

Swindon Borough Council

Open Space Audit and Assessment Update

Interim Report August 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The updated Open Space Audit and Assessment's (OSAA) purpose is to inform the emerging Local Plan 2043 and the policies on Open Space. More broadly it will provide an evidence base, not just for planning policies, but also for future open space strategy work and for use in planning decisions. This Interim Report precedes a full update Open Space Audit and Assessment. It outlines progress to date as well as work needed in order to bring this work to completion.
- 1.2 Swindon Borough Council ('The Council') is in the process of producing a New Local Plan. It sets out the Council's long-term vision and spatial strategy for how Swindon Borough will develop and change over the next 20 years up to 2043 (the technical Plan period, set within the context of a wider 2055 vision).
- 1.3 With this vision at the heart of the New Local Plan 2043, the Plan outlines a range of policies related to open space, in particular policies HL2 and HL3. These policies seek to protect and enhance the Borough's open space and ensure that major residential development contributes towards its provision.
- 1.4 Open Space is multifunctional and performs a wide range of services, and can be considered infrastructure that contributes to health, well-being, cultural heritage, placemaking, landscape, education, climate change mitigation, biodiversity and movement for people and wildlife. It is therefore important for the Council to know what provision currently exists across a range of typologies to identify gaps in provision and quantity. The distribution will also need to be understood spatially, to ensure that there is suitable provision across the borough.
- 1.5 This interim report precedes a full OSAA update, setting out an overview of the status of evidence production and of relevant Council strategies related to open space. Specifically, it sets out the findings to date on the Open Space Audit and Assessment update undertaken by the Council in 2025. An Open Space Audit and Assessment was last published in 2014 (audit work carried out in 2011) which is part of the evidence base to the adopted Local Plan 2026.
- 1.6 An updated Open Space Audit and Assessment is necessary to understand how current provision of open space meets the needs of the community. The assessment seeks to evaluate the quality of open spaces by considering their condition, accessibility, functionality, and overall user experience. This ensures that the spaces not only meet current community needs but also support health, wellbeing, and inclusivity for a growing population.
- 1.7 This report sets out the findings to date of the OSAA update, including the quantitative analysis and the updating of OS typologies in line with new guidance. It also identifies the remaining gaps in the analysis, namely assessing quality and proposes the next steps the Council intends to take to address these through future work.

- 1.8 This ongoing work will also involve collaboration with wider teams in the Council responsible for delivery of various types of open space and recreation strategies, to working together to support Council priorities and strategies.

2. Policy context

National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1 Paragraph 103 of The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024) states that access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.
- 2.2 It also adds that planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.
- 2.3 The NPPF (2024) defines open space as places of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.¹
- 2.4 Paragraph 104 of the NPPF (2024) sets three criterion that ensures existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
- *An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
 - *The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
 - *The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use*

Planning Practice Guidance

- 2.5 Guidance published in March 2014 sets out how open space should be taken into account in planning.² The guidance reinforces policy in the NPPF (2024) in that open space should be a consideration in planning for new development and for proposals

¹ Annex 2: Glossary of the NPPF (2024)

² Paragraph 001 Reference ID: 37-001-20140306 in: Planning Practice Guidance, 'Open space, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space' (Published March 2014)

affecting existing open space. The guidance further states that open space forms an important component in the achievement of sustainable development.

Fields in Trust – Guidance for Local Planning Authorities

- 2.6 The starting point for assessing provision in the Borough has been The Fields in Trust Standards which is guidance that has been developed for use by local authorities.³ The Fields in Trust guidance provides nationally recognised benchmarks for the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space, sport and recreation provision. This guidance sets minimum and ideal standards of provision. Whilst these standards are not national policy, they are regularly used in the development of planning policy.

Council Strategies

- 2.7 The Open Space audit sits within a wider context of various Council led strategies and evidence reports that align with the corporate aim to Build a Green Swindon. A range of the most relevant plans and strategies are presented below.

Swindon Borough GI Strategy 2024
Tree Strategy
Food Growing Strategy
Open Space Strategy
Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy
Play Strategy
GWCF Plan
Design Codes
Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Local Plan
Country Parks Strategy
GI Delivery Plan
Swindon Borough GI Strategy 2024

³ Fields in Trust Standards: Creating great spaces for all (2024); Planning Policy Context for England, Fields in Trust Standards: Creating great spaces for all (2024)

Public Health Strategies

2.8 Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023-2033)

2.9 The Council's Health and Wellbeing Board published A Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Swindon (2023-2033) in May 2024. It sets out the Council's intention to reduce health inequalities to increase the number of years spent in good health by the people of Swindon. As part of encouraging residents to 'Eat Well and Move More', the Strategy seeks to promote green space and an active built environment and the delivery of the Get Swindon Active Strategy.

2.10 Get Swindon Active Strategy (2022-2025)

2.11 The Council's Get Swindon Active Strategy (2022-2025) focuses on three objectives to be delivered by the Council in collaboration with its partners and through making use of existing leisure centres, parks and open spaces. These are as follows:

- Encouraging everyone in Swindon to be more physically active and move more, focussing particularly on groups who are less active.
- Removing the barriers to physical activity and movement so that everyone in Swindon is able to be active.
- Working together with partners and the local communities in Swindon⁴

3. Relevant evidence base reports

Playing Pitch and Open Spaces Assessment 2024

3.1 Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP) were commissioned to undertake a Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS) for Swindon Borough Council to inform decisions affecting provision within the local authority area.⁵ This report is published as part of the Regulation 18 consultation evidence base. It presents a supply and demand assessment of playing pitch and outdoor sport facilities across Swindon in accordance with Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) Guidance.⁶ The report has been endorsed by Sport England, the statutory consultee on this element of recreational open space.

3.2 The consultants assessed playing pitches and playing fields in the Borough, recording the level of community access to use the site. An in-person audit of the baseline of available pitches and fields was undertaken to assess the quality (good, standard, or poor), and consultation with site management identified any investment planned in the stock. This report can therefore contribute emerging findings to the quality element of the open space audit. The assessment also considered the capacity at each site to support

⁴ Swindon Borough Council, Get Swindon Active Strategy (2022-2025)

⁵ Knight, Kavanagh & Page, Swindon Borough Council Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy Assessment Report (Published February 2025)

⁶ Sport England, Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance: An approach to developing and delivering a playing pitch strategy (Published October 2013)

demand, and identified the additional need for pitches that would result from planned growth over the emerging plan period. It also assesses accessibility via walk time and drive time for residents. The Assessment constitutes a long report with various findings for each of the sports covered. Therefore, its findings cannot be reviewed in this report. It can be referred to however on the Council's website as part of the evidence base for the Regulation 18 consultation for the New Local Plan 2043.

3.3 Green Infrastructure Strategy 2024

3.4 The Council has created a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Borough which seeks to provide a basis for the creation and sustained management of Green Infrastructure in Swindon.⁷ Green Infrastructure (GI) is defined by the NPPF (2024) as:

*'A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.'*⁸

3.5 The initial draft strategy will be published as part of the Regulation 18 consultation evidence base. It has been produced with some initial stakeholder engagement. It is an evolving document however, and further stakeholder engagement will be undertaken on the initial draft and a GI Audit, this Open Space Audit, as well as a GI and Open Space questionnaire with residents will feed into the document. It is intended that the strategy will contribute towards the creation of a GI Delivery Plan, a Country Parks Strategy and masterplans and management plans for each of the Country Parks, and a Forest Plan that is being produced by the Great Western Community Forest team.

3.6 The GI Strategy identifies open space as a key GI asset. The strategy sets out the range of open spaces across the Borough. The strategy uses a different measurement to evaluate the provision of open space than the Open Space Audit and Assessment published in 2014. Rather than measuring the quantity of open space in the Borough, the strategy looks to assess the accessibility of open space to Swindon residents using Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Standards.⁹ These are:

- Doorstep (0.5ha within 200m)
- Local (2ha within 300m)
- Neighbourhood (10ha within 1km)
- Wider Neighbourhood (20ha within 2km)
- District (100ha within 5km)
- Sub regional (500ha within 10km)

⁷ Swindon Borough Council, Green Infrastructure Strategy (2024)

⁸ Annex 2: Glossary of the NPPF (2024)

⁹ Natural England, Green Infrastructure Framework, Accessible Greenspace Standards (2025)

3.7 It was found that there are gaps in doorstep, local and neighbourhood access to open spaces in the town centre, Walcot, and around the Oxford Road areas of St Margaret and South Marston.

4. Purpose and requirements of the updated Open Space Audit and Assessment 2025

4.1 An Open Space Audit and Assessment was last published in 2014 and provided comprehensive information on all recreational open space within the Borough and is used to support the implementation of policies and standards detailed in the adopted Swindon Local Plan 2026.

4.2 Policies in the adopted Local Plan 2026 currently inform how public open space is protected and how it will be provided for as part of residential development. Policy EN3 in particular states that residential development shall provide or contribute towards public open space in line with open space standards set out in the appendix of the Local Plan 2026.¹⁰ Policy EN3 dictates that residential development of 25 dwellings or more should provide open space on site. Further, open space will generally be protected from development unless certain criteria under Policy EN3 are met.

4.3 When assessing planning applications Development Management consider open space provision against local and national policy, applying standards on quantity, quality, and accessibility. New developments are expected to provide appropriate on-site space or secure off-site contributions, while proposals involving the loss of existing open space are resisted unless the land is proven surplus or replaced with provision of equal or better quality. This approach balances the need for growth with the protection and enhancement of valued open spaces.

4.4 An updated Open Space Audit and Assessment is needed to inform the New Local Plan 2043 which will be undergoing Regulation 18 consultation in Autumn 2025. The report will thus influence how the provision of open space is protected, managed and how development proposals are considered to accord with open space policies. Further, given that the most recent Audit and Assessment was published in 2014, the provision of open space in the Borough will have changed since 2014, something that needs to be reviewed.

Requirements for the New Open Space Audit and Assessment

4.5 The approach of the current open space audit and assessment was reviewed to determine whether it remained in line with best practice and current guidance, and whether the scope of the assessment should be broadened to better align with wider Council projects and priorities.

Research objectives of the updated Open Space Audit and Assessment 2025

To understand and analyse the current provision of open spaces in the Borough, and at ward level to understand local surplus and deficit;

¹⁰ Appendix 3: Open Space Standards in: Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 (Adopted 2015)

To align typologies with best practice as defined by the Fields in Trust guidance for Local Authorities;
To undertake assessment of provision utilising Fields in Trust standards on provision and typology;
To have cross-boundary discussions with neighbouring authorities to understand their residents' use of Swindon's open space.
To identify and map changes to open spaces provision since last audit and assessment as far as the amount lost and gained;
To understand the quality of the site in terms of the attractiveness and practicality of these spaces for their presumed purpose;
To consult with stakeholders and residents on the quality of open spaces.

5. Methodology

- 5.1 A full update to the existing audit of all open spaces was undertaken, to include additional sites added since the last audit. The audit update was undertaken using GIS, and a full database of open spaces includes spatial data with attributes include area, location, address and site name.

Fields in Trust Standards

- 5.2 Fields in Trust Standards (2024) on open space provision are outlined in the table below. Fields in Trust categorise open space by its broad use, establishing different ideal standards for open space provision for each category.

	Category	Ha per 1000 People Standard
Open Space	Parks and Gardens	0.8
	Amenity Green Space	0.6
	Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space	1.8
	Total Open Space	3.2
Outdoor Sports	Outdoor Sports	1.6
	Total Outdoor Sports	1.6
Play Space	Equipped designated play areas	0.25
	Informal Play	0.3
	Total Play Space	0.55
Total	Overall Total Open Space	5.35

The adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 and Open Space Audit and Assessment adopts a minimum provision standard of 3.2ha of all open space per 1000 population. This was based on Fields in Trust guidance and adapted to the Swindon context. This update proposes to retain

the 3.2 Ha of open space per 1000 population minimum standard. It considers in the 3.2ha standard to include all typologies with the exception of informal play and outdoor sports since these are dealt with in other strategies.

Total open space: minimum of 3.2 hectares per 1000 people (32 metres squared per person)

Total outdoor sports: minimum of 1.6 hectares per 1000 people (16 metres squared per person)

Total play space: minimum of 0.55 hectares per 1000 people (5.5 metres squared per person)

Overall total: minimum of 5.35 hectares per 1000 population (53.5 metres squared per person)

Typology revision:

- 5.3 To consider a ward's strengths and opportunities open spaces in this audit are assigned typologies. All open spaces were considered in terms of their typology as outlined below.
- 5.4 Amendments to the typologies from the previous Open Space Audit and Assessment (2014) were made to align with the modern FiT standards which are widely recognised as benchmark standards for open space.
- 5.5 Open space Audit and Assessment 2014 – Typology used

Type of Open Space	Definition	Requirement
Children and Teenager's Play Areas	All children and teenager's play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball goals and similar facilities.	0.3 Hectares/1000 population
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Includes all outdoor sports facilities whether naturally or artificially surfaced e.g. playing pitches bowling greens and tennis courts.	1.6 Hectares/1000 population (1.2 Hectares of which is playing pitches)
General Recreational Areas	All areas of public open space which have a significant recreational function but do not fall in the other categories.	1 Hectare/1000 population of which 0.5 Ha should be suitable for children's informal play
Allotments	An area containing allotment plots which the occupier uses mainly for the purpose of cultivating fruit or vegetables for consumption by the occupier or their family.	0.3 Hectares/1000 population

Open Space Audited 2025 – Revised Typologies

Type of Open Space	Definition
Local Area of Play (LAP)	Local areas for play or 'door-step' spaces – for play and informal recreation (LAPs)
Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP)	Local equipped, or local landscaped, areas for play – for play and informal recreation (LEAPs)
Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP)	Neighbourhood equipped areas for play – for play and informal recreation, and provision for children and young people (NEAPs)
Parks and Gardens	Urban parks and squares, country parks, regional parks, forest parks, and formal gardens
Amenity Green Space	Informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing, village greens, urban commons, allotments and growing spaces and other incidental spaces which may include areas of hard spaces as well as green spaces
Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space	Woodland, scrub, grassland, heath or moor, wetlands, open and running water and open access land
Outdoor Sports	Sport pitches, courts, greens, tracks, trails or sports equipment (including schools and outdoor facilities not publicly accessible)
Cemeteries and church yards	Burial grounds and churchyards providing space for remembrance, quiet reflection, and often contributing to local heritage, biodiversity, and informal recreation.
Allotments, Orchards and Community Grow Spaces	Allotments, orchards and community grow spaces provide land for food growing and small-scale horticulture, contributing to health, community activity and the wider open space network.

Quantity

- 5.6 The quantity of open space has been considered in terms of the area in Ha of open space area in each ward and against ward population, to determine the overall provision by ward. This has further been broken down to consider open space provision in terms of Open spaces (amenity green space, parks and gardens, country parks) as well as Play Space and Outdoor Sports.
- 5.7 To calculate the quantity of open space within each amended ward, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software was used to calculate the total area of the open space sites within each individual ward. Where sites were divided between two or three

neighbouring wards, the area of each section was measured and apportioned to the appropriate ward.

Findings

Ward	Open Space (ha)	Outdoor Sports (ha)	Play Space (ha)	Total (ha)	Total OS (all types) ha per 1000 people
Blunsdon and Highworth	129.171	32.033	0.384	161.588	13.93
Central	13.1092	11.578	0.879	25.566	1.62
Chiseldon and Lawn	137.263	9.899	0.173	147.335	17.84
Covingham and Dorcan	25.195	2.169	0.599	27.963	2.62
Eastcott	6.823	0	0.113	6.936	0.55
Gorse Hill and Pinehurst	19.209	9.983	0.248	29.44	2.12
Haydon Wick	17.578	1.540	0.636	19.754	1.65
Liden, Eldene and Park South	20.772	4.502	0.506	25.78	2.28
Lydiard and Freshbrook	69.293	11.385	0.785	81.463	7.58
Mannington and Western	38.920	14.451	0.731	54.102	4.86
Old Town	31.21	11.81	2.457	45.477	4.01
Penhill and Upper Stratton	93.384	31.268	0.394	125.046	9.84
Priory Vale	78.788	0.642	0.653	80.083	6.36
Ridgeway	20.315	18.2869	0.098	38.70	11.27
Rodbourne Cheney	26.451	38.624	1.269	66.344	5.19
Shaw	129.498	1.189	0.9	131.587	12.24
St. Andrews	38.556	4.727	1.444	44.727	2.21
St. Margaret and South Marston	62.580	16.788	0.839	80.207	6.73
Walcot and Park North	11.598	6.254	0.171	18.023	1.31
Wroughton and Wichelstowe	110.312	23.827	1.035	135.174	16.23

Quality

- 5.8 In addition to assessing the quantity of provision, it is important for the council to assess the quality of open spaces to ensure they are functional, accessible, and meet the needs of different users. A purely numerical assessment cannot capture issues such as condition, design, safety, and inclusivity, all of which determine whether spaces are well-used and meet the needs of the community. By considering both quantity and quality, authorities can make more informed decisions about protection, enhancement and investment.
- 5.9 In May 2025 the Council undertook a consultation and engagement exercise via an 'Open spaces survey' which will feed into an overall assessment on quality as outlined below in next steps.
- 5.10 A more detailed analysis of feedback from local residents will take place through the forthcoming Open Spaces technical study as outlined in Section 6.
- 5.11 Parallel workstreams have updated elements of the quality findings and will be utilised in the quality analysis. The Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Assessment involved an in-person audit of playing pitches and fields, to understand their suitability to attract or sustain the sporting activity.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 The current analysis of open space quantity requires refinement to provide a more detailed understanding of provision at the ward level, broken down by typology. This will enable the Council to identify localised gaps and surpluses, target improvements effectively, and ensure that provision standards are calibrated to reflect both community needs and policy objectives.
- 6.2 The quality of Swindon's open spaces has not been fully assessed, representing a gap in the evidence base. To address this, the Council intends to undertake a systematic quality audit, drawing on recognised benchmarks such as the Green Flag criteria. This will evaluate condition, facilities, accessibility, safety, and user experience, ensuring that future planning and investment decisions reflect not only the quantity of provision but also its suitability and value to the community.
- 6.3 A gap analysis will identify key shortfalls in open space provision based on the findings of the audit and quantitative assessment. It highlights areas where the quantity, accessibility, and quality of open spaces fall below established benchmarks or local standards. Spatial disparities are evident, with certain neighbourhoods underserved in terms of hectares per capita and access to green spaces within walking distance.