces • Proposal 28 encourages the management of cemeteries and churchyards for the enjoyment of nature • Proposal 30 states The Mayor will work with Boroughs to encourage greater use of allotments. 	<p>Accessibility mapping will identify areas that do not have access to natural and semi natural open space and facilitate improved access in these areas.</p> <p>The study will guide the protection and enhancement of natural areas, MOL and Sites of Metropolitan, Borough and Local Importance for Nature Conservation.</p>

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Document Reviewed	Summary of key strategic drivers	Links to open space strategy and PPG17 assessment
Bexley Unitary Development Plan (2004)	<p>The key policies relating to the provision of natural and semi natural open space in Bexley include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy ENV16 states the Council will enhance recreational activities and take action in areas such as MOL to conserve and enhance the landscape, promote nature conservation and provide suitable screening from built development • Policy ENV18 states the Council will take action in the Green Chain to conserve and enhance the landscape, promote nature conservation and provide visual screening • Policy ENV23 states the council will resist developments that will damage or destroy habitats in nature reserves or Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation as shown in the proposals map will not be permitted • Policy ENV24 protects Sites of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation from development • Policy ENV25 states the Council will conserve, protect and enhance Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation • Policy ENV27 encourages the creation of sites for nature conservation • Policy ENV28 forbids development in Local Nature Reserves that will damage the preservation of the area • Policies ENV32 and ENV33 protect Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) and adjoining land from development. 	The study recognises the importance of nature conservation and will protect these sites from development.
Local Development Framework – Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper.	One of the key objectives and issues of the strategy is to protect and improve the natural environment.	The study will provide evidence for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment through the application of local standards.
Bexley Sustainable Design and Construction Guide (SPD) (Adopted October 2007)	<p>Guidance seven covers biodiversity and states that for all new developments, the Design for Biodiversity sequential tests should be applied, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain, enhance or create features of nature conservation value and avoid harm • mitigate for impacts to features of nature conservation value 	The study recognises the importance of biodiversity and will seek to protect, enhance and create areas of nature conservation.

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Document Reviewed	Summary of key strategic drivers	Links to open space strategy and PPG17 assessment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compensation for the loss of features of nature conservation value. 	
Bexley Parks Strategy	<p>Taking account of the sustainable needs of the environment and wider community is a key element of the parks strategy. The strategy promotes diversity in provision – this includes the provision of natural and semi natural open spaces within wider parks environments.</p> <p>The parks strategy has a clear commitment to wildlife protection.</p> <p>One of the eight key aims of the strategy is to conserve and enhance the natural environment and ecological balance in parks.</p>	Open space can contribute to the sustainable needs of the environment and wider community. This study will guide the protection and enhancement of natural and semi natural open space in the Borough.
Bexley Biodiversity Action Plan	<p>The action plan focuses on the conservation of biodiversity in Bexley. The plan supports the Council's six key aims and has a number of habitat action plans relating to open space, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allotments – the aims of the plan are to make Bexley's allotments sustainable, increase the uptake of allotments and encourage the keeping of biodiversity records • parks and open spaces – the plan aims to encourage the public to get involved in their local park, encourage a greater diversity and abundance of flora and fauna within parks and to provide local people and schools with regular contact with nature. 	The importance of biodiversity, particularly within natural and semi natural open space is recognised. This study will guide the protection of natural and semi natural open space.
Bexley Trees and Woodland Strategy	<p>The objectives of the strategy are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide for and encourage the sustainable management of trees and woodland in the Borough • manage the existing provision through best practice for the objectives of nature conservation, landscape and environmental benefits • promote a greater interest, awareness and enjoyment of trees and woodland by the public • promote the economic and amenity value of trees and woodland in the Borough • provide or encourage the expansion of tree cover in the Borough • protect trees and woodland that provide amenity, landscape, nature conservation or historical value. 	Trees and woodlands contribute to the overall network of open space and wildlife corridors.

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Document Reviewed	Summary of key strategic drivers	Links to open space strategy and PPG17 assessment
<p>Managing the Marshes Vision and Strategy Summary Report (2006)</p>	<p>The aims of the strategy are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outline a 10 year vision and strategic plan • prepare framework plans for Erith and Crayford/Dartford Marshes • inform the next phases of implementation. <p>The three core values of the marshes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the marshes should be a place for biodiversity to flourish • the marshes should contribute to the area's prosperity in terms of economy as well as people's health and wellbeing • the marshes should be a place for existing communities and future generations to use. <p>There are eight visionary objectives of the strategy, those of importance to this study are that the marshes can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be a place where communities feel linked • be provide and protect a setting for economic and community growth • be a place where natural and cultural heritage is protected • deliver high quality design standards with environmental focus. 	<p>The management plan for the marshes will ensure that recreational use is balanced with the promotion of biodiversity. Increasing access to the marshes will be key in the delivery of improved open spaces for local residents.</p>
<p>The River Cray Environmental Regeneration Programme 2004 - 2006</p>	<p>Two of the six key objectives of the strategy are biodiversity and environment.</p>	<p>Enhancement of the River Cray will allow increased access to natural and semi natural open space.</p>
<p>East London Green Grid Area 5 Bexley Framework, River Cray and Southern Marshes Final Draft</p>	<p>Two of the strategic objectives of the area framework are to develop a vision for the inner Thames marshes conservation park and enhance biodiversity.</p> <p>Enhancing the green infrastructure within the Borough is also one of the key objectives of the area strategy, which stresses the need to develop links with the South East London Green Chain and the Dartford Green Grid.</p>	<p>The study supports the vision for the East London Green Grid. Improving the accessibility to open spaces is a key aim of the study and regional priorities will contribute to the achievement of the key aims and objectives of this study.</p> <p>The study will identify areas deficient in open space and aim to reduce these deficiencies.</p> <p>The study will improve access to natural and semi natural open space through the application of the accessibility standards.</p>

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Document Reviewed	Summary of key strategic drivers	Links to open space strategy and PPG17 assessment
<p>Bexley Talk Back Survey 2006 – Parks and Open Spaces</p>	<p>22% of respondents stated they visit natural green spaces at least once a month. 22% also indicated they visit less than monthly.</p> <p>The majority of respondents to the survey felt the provision of natural green space was about right (57%). However, 23% felt provision was insufficient.</p> <p>63% of residents were at least satisfied with the quality of natural green spaces in the Borough.</p> <p>The most common travel method used to access natural green spaces was walking (29%). 25% of respondents also use the car to access this typology.</p> <p>When accessing a natural green space, travel times were split between 10 minutes (25%), 5 minutes (21%) and 15 minutes (17%).</p>	

Assessing local needs - consultation

- 5.6 Consultation undertaken as part of the study highlighted the following key issues:
- there was a general perception that open spaces in general are being lost to development. This was perceived to increase the value of key sites such as Footh Cray Meadows, Hall Place, Lesnes Abbeywood and East Wickham Open Space (all Green Flag Award Winners 2007/08)
 - 35% of respondents to the household survey felt that the quality of natural sites was good, with 35% also rating these types of open space average
 - the most satisfied residents were those in the Sidcup cluster where 39% felt that the quality of the sites was good
 - residents at drop in sessions highlighted the ecological benefits gained from natural open space. It was felt that these areas (Footh Cray Meadows, East Wickham Open Space, Burstled Woods) need to be maintained, as they are well used and valued by local residents for recreational use – this raises the challenge of balancing biodiversity with recreation
 - attendees at drop in sessions praised the quality of natural open spaces across the Borough. However, safety and security was a concern, primarily through the threat of gangs of youths. This detracted a number for residents from using open spaces at certain times of the day
 - the household survey reveals that 58% of people would **expect** to walk to natural and semi natural areas as opposed to 33% who would expect to drive. Of those users who visit natural and semi natural open spaces more often than any other typology in the study 76% **currently** walk
 - there were some concerns at drop in sessions that some natural open space was being neglected and used inappropriately, predominantly by motorbikes and trail bikes. It was therefore suggested that there is restricted access to open spaces for this use.

Assessing the current provision of natural and semi natural open space in Bexley

- 5.7 Natural and semi natural open space across London Borough of Bexley falls under a variety of ownerships. While many sites are publicly owned and managed under the remit of the Council, several sites across the Borough are private, but permit public access.
- 5.8 Four sites across London Borough of Bexley have recently been designated as Local Nature Reserves (LNR) including an area of Danson Park, Lesnes Abbey Wood, Crossness and Footscray Meadows.
- 5.9 In addition, there are several sites of significant value for nature importance and conservation in Bexley.
- 5.10 Areas of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (AMINC) are those sites which contain the best examples of London's habitats, rare species, rare assemblages of species, important populations of species or which are of particular significance within large areas of otherwise built-up London. They are of the highest priority for protection. Sites falling into this category include:
- Lesnes Abbey Woods
 - The River Thames

- Erith Marshes (Crossness)
- Foots Cray Meadows and the River Cray
- Crayford Marshes
- M118 Joydens Wood and Chalk Wood (Including Gattons Plantation)

Sites of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation

5.11 Sites of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation (SBINC) are those that are important in a borough perspective. The following sites have been identified as being of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation by the London Ecology Unit.

- Crossness
- Franks Park
- Erith Quarry
- Hollyhill open space
- Sidcup Golf Course and Lamorbey Lake
- Danson Park
- Bexley Woods
- Rochester Way Golf Course
- Queen Mary's Hospital Grounds
- Home Wood and Bunkers Hill Ponds
- Dryden Road open land and Woodlands Farm
- Blackfen Woods
- Southmere Park
- Rutland Shaw
- Bursted Wood open space
- Martens Grove
- Hall Place (north) to Shenstone Park
- The Warren
- The River Shuttle and Wyncham Stream
- Mount Mascall Farm
- Caveys Spring
- Churchfield Wood
- The Old Orchard (The Gun Club)
- Slade Green Triangle
- Slade Green Recreation Ground
- Crayford landfill area

Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation

5.12 A Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC) is one that is, or may be, of particular value to nearby residents or schools. These sites may already be used by schools for nature study or run by management committees composed mainly of local people. Sites in London Borough of Bexley considered to be of local importance for Nature Conservation include:

- Rectory Lane Pond
- East Wickham open space
- Barnehurst Golf Course
- St. Mary's Cemetery (Old Bexley)
- The Hollies nature area
- Sidcup Place
- Crossway Park and Tump 52
- Streamway and Chapman's Land

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- Belmont Primary School nature garden
- Waterhead Estate Rough
- Edendale Rough
- St. Paulinus Churchyard, Crayford
- Hoblands Wood
- Land between A2 and Rochester Drive.

Quantity of provision

5.13 The quantity of provision of natural and semi natural open space in London Borough of Bexley is summarised in Table 5.2 overleaf. These calculations exclude natural areas provided as part of larger park and gardens sites, which have been classified under the umbrella of parks in light of the multi dimensional nature of these facilities. Only sites where the primary purpose is natural and semi natural open space are included. In addition to sites included below, there are 20 local parks which have a secondary natural and semi natural open space function.

Table 5.2 – Provision of natural and semi natural open space across London Borough of Bexley

Clusters	Current provision	Smallest site (hectares)	Largest site (Hectares)	Provision per 1000 of the current population	Scenario 1 Provision per 1000	Scenario 2a Provision per 1000	Scenario 2b Provision per 1000	Scenario 3a Provision per 1000	Scenario 3b Provision per 1000
Bexleyheath	0.39	0.18	0.21	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Crayford	206.24	0.14	32.3	10.14	8.82	8.23	8.31	7.70	8.31
Erith	127.05	0.12	46.05	3.07	2.62	2.56	2.06	2.47	1.86
Sidcup	113	0.27	31.44	3.70	2.20	2.23	2.29	2.14	2.29
Thamesmead	105.37	0.61	49.3	2.51	2.76	2.90	2.90	2.90	2.81
Welling	10.05	10.05	10.05	0.20	0.22	0.23	0.23	0.22	0.23
Overall	564.1	0.14	49.3	2.58	2.35	2.35	2.26	2.27	2.19

5.14 The key issues emerging from Table 5.2 and consultations relating to the quantity of provision of natural and semi natural open space across the Borough include:

- as shown in Table 5.2 the overall level of provision equates to 564ha, however, this appears to be split unevenly across the clusters with Crayford, Erith, Sidcup and Thamesmead all containing in excess of 100ha, as opposed to the Bexleyheath and Welling cluster which contain less than 10% of this figure. These figures however are not representative of the actual spread of natural open spaces, as both Danson Park and East Wickham Open Space contain natural and semi natural open space. This reflects the objective of providing a diverse range of parks and other open spaces

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- the variation in distribution of natural and semi natural open space is reinforced by the findings of the household survey. While 46% feel that there is sufficient natural and semi natural open space, 51% indicate that there is not enough
- findings from the household survey reiterate the figures from Table 5.2, with 59% of residents within the Crayford cluster stating the level of provision is about right, the highest of all the clusters. This is reflected in the analysis of current provision, where it can be seen that the current provision per 1000 population is greatest in the Crayford cluster (10 ha). The lowest provision can be found in the Welling cluster (0.19 ha per 1000 population)
- the current provision per 1000 in Bexley is 2.58 ha. Based on Scenario 1 growth strategy this is expected to decrease to 2.34 ha by 2026. In the event of the high growth scenarios, provision will fall to 2.18 ha per 1000 population.

Setting provision standards – quantity

- 5.15 The recommended local quantity standard for natural and semi natural spaces has been summarised overleaf. Full justification for the local standard is provided within Appendix E. This local standard is based on the key findings of consultations, which indicate that natural and semi natural open space is important to residents, and there is an emphasis on enhancing the quantity of provision and access to sites, as well as maintaining the quality.
- 5.16 The recommended standard of provision is set based on the existing population. Multiplication of this standard for each of the growth scenarios will enable identification of areas of potential surplus and deficiency generated by population growth and will also inform the amount of new natural and semi natural open space that should be provided.

Quantity Standard (see appendices F and I – standards and justification, worksheet and calculator)

Existing level of provision	Recommended standard
2.58ha per 1000	2.60ha per 1000
Justification	
<p>The value placed on natural and semi natural open space is clear, both in terms of the recreational resource these spaces offer and the role that natural areas play in biodiversity and conservation. While the household survey reveals a split in opinion between those who perceive there to be insufficient natural areas and those who are satisfied with current levels of provision, the findings of all other consultations emphasised the importance of the protection of existing provision from development.</p> <p>Proposal 6 of the Mayor of London’s Biodiversity Strategy supports the opportunity for the creation of natural and semi natural open space. Therefore in consideration of this strategy and local consultation findings, which indicate dissatisfaction with the current provision and concern regarding recent development, it is suggested the local standard is set slightly higher than the existing level of provision.</p> <p>Setting the standard at a slightly higher level will allow the Council to identify opportunities for new provision, but also focus on the protection and enhancement of existing sites within the Borough. A challenging local accessibility standard has been set to increase accessibility to natural and semi natural open space, supporting the key aims of the Mayor of London’s Biodiversity Strategy.</p>	

Quality of provision

- 5.17 The quality of existing natural and semi natural open space in the Borough was assessed through site visits and is set out in Table 5.3 overleaf. It is important to note that site assessments are conducted as a snapshot in time and are therefore reflective of the quality of the site on one specific day.
- 5.18 Site assessments were not conducted to private sites. In addition to sites detailed overleaf, natural areas which are part of larger areas (including Danson Park and Lesnes Abbey) are considered within the parks section due to the multifunctionality of the site.
- 5.19 A full explanation of the quality assessment matrix used can be found in Appendix C. The full rationale behind this approach is set out in Appendix G.

Table 5.3 – Quality of natural and semi natural open space across London Borough of Bexley

Cluster	Range of quality scores (%)	Average quality scores (%)	Lowest quality sites	Highest quality sites
Bexleyheath				
Crayford		65		Rutland Shaw
Erith				
Sidcup	33-71	74	Oakley Park Wood	Chalk Wood
Thamesmead	59-79	69	Streamway	Crossway Lake
Welling	-	-	-	-
Overall	33-79	62	Oakley Park Wood	Crossway Lake

- 5.20 The key issues emerging from Table 5.3 and the consultation relating to the quality of natural and semi natural open space are:
- although the average score is consistent across the Borough, the range of scores received vary from 33 – 79. This indicates that there are significant differences in the quality of natural areas. It must be noted that several important natural areas in the Borough are excluded from consideration in this table, due to their wider functions. This was explained in Section 4
 - findings from the household survey show a split in the perception of the quality of natural and semi-natural areas, with 53% of respondents indicating that the quality is good/very good while 46% state the quality is average/poor
 - residents at drop in sessions highlighted the ecological benefits from natural open space. It was felt that these areas (Foots Cray Meadows, East Wickham, Bursted Woods) need to be maintained, as they are well used and valued by local residents for recreational use as well as providing conservation and biodiversity benefits
 - some attendees at drop in sessions were concerned that open space was being misused, which was subsequently detracting residents from visiting certain sites (eg mountain biking at Bursted Woods). Like other types of open space, vandalism and graffiti was perceived to be the key issue at natural and semi natural open spaces
 - safety was a concern for some residents when walking in natural open space due to a lack of security and on site maintenance

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- it can therefore be concluded that quality of natural and semi natural open spaces is of particular importance to local residents.

Setting provision standards – quality

- 5.21 The recommended local quality vision for natural and semi natural open space has been summarised overleaf. Full justification for the local standard is provided within Appendix G. This standard is based on the key findings of local consultations. The desire for footpaths links strongly with the draft Public Rights of Way Access and Improvement Plan.

Quality Standard (see appendix G)

Recommended standard – NATURAL AND SEMI NATURAL OPEN SPACE	
Based on the calculated quality scores from detailed site assessments all natural and semi natural open space should aspire to achieve a quality score of 66%.	
Local consultation, national guidance and best practice therefore suggest that the following features are essential and desirable to local residents:	
Essential	Desirable
Nature Features	Clean/Litter Free
Flowers/Trees	Good Access
Footpaths.	Dog Bins

The quality of existing sites

- 5.22 The application of the 75th percentile standard (set at a score of 66% on the site assessment for natural and semi natural open space) provides an indication of the desired level of quality suggested at each site and enables a comparison at sites across the Borough. Sites falling into the top quartile are set out in Table 5.4 below. Benchmarking scores can be found in appendix J, enabling comparisons against other types of open space. A full list of site scores can be found in the natural and semi natural section of Appendix I.

Table 5.4 – Selection of quality assessment results for natural and semi-natural provision

Above upper quartile	66%+	(79%) Crossway Lake – Site ID 47 (71%) Chalk Wood – Site ID 38
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- 5.23 The key issues emerging from Table 5.4 include:
- two sites scored highly (including Crossway Lake – Site ID 47) and can be considered to be excellent examples of good practice
 - the average quality score for natural and semi natural sites in Bexley is 60%. Given that this is lower than some other typologies, this highlights the need for qualitative improvements to this typology in the Borough. As previously highlighted, this should be considered with caution as some high quality natural and semi natural open spaces are evaluated within Section 4, parks
 - the aspiration should be for all natural and semi natural areas to achieve 66%, the score required to fall within the top quartile

- there were few general issues arising from the findings of the site assessments for natural and semi natural open spaces with the majority appearing to be well managed and maintained. Greater opportunities for enhancement were identified in smaller sites across the Borough.

Setting provision standards – accessibility

- 5.24 The accessibility of sites is paramount in maximising usage as well as providing an opportunity for all people to use the site. The recommended local standard is set in the form of a distance threshold and is derived directly from the findings of the local consultations.
- 5.25 Site specific accessibility issues were also analysed as part of the site visits where information and signage, transport and general access issues were assessed.
- 5.26 Consultation and analysis has shown that the key issues with regards to accessibility are:
- 13% of respondents use natural and semi natural open space more frequently than any other open space in Bexley. Within this group of regular users, walking is the most common method of travel used to access this typology (76%)
 - the majority of respondents to the household survey expect to walk to a natural and semi natural open space (58%). 33% of residents would prefer to drive
 - 75% of residents would be prepared to travel on foot for up to 15 minutes to access this typology. Findings within three of the six clusters are consistent with the overall responses, however residents in the Thamesmead and Welling clusters would be prepared to travel slightly longer to access a natural and semi natural site (18 and 20 minutes)
 - residents at drop in sessions felt that they were willing to travel further to access some of the larger sites across the Borough (in particular Foots Cray Meadows). A major objective and target of the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy is to provide better access to natural places in London. The strategy assessed natural and semi natural open spaces perceived to be accessible to local residents and highlighted areas of deficiency across the region. Spaces of metropolitan significance are considered in addition to spaces that are significant at a Borough level. Sites not considered to be significantly accessible were excluded from consideration and included several sites in Bexley, specifically the River Thames through Belvedere and Erith, Belvedere Dykes, Erith Quarry, Sidcup Golf Course, Rochester Way Golf Course, Pirelli Factory Nature Area, Crossness Lake Nature Reserve, Wyncham Stream (partly inaccessible and limited lengths which are accessible have insufficient experience of nature), Slade Green Triangle, Crayford Landfill and Howbury Grange, Rectory Lane Pond and Sidcup Line Railsides. This reinforces the importance of balancing biodiversity with recreational access for the public.
- 5.27 Natural England have developed standards relating to access to natural greenspace (ANGST) which state that no person should live more than 300m from their nearest area of natural green space and also provide some indications as to the quantity of natural green space expected.
- 5.28 Woodland Trust Access Standards recommend that no person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2ha in size and that there should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20ha within 4km (8km round-trip) of people's homes.

- 5.29 The recommended local accessibility standard for natural and semi natural open space has been summarised below. Full justification for the local standard is provided within Appendix H. In light of the urban nature of Bexley, the recommended standard is below the level suggested by Natural England. This level should therefore be considered a minimum level of provision.

Accessibility Standard

Recommended standard
15 minute (720metre) Walk
Justification
<p>Local consultation indicates that a significant number of residents would expect to walk when accessing natural and semi natural provision. 76% of those who use this typology more frequently than any other currently walk and 58% of general responses indicate that they would expect to walk.</p> <p>A drive time standard would produce a significantly higher distance threshold than a walk time standard. PPG17 states that higher thresholds may be appropriate if there is no realistic possibility of sufficient new provision to allow lower thresholds to be achievable, but can result in levels of provision that are too low and insufficient to meet some local needs. In the context of the local consultation findings regarding the quantity of provision (46% of respondents indicated the provision is sufficient and 51% insufficient) and given the importance of facilitating everyday contact with nature, a standard based on a walk time is recommended as this will help to deliver a greater number of localised natural and semi natural spaces.</p> <p>An assessment of the 75% threshold level suggests that residents across Bexley are willing to walk up to 15 minutes to a natural and semi natural open space, with residents within Thamesmead and Welling willing to travel even further than this Borough wide level. Consultation also indicated a willingness to travel greater distances to access some of the more significant strategic sites across Bexley.</p> <p>Although current national guidance recommends an accessibility standard of 300 metres (ANGSt), PPG17 states that lower thresholds are only needed where there is clear evidence that a significant proportion of local people do not use existing provision because they regard it as inaccessible. Given the findings of the local consultation (which highlight the high levels of use at natural and semi natural open spaces) this could not be substantiated.</p> <p>Given the high levels of agreement from respondents to the household survey regarding the appropriateness of a 15-minute walk time, it is recommended that the standard is set at this level.</p>

Applying provision standards

- 5.30 The application of the recommended quantity, quality and accessibility standards is essential in understanding the existing distribution of natural and semi natural sites and identifying areas where provision is insufficient to meet local need.
- 5.31 The quantity standards enable the identification of areas that do not meet the minimum provision standards, while the accessibility standards will help determine where those deficiencies are of high importance. Applying the standards together is a more meaningful method of analysis than applying the standards separately.

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Quantity

5.32 The application of the local quantity standard for each area is set out in Table 5.5 below. Both public and private sites are included within this calculation.

Table 5.5 – Application of quantity standard natural and semi natural open space

Cluster	Current provision balanced against local standard (2.76 hectares per 1000 population)	Scenario 1 Future balanced against local standard (2.76 hectares per 1000 population)	Scenario 2a Future balanced against local standard (2.76 hectares per 1000 population)	Scenario 2b Future balanced against local standard (2.76 hectares per 1000 population)	Scenario 3a Future balanced against local standard (2.76 hectares per 1000 population)	Scenario 3b Future balanced against local standard (2.76 hectares per 1000 population)
Bexleyheath	-84.08	-86.59	-85.82	-85.83	-88.70	-91.13
Crayford	153.37	145.46	141.06	141.71	136.56	137.74
Erith	19.53	1.11	-1.88	-33.03	-6.60	-61.83
Sidcup	34.26	-20.70	-19.12	-15.46	-24.44	-23.49
Thamesmead	-3.58	6.02	10.80	10.80	10.80	1.84
Welling	-123.01	-106.16	-105.41	-103.06	-110.73	-110.02
Overall	-3.50	-60.86	-60.38	-84.87	-83.11	-146.90

Green = above the standard, Red = below the standard

- application of the local quantity standard for Natural and Semi Natural provision shows there is currently an overall deficiency of – 3.50ha across the Borough
- as discussed previously in Table 5.2 and reiterated above, there is an apparent split in provision, with both the Bexleyheath and Welling clusters showing significant deficiencies (-84.08ha and –123.01ha respectively), as opposed to the Crayford, Erith, Sidcup and Thamesmead clusters which all currently have sufficient provision when measured against the local standard. As highlighted, these findings should not be considered in isolation as many parks are multifaceted and provide significant natural and semi natural opportunities – including Danson Park and East Wickham Open Space
- based on growth scenario 1 there will be an overall shortfall of -60.86 ha, a significant increase from the current shortfall / surplus. There will be shortfalls of provision in Bexleyheath, Sidcup and Welling
- scenario 2a population projections reveal the same trend with a deficiency of – 60.38ha per 1000 population. Scenario 3a indicates a further increase with an overall shortfall of –83.11 ha by 2026.
- scenarios 2b and 3b will result in uneven population growth across the Borough, with particular increases in the Thames Gateway area. This is particularly evident in the Erith cluster, where shortfalls will increase significantly if these growth scenarios occur.

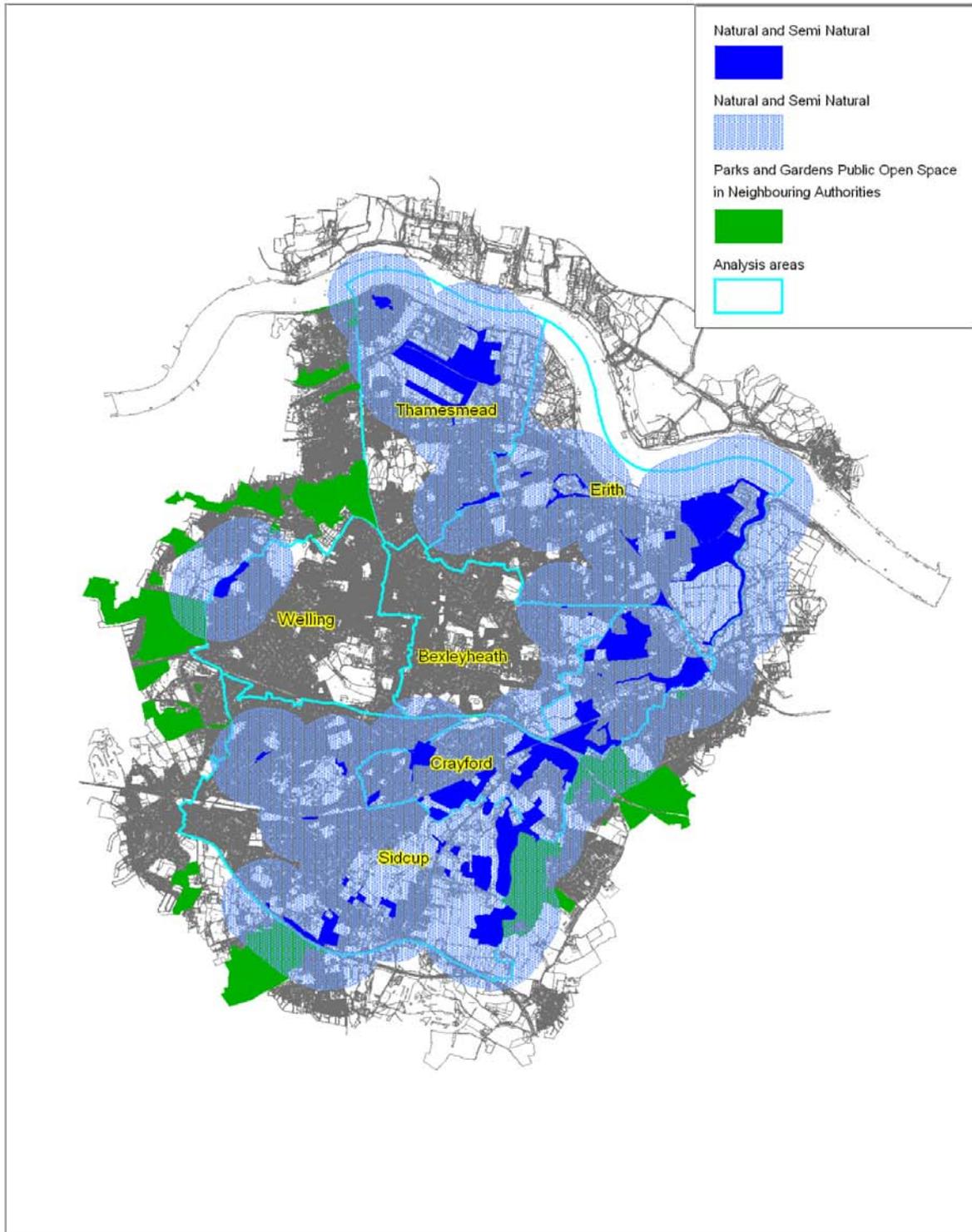
5.33 This highlights that population growth across the Borough will have a significant impact on the demand for natural and semi natural open space.

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- 5.34 The application of the local accessibility standards for natural and semi natural open space is set out overleaf in Map 5.1.
- 5.35 The quality of natural and semi natural open spaces is summarised in Map 5.2 overleaf.
- 5.36 Calculations considering access to woodland for residents in Bexley when measured against the Woodland Trust Access Standards are summarised below (data provided by Woodland Trust August 2008).

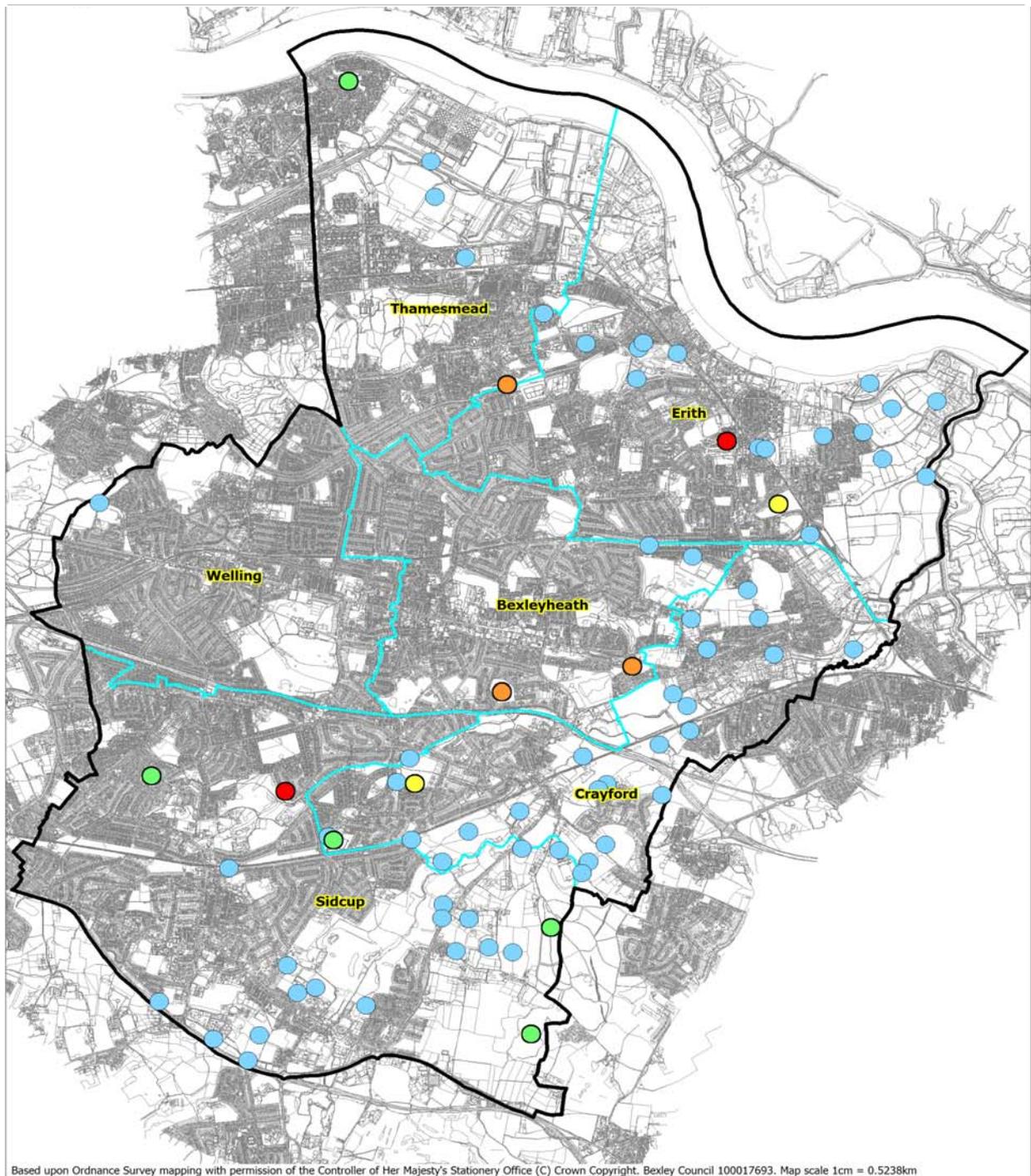
		Bexley	Havering	All London
Accessible woods	% population with access to 2ha+ wood within 500m	10.41%	32.38%	10.98%
	% population with access to 20ha+ wood within 4km	98.67%	100%	64.28%
Inaccessible woods	% extra population with access to 2ha+ wood within 500m if existing woods opened	24.90%	0.85%	11.67%
	% extra population with access to 20ha+ wood within 4km if existing woods opened	1.06%	0%	11.76%
Woodland creation	% population requiring new woodland creation for access to a 2ha+ wood within 500m	64.68%	66.77%	77.35%
	% population requiring new woodland creation for access to a 20ha+ wood within 4km	0.27%	0%	23.96%
	Minimum area of new woodland required for 2ha+ woods within 500m (ha)	102ha	137 ha	2,471ha

Map 5.1 – Provision of natural and semi natural open space in London Borough of Bexley

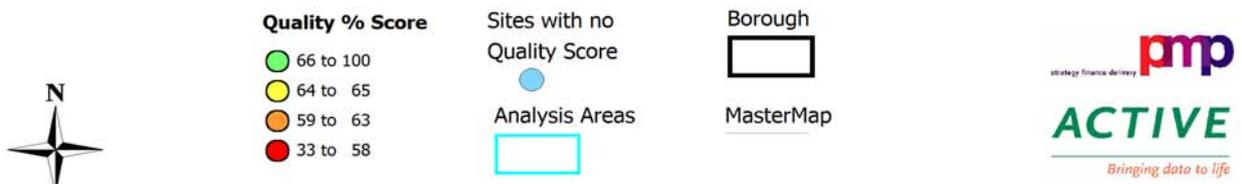


Provision of natural and semi natural open space in London Borough of Bexley

Map 5.2 – Quality of natural and semi natural provision in London Borough of Bexley



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Applying the quantity, quality and accessibility standards

- 5.37 As illustrated in Map 5.1, natural and semi natural open space sites are predominantly located to the north, south and east of Bexley, within the Thamesmead, Erith, Crayford and Sidcup clusters. Within these clusters the vast majority of residents are able to access at least one natural and semi natural site within the recommended distance threshold. Supplementing the provision in these areas is the natural and semi natural provision located within some of the larger strategic parks across Bexley.
- 5.38 Although on first glance, areas of the Welling and Bexleyheath clusters appear to be outside of the accessibility catchment, Danson Park (Welling) and Burstled Woods (Bexleyheath) provide natural and semi natural provision to a large number of residents. Danson Park in particular is significant in terms of formal garden provision and a local nature reserve. Additionally, there are 20 local parks with a secondary natural and semi natural open space function. This includes 6 in Bexleyheath, all sites in Crayford, one in Erith, seven in Sidcup and one site in Thamesmead.
- 5.39 Large sites, as discussed during the consultation, are highly valued by residents. They not only provide access to natural and semi natural provision to people living in close proximity, but also those willing to travel much greater distances to access such large strategic sites. The need to protect these sites from development was one of the overriding themes of consultation. These sites are valuable not just from a recreational perspective, but also in terms of conservation and biodiversity. A Living Landscape (Wildlife Trust) sets out some of the key principles of the protection of open space.

NSN1	In light of the wider benefits of natural and semi natural open spaces in terms of both recreation and biodiversity and the expressed importance of these sites by local residents, the Council should protect all natural and semi natural sites from development through the Local Development Framework Process.
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- 5.40 Larger sites can be of particular strategic significance to residents and may attract visitors from a wider catchment area. Such sites include Danson Park Local Nature Reserve, Erith Marshes and Footscray Meadows. In many instances, these sites fulfil a wider strategic role, meeting informal recreational needs across all areas of the Borough.
- 5.41 The quality of provision of natural and semi natural open spaces should not only consider recreational opportunities, but should also take into account the biodiversity and wildlife value of the site. Many participants in consultations considered this to be imperative.

NSN2	Monitor the impact of recreational use on natural and semi natural open space sites and ensure that recreational opportunity is balanced with biodiversity. It will be essential to ensure that appropriate management tools and techniques are employed to facilitate this balance.
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- 5.42 The importance of qualitative enhancements is reinforced by the findings of the site assessments, which suggest that the quality of natural areas across the Borough was wide ranging. Two sites achieved scores of below 50% and the range in site scores was between 38% and 79%.
- 5.43 As illustrated in Map 5.2, there are key geographical areas for improvements in the quality of natural and semi natural open space. Areas for quality enhancements may

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include the Erith and Bexleyheath clusters. This is reinforced by the findings of the quality standard that suggests that the quality of sites is poor in this cluster.

- 5.44 As can be seen on Map 5.2, private sites have not been assessed for quality. Sites with access and functionality issues, for example a site that's primary use is for agricultural purposes, have been omitted from the site assessment process. For this reason, no specific enhancements in quality have been recommended for individual clusters.
- 5.45 The local quantity standard highlights the need for additional provision of natural and semi natural areas in areas that are currently deficient, but advocates a focus on the enhancement of the quality of sites in all other areas. In areas where there is already sufficient natural and semi natural open spaces, future efforts should therefore be concentrated into improvements to the quality of sites. Not all sites are publicly accessible, with many considered to be undeveloped green belt or metropolitan open land (MOL) of little public value.
- 5.46 The standard therefore recognises the issues of accessibility and provides the opportunity to increase the overall value of provision in the Borough by increasing or providing access to sites where access is currently restricted.
- 5.47 It is evident that there is significant interest and community involvement across Bexley, particularly in the provision of parks and natural and semi natural open spaces. Footscray Meadows is an excellent example of a successful park/natural and semi natural open space. Partnership working with groups (eg Local Friends Groups) offers the opportunity to capitalise upon a variety of skills. The benefit of this approach and the further opportunities that this brings was also discussed in Section 4, parks and gardens.

NSN3	Continue to promote partnership working and management across the natural and semi natural open spaces in Bexley. Promote information sharing through the establishment of a Friends Forum and explore further options for the further promotion of partnership working.
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- 5.48 Application of the Woodland Trust Accessibility standards reinforces the deficiencies in access and quantity of natural open space and the Woodland Trust indicate that the creation of a small woodland is required to meet deficiencies.
- 5.49 The ELGG Area Framework seeks to address deficiencies in natural open space in the Borough through improved links and enhancing currently under used sites (eg Franks Park). Although there is a relatively even distribution of sites, it is essential to provide adequate access to these sites to ensure that they do effectively meet local needs and that all residents have appropriate access to natural and semi natural open spaces. Franks Park is also of Borough wide importance in terms of local biodiversity and conservation.
- 5.50 In addition the Greater London Authority Access to Nature report identifies several areas of the Borough which are deficient in terms of access to wildlife, predominantly in the Erith, Bexleyheath and Sidcup areas of the Borough.

NSN4	Identify opportunities to create new wildlife and habitats in areas identified as deficient in wildlife in the GLA Access to Nature Report.
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- 5.51 The provision of additional natural and semi natural open space may not be possible in densely developed or very urban areas of the Borough and in this case attention should be given to improving accessibility to sites. This is a key priority of the ELGG and establishing green corridors and links to sites such as River Cray Corridor, Lesnes Abbey Woods and Franks Park will be key to improving access for residents. The strategy highlights that many open spaces, notably in the east, are underused by the public and are not well linked to the surrounding area. In light of the challenges of providing natural spaces in an urban area, in many instances the development or enhancement of green corridors will be the more appropriate solution. The draft Public Rights of Way Access and Improvement Plan also seeks to address these issues.

NSN5	To enhance the existing network and to establish new green corridors to link densely populated areas with natural and semi natural sites, other types of local open space and also wider strategic sites.
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- 5.52 Increasing access to natural and semi natural open spaces will be particularly important within the Erith and Crayford clusters of the Borough. While there is an abundance of space and all residents are within the recommended distance threshold, these sites (including the marshes) have limited accessibility to the public and there are few links between existing sites.

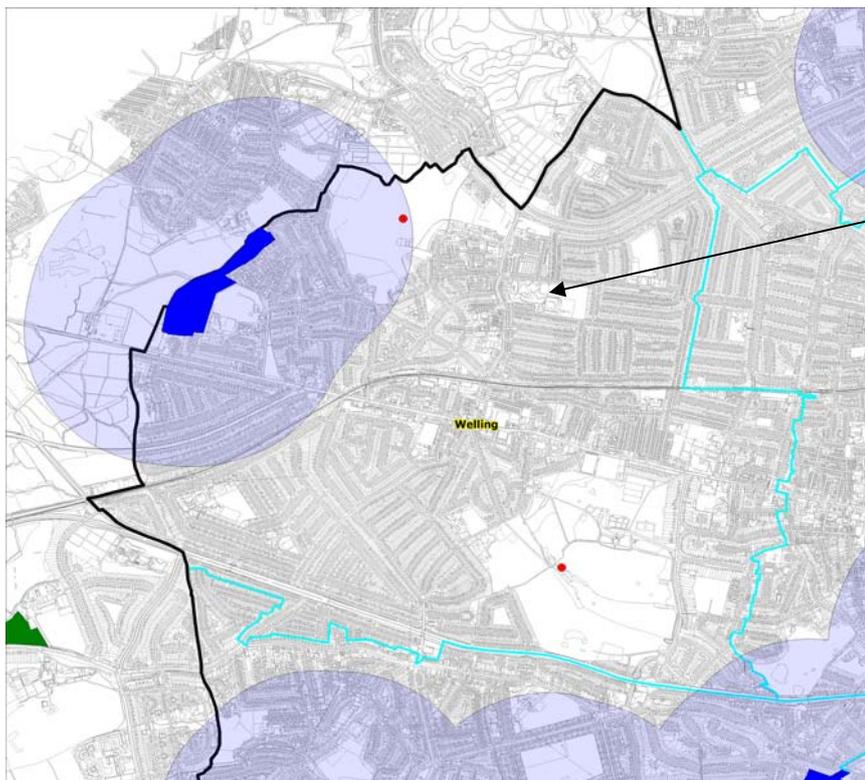
NSN6	Work to increase access to currently inaccessible sites in the Erith and Crayford clusters (including the Marshes) and maximise access to the River Cray Corridor.
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- 5.53 Maximising the positive value of Green Belt land (including better public access) in accordance with PPG2 could provide significant opportunities to maximise this type of provision to serve the outer urban areas of Bexley (including Erith and Crayford).
- 5.54 Application of the quantity standard for natural and semi natural open space highlights that the highest deficiency is in the Welling cluster and equates to over 100ha. Analysis of the accessibility standard supports this but one must consider the role of natural and semi natural provision within Danson Park and East Wickham Open Space.
- 5.55 The key areas of deficiency are highlighted in Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below. It is evident that some residents are outside the catchment for natural and semi natural open space.

Welling Cluster

- 5.56 The shortfall in the Welling cluster (Figure 5.3) emphasises the importance of the Danson Park to local residents as it also offers some natural resources. The red points highlight the provision of natural and semi natural open space in sites where the primary purpose is not natural and semi natural open space.
- 5.57 It is clear that while the majority of residents have access to natural sites, there are some areas in both the Welling and Bexleyheath clusters where even taking into account provision within parks, there are some small deficiencies.

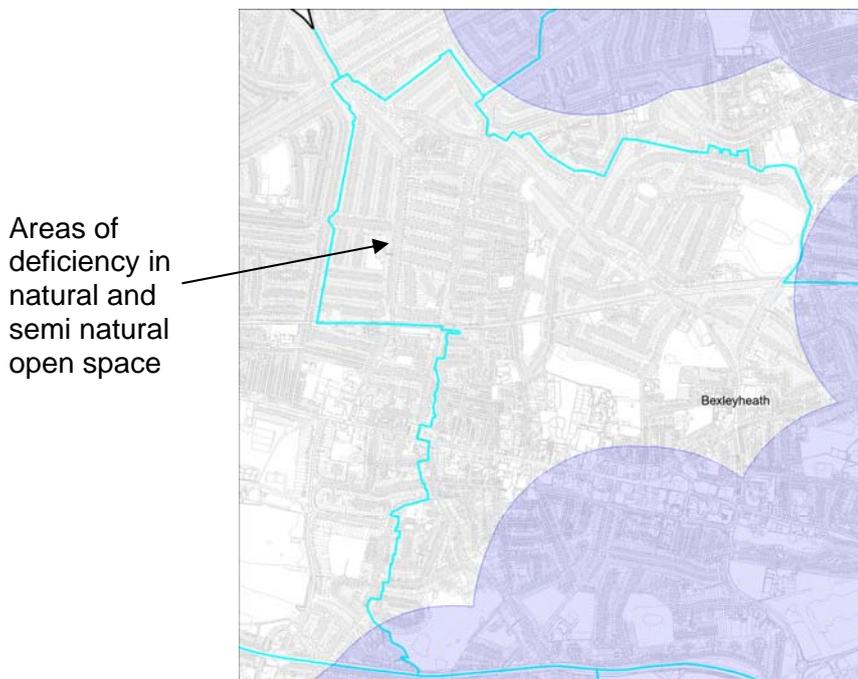
Figure 5.3 - Accessibility deficiency in Welling cluster



Areas of deficiency in natural and semi natural open space

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Figure 5.4 - Accessibility deficiency in Bexleyheath cluster

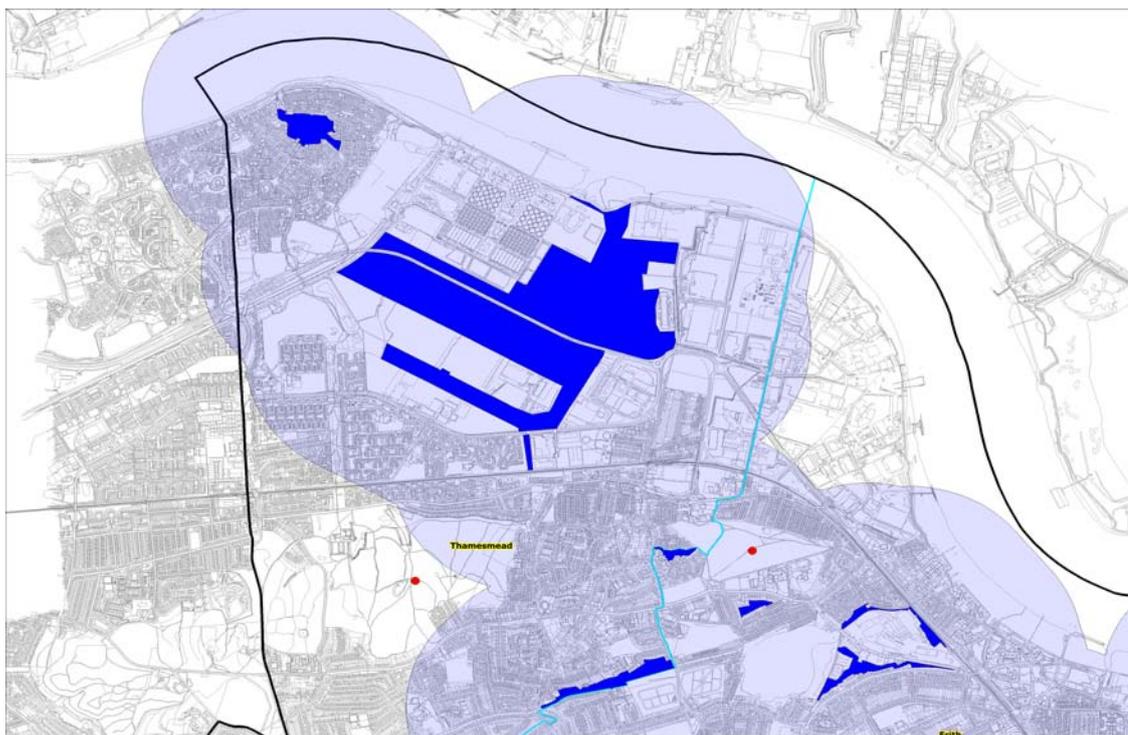


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Thamesmead Cluster

5.58 Like the Welling and Bexleyheath clusters, the application of the accessibility standards for the Thamesmead cluster portrays a false picture and it can be seen that the presence of Lesnes Abbey Wood offsets much of the apparent shortfall of natural and semi natural open space. Only the far south western corner of the area is outside of the catchment for provision and it can be seen that this area borders provision in the neighbouring authority.

Figure 5.5 - Accessibility deficiency in Thamesmead cluster



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5.59 As highlighted, while it appears that there are significant areas of deficiency within the Thamesmead, Welling and Bexleyheath clusters the multi faceted nature of other open spaces ensures that natural open space is provided for the majority of residents. There remain however a small number of residents who are unable to access natural and semi natural open spaces.

NSN7	Consider opportunities to address the quantitative and access deficiencies to natural and semi natural open space within the Welling and Bexleyheath clusters through the inclusion of natural and semi natural areas within local parks, or the enhancement of links to existing natural open spaces.
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Summary and recommendations

5.60 Natural and semi natural open space is one of the most popular of all types of open space across Bexley, with 13% of respondents indicating that they visit this type of open space at least once per month.

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- 5.61 In addition to the recreational value of natural resources, residents also frequently recognise the wider benefits of natural open spaces, particularly in terms of providing opportunities for biodiversity and habitat creation. The importance of achieving a balance between recreational opportunities and biodiversity was central to discussions throughout consultations. The ELGG Area Strategy also seeks to improve biodiversity in Bexley by utilising the myriad of important habitats and species located in the Borough.
- 5.62 Larger strategic sites were perceived to be as important to local residents as smaller localised natural open spaces. Sites of key importance include Lesnes Abbey Woods, Crayford Marsh, Erith Marsh and Danson Park. Facilitating access to these sites is as important as providing local natural and semi natural open spaces. Residents identified further opportunities to maximise use of existing resources through increased access to valued sites in the Borough.
- 5.63 Application of the recommended quality, quantity and accessibility standards highlights that the key priority for natural and semi natural open space is maximising access to sites across the Borough and in the Green Belt. Opportunities should also be taken to address locational deficiencies, particularly in the Welling, Bexleyheath and Sidcup clusters where significant deficiencies are likely by 2026.