



Wolverhampton Open Space Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2039 Executive Summary

City of Wolverhampton Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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Executive Summary

This Executive Summary accompanies the main Open Space Strategy and Action Plan document (a separate volume). Any chapter numbers stated below refer to chapters within the main document.

Wolverhampton's Open Space Strategy and Action Plan has been prepared to guide the planning and management of open spaces up to 2039. The Strategy will help to ensure that the open space and play needs of the current and future population are met into the future. This document provides the open space standards to support the emerging Wolverhampton Local Plan and an Action Plan for future enhancements to the open space network.

The document should be read alongside the Wolverhampton Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS), 2022, and the Wolverhampton Built Facilities Strategy, 2024, some of whose actions are of wider relevance to the city's open spaces. The Strategy divides Wolverhampton into five analysis areas which were adapted from the analysis used in the PPOSS and these are referenced throughout the document: Bilston Analysis Area, Central and South Analysis Area, North Analysis Area, Tettenhall Analysis Area and Wednesfield Analysis Area.

It is well recognised that publicly accessible parks and other open spaces can provide significant health, wellbeing, environmental and economic benefits. Open space is also key to addressing several key challenges and priorities including adapting and mitigating to climate change and addressing the crisis in the loss of biodiversity.

Large areas of Wolverhampton are ranked within the 10% most deprived areas in the country. Data indicates that on average residents in Wolverhampton are less active than across England. Wolverhampton also has a diverse population. A high percentage of residents identify as from minority ethnic backgrounds,

when compared to England and to neighbouring authorities. There is a degree of inequality in access to open space within Wolverhampton and large areas, especially within the Central and South Analysis Area, do not have access to a private garden. It is therefore important that the open space network is strategically planned to help address inequalities in access and ensure that benefits are maximised for local communities.

Vision, Aims and Objectives

The Strategy is comprised of a set of Aims, Objectives and an Action Plan which is guided by a new Vision for parks and open spaces in Wolverhampton. This provides the overarching guidance of ‘where we want to be’. The Strategy has been informed by extensive community and stakeholder consultation.

Vision

‘All communities in Wolverhampton will have easy access to a network of high quality, diverse and inclusive open spaces, offering space for residents and visitors to enjoy a range of recreational activities, including physical activity, contact with nature and social interaction. The network of open spaces will improve connectivity for people and wildlife, providing habitat networks and encouraging active travel. Open spaces in Wolverhampton will be increasingly resilient and help to adapt to the effects of climate change through environmentally sensitive design and management.’

To achieve this Vision, five key Aims have been identified each of which have several associated objectives (see **Chapter 9**).

- 1) Provide a well-planned and maintained diverse open space network, underpinned by a strong evidence base, that informs allocation of open space contributions, investment decisions and funding applications.

- 2) Provide inclusive open spaces, with equal access to facilities for the whole community.
- 3) Provide healthy, safe and active open spaces.
- 4) Ensure open spaces are well recognised through local heritage and culture.
- 5) Develop a biodiverse, resilient, and well-connected open space network.

Open space provision in Wolverhampton

The Strategy sets open space standards and provides an analysis of open space with the city. The Strategy considers provision in relation to:

- Quantity: by area, type of open space and number of sites (further detail provided in **Chapter Three**)
- Quality and value: the presence and condition of landscape features and facilities; and their value to local communities (further detail provided in **Chapter Four**)
- Accessibility: how far residents need to travel from home to reach different types of sites (further detail provided in **Chapter Five**)

Standards for each type of open space have been developed for Wolverhampton which new development will be required to meet. The standards are informed by the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework, which provides the primary national guidance for Green Infrastructure standards, including standards for accessible natural greenspace. A summary of all proposed standards is set out in **Appendix E**.

Open space in Wolverhampton has been identified and mapped to understand the quantity and type of open spaces to which residents in Wolverhampton have access. Open spaces have been grouped into several categories that reflect the primary function of each site. These are:

- Parks
- Natural green space
- Provision for children
- Provision for young people and other recreation
- Civic spaces
- Cemeteries
- Outdoor sports facilities and recreation grounds
- Allotments

Greenways are also identified within this report. These are: traffic-free routes for active travel; wildlife habitat and corridors; recreational routes; and provide climate change adaption through urban cooling. They include the city's canal and redundant rail corridors. Greenways are a strategic designation that is in addition to the typology categorisation above.

Some typologies have also been categorised into a 'hierarchy', primarily based on the size of sites but also informed by local knowledge of how sites function for the local community. The hierarchy recognises that some sites have a wider offer and draw due the range of features and facilities available. The assessment of access to open spaces, which has been mapped using straight line walking distances, is informed by the categorisation of sites within the hierarchy. The table below sets out the hierarchy, guideline size and access catchments that have be set for each type of site.

Open space hierarchy

Hierarchy / typology	Guideline size	Distance	Estimated walk time (minutes)
District (city-wide) open space	20ha-100ha	2km	30-35
Town open space	10ha - 20ha	1km	15-20

Hierarchy / typology	Guideline size	Distance	Estimated walk time (minutes)
Neighbourhood open space	2ha – 10ha	300m	5-10
Doorstep	0.5ha – 2ha	200m	5 or less
Provision for children	n/a	300m	5-10
Provision for young people and other recreation	Categorised by age group provided for – see Chapter 3 .	1km	15-20

Findings: quantity of open space

709 open spaces have been identified as part of the study, covering 1,130 hectares (ha) in area. 530 of these sites are fully publicly accessible with no access restrictions, covering 773 ha. Some open spaces have restricted access, many of which are outdoor sports facilities and allotment sites. Parks make up the largest proportion of freely publicly accessible open space in Wolverhampton (38% of sites), followed by natural green space (32%) and then amenity green space (17%).

Relative quantity provision of open space has been reviewed by assessing the quantity of open space (in hectares) per 1,000 residents. A quantity standard of 3ha per 1,000 residents has been set which new development will be expected to provide. Detailed quantity standards are provided for all typologies except outdoor sports facilities (which are considered within the PPOSS) and cemeteries. A separate and additional quantity standard of 0.13ha per 1,000 has been set for allotments.

The analysis areas vary significantly in the amount of open space per resident when compared to the standards that have been set. Bilston Analysis Area, as

of 2023 has 3.89ha of open space per 1,000 residents (all typologies / publicly accessible sites not including cemeteries and outdoor sports facilities). This compares to Wednesfield Analysis Area, which has the least amount of publicly accessible opens space, at 1.73ha per 1,000 residents, followed by the Central and South Analysis Area (2.01ha per 1,000 residents).

Findings: quality and value of open space

A large sample of 290 open spaces and 140 equipped playgrounds and other recreation features have been visited across the borough and have been subject to a detailed audit based on the Green Flag Award criteria (see **Chapter Four**). As part of the site audit, the condition of various features and facilities of each site were rated on a five-point scale, resulting in a numeric quality score. The level of features and facilities, site context, level of use and wider benefits were also assessed, resulting in an additional numeric value score for each site. Separate ‘threshold’ or ‘benchmark’ standard numeric scores for quality and value have been defined for each typology reflecting the ideal score scenario for a good quality / value site. The performance of each site can be tested against this standard and may fall into one of four categories in relation to quality and value.

- Higher quality / higher value
- Higher quality / lower value
- Lower quality / higher value
- Lower quality / lower value

These categorises can be used in a strategic way to identify sites that should be a priority for enhancement and the overall management approach that should be considered. Lower quality / lower value sites will generally be considered the highest priority for enhancement and will likely require enhancement to both the condition of features and the range of facilities on offer.

Following the audit of sites and comparison of results against the quality and value standards; 63% of sites were categorised as higher quality / higher value,

10% higher quality / lower value, 13% lower quality / higher value and 14% lower quality / lower value. The assessment found that the Bilston Analysis Area has the highest proportion of audited sites that fall short of either the quality standard, the value standard or both. The Wednesfield Analysis Area has the highest percentage of sites that are above both quality and value (78% of audited sites in the area).

Findings: accessibility

Standards for accessibility have been set for each category of the hierarchy (see above) and mapped using straight line 'buffers' which visually show the catchments for each site. 'Access to Greenspace Close to Home' (as proposed by Natural England) has also been assessed, which indicates areas which do not have access to range of sites of different sizes. Areas without easy access to a range of different types of open space, both at the doorstep or neighbourhood and at the town scale, should be considered priority areas for enhancements. Areas that do not meet the Access to Greenspace Close to Home standard include: pockets around the city centre; south west of the Central and South Analysis Area extending into Tettenhall Analysis Area; the southern boundaries of the Bilston Analysis Area; south section of the Wednesfield Analysis Area; and other small areas in the Wednesfield and North Analysis Areas.

Findings: Community insight

A wide range of consultation with the community and other stakeholders has been undertaken. The results from the consultation informed the priorities for the Strategy including the Vision, Aims, Objectives and Actions. A key focus of the consultation was to ensure that members of the community representing a range of protected characteristics were engaged to ensure appropriate representation. Consultation included:

- An online survey, hosted on the City of Wolverhampton Council Consultation Hub (567 participants).

- Two structured community workshops (12 participants).
- Focussed discussion groups with specific interest / demographic groups and forums (171 participants plus attendees from various City of Wolverhampton Council staff forums).

Focussed group discussions were arranged with several interest groups to ensure a range of protected characteristics were represented within the information gathered. This included: HY5! Youth Forum: Milan Community (Gujarati) Forum (men's group and women's group); African Caribbean Community Initiative (ACCI); Ladies' exercise group (predominantly of South Asian heritage); City Council Age and Disability Staff Forum; City Council Rainbow Staff Forum and City Council Race, Religion and Belief Staff Forum.

Several common themes that emerged from all consultation included:

- **Safety concerns.** Largely because of antisocial behaviour, drug and alcohol use in parks, large groups, and unleashed dogs. Improvements suggested by residents included better management of antisocial behaviour via park staffing, advertised phone helplines, CCTV, and more lighting. It should be noted that safety issues were mentioned frequently amongst a number of the focus groups, including interest groups for the LGBT+ community, disability forum and ladies group.
- **Maintenance, litter, and cleanliness.** A number of respondents suggested a need for more bins, increased frequency of bin emptying/ park maintenance, more dog litter warning signs, and increased enforcement and monitoring of flying tipping.
- **Accessibility and inclusion.** The need for improvements to accessibility was raised by participants, particularly in regard to the elderly and disabled people. Issues discussed included a lack of wheelchair friendly facilities such as wheelchair friendly benches, picnic tables, pathways, and play features / sport provision, improved public transport connections and road crossings.
- **Community engagement.** Respondents' feedback highlighted the need for greater availability of information regarding the open space network via physical mapping and online resources. Also requested were: improved

information sharing about community events being held; an increased numbers of community events; and streamlining of the process by which the public and community groups can arrange events with the council.

- Respondents also expressed a desire for improved availability of certain facilities and features within open spaces, notably: toilets; changing rooms for sport; cafes; additional benches; social seating; sheltered areas; more disability friendly features; and more flower beds.

Wider needs and priorities for open space

In addition to community consultation, work has been undertaken to identify wider needs and priorities for open space and play space in Wolverhampton. **Chapter 7** sets out a high-level overview of spatial needs relating to health and well-being, specific groups with protected characteristics relating to age and ethnicity, and the living environment (such as air quality and flood risk).

Implementing the Strategy

The Action Plan (**Chapter 9**) sets out a range of projects and enhancements per analysis area. Where possible open space enhancements will be delivered alongside new and enhanced provision of sports facilities, where specific needs have been identified. The design and delivery of enhancement schemes should be guided by the Aims and Objectives set out in the Strategy, which include principles for engagement with the community, including under-represented groups.

Quantity analysis per analysis area, access mapping and quality and value data set out within this Strategy should be referenced to ensure new provision or off-site development contributions will help to address identified deficiencies. Mapping and data included within the Strategy should also be used to identify opportunities to provide wider benefits and prioritise investment in areas of most need.

Much of the expected future growth within Wolverhampton will be within the Central and South Analysis Area, which currently does not meet the standard for total accessible open space. Within this area, there is limited land available to provide additional open space. Alternative opportunities to enhance access to open space may be considered in these areas such as the creation of pocket parks (i.e. high-quality recreation space of 0.25ha or more) and promotion of Greenways, active travel routes such as canal towpaths which connect to existing larger open spaces.

This delivery of the Strategy will be monitored and periodically reviewed to measure progress and inform future updates.

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