

CASTLE POINT OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 Overview

The Open Space Assessment has been undertaken by Ethos Environmental Planning (Ethos) to inform Castle Point Borough Council's decision-making processes in relation to open space provision and green infrastructure planning. It will inform the emerging Castle Point Plan, supporting strategic policies, and will be used to secure developer contributions and other funding sources for open space works.

The assessment provides a robust analysis of the quality, quantity and accessibility of publicly accessible open spaces in order to establish local provision standards. The focus of the assessment is on parks and recreation grounds, amenity green spaces, accessible natural green spaces, play spaces (children's and youth) and allotments. It provides recommendations to enhance the quality of open space and considers the contribution of open space to the overall green infrastructure network within Castle Point. It also provides an assessment of the potential for delivering biodiversity net gain (BNG) units on five key open spaces.

The assessment has been carried out in-line with the NPPF and PPG 17 (the government has not published anything to replace this document, and the NPPF principles continue to align with PPG17). This provides a tried and tested methodology and takes a consistent approach with many other local authorities.

2.0 Identification of Local Needs

The local needs for open space have been identified through a resident's survey (578 responses were received) and consultation with key stakeholders. A review of relevant national, regional and local policy and strategy also helped feed into this.

3.0 Auditing Open Space Provision

The Council undertook a review of open space prior to the commencement of the assessment and identified 166 open spaces and 180 small areas of green space, which were provided to Ethos in a GIS layer. These sites were visited by Ethos during August 2023, to undertake quality audits, check open space boundaries and typologies, and provide indicative costings for open space improvements.

Following the site visits a final open space GIS layer was produced, with all open spaces classified into an agreed typology. The wider value/contribution to green infrastructure (GI) functions of each open space was also assessed using a number of measurable desktop criteria.

Five of the largest open spaces within Castle Point have also been surveyed for their potential for biodiversity net gain.

4.0 Recommended Open Space Standards

The table below summarises the quantity and access standards developed for each typology of open space. These standards have been evidenced through the results of the mapping/quantity of open space, results from the consultation, and policy and strategy review.

Typology	Quantity standards for existing provision and new provision (ha/1000 population)	Access standard
Allotments	0.2	15 minutes' walk time (720m straight line)
Amenity Green Space (sites >0.1 ha)	0.6	10 minutes' walk time (480m straight line)
Parks and Recreation Grounds	1.1	15 minutes' walk time (720m straight line)
Play Space (Children)	0.07	10 minutes' walk time (480m straight line)
Play Space (Youth)	0.07	15 minutes' walk time (720m straight line)
Accessible Natural Green Space	1.80	15 minutes' walk time (720m straight line) and Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Standards.
Total for new provision (ha/1000)	3.84	

A review of the quality of open space has also been carried out from undertaking site visits (criteria based on the Green Flag Award), and for each typology of open space there are quality recommendations to guide the provision of new open space through development in the future.

In addition to the main open space typologies above, site visits were also taken to assess the quality of open space typologies which were not subject to quantity and access standards, which included:

- small amenity green spaces (<0.1ha in size)
- churchyards and cemeteries
- green/blue corridors
- outdoor bathing
- outdoor sport (private).

5.0 Application of Standards and Results (Summary)

Quantity – In Castle Point there is sufficient supply of accessible natural green space and parks and recreation grounds, and shortfalls in allotments, amenity green space, children’s play space and youth play space. The picture varies by ward.

Access – In Castle Point there are gaps in access to all types of open space. Some of the largest gaps in access are to allotments, youth play space and children’s play space. Again, the picture varies by ward.

Quality - The majority of open spaces (48%) were assessed as being of good quality overall, however 18% of these scored 4 or less (poor) for at least one criterion and may therefore still have requirements for improvement. A large proportion of sites (45%) were assessed as being fair quality.

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment - Holistically, the five open space sites identified with the potential for BNG suggest the potential for a borough-wide net gain of 215.47 biodiversity units.

6.0 Draft Policies and Recommendations

The strategic options and draft policies address six key areas:

- 1) Existing provision to be protected – those open spaces where there is already a deficiency or that are critically important in avoiding deficiencies in quantity, accessibility or quality, or those that are of particular nature conservation, historical or cultural value.
- 2) Existing provision to be enhanced – those open spaces that are important in avoiding deficiencies in quantity and access and also scored poorly in the quality assessment. This could include optimising the multifunctionality of open spaces and green corridors.
- 3) Opportunities for re-location/re-designation of open space – re locating or upgrading existing open space to make better use of land e.g. upgrading an amenity green space to a park and recreation ground or accommodating food growing areas or play areas in amenity green spaces (to name a few examples). Access to other types of open space/GI such as accessible green/blue corridors could contribute towards addressing the deficits in other types of open space.
- 4) Identification of areas for new provision – new provision will be required where there is a new development and/or an existing deficiency in supply and access to open space. The study sets out the decision making process for on-site provision of open space, with on-site provision always to be considered as the first solution (where applicable).
- 5) Facilities that may be surplus to requirement - an outline of the decision process that should be followed before the development/alternative use of an open space

can be seriously contemplated is provided. This is unlikely to be a consideration in Castle Point, due to the shortfalls in supply of open space across the study area.

- 6) Developer contributions (capital costs and maintenance/commuted sums costs for open space) and recommended thresholds for on-site provision of open space are set out within the report. A cost calculator spreadsheet is also provided.