

Natural and semi-natural open space

Definition

- 8.1 This type of open space includes woodlands, urban forestry, scrubland, grasslands (eg downlands, commons, meadows), wetlands, nature reserves and wastelands with a primary purpose of wildlife conservation and bio-diversity within the settlement boundaries.

Picture 8.1 *Etchingham woods (Site ID 582)*



Strategic context and consultation

- 8.2 The District of Rother contains a large number of public and private woodlands. These sites tend to be heavily protected by their location in the green belt, area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) or proximity to a site of special scientific interest (SSSI). In fact over 80% of the District is encompassed within the High Weald AONB.
- 8.3 The Local Plan recognises the distinctive make up of the District as well as the distinguishing features between different settlements. Specific policies are in place to protect these features and to ensure future developments protect and do not conflict with such features. The urban area of Bexhill is focused upon for much residential growth as it is not as constrained by any AONB's.
- 8.4 Due to the large number of policies in place in Rother District that protect natural and semi-natural sites, this study has focused predominantly on all sites in urban areas and on the urban fringe (both public and private) but only strategic sites in the rural areas.

- 8.5 Consultation showed that the protection of Rother's natural and semi natural open spaces was of a high importance to the public with inappropriate development being a particular concern. In some areas there are concerns that such development would eventually result in the merging of settlements. The importance of these sites to the public was re-confirmed by the household survey that showed this typology to be the most visited of all typologies and 66% of respondents using a site more than once a month.
- 8.6 Of respondents who use a natural/semi natural site as their primary open space, 41% walk less than five minutes to reach it and a further 29% walk between five and ten minutes. The most significant problems were vandalism/graffiti and dog fouling. The consultation showed that the majority of respondents are content with the current quantity of natural/semi natural sites in the District.

Setting provision standards

- 8.7 In setting local standards for natural and semi-natural open space there is a need to take into account any national or local standards, current provision, other local authority standards for appropriate comparison, site assessments and consultation on local needs.

Current position

- 8.8 There are a total of 138 natural and semi-natural sites in the District, accounting for 1321.32ha of open space. As to be expected the rural areas have the highest total hectares of this typology however the highest average site size was for the Battle analysis area. The Bexhill analysis area had the smallest average site size but the largest number of sites of the three urban analysis areas.

Quantity standard

- 8.9 Existing provision of natural and semi-natural sites in Rother District is currently 15.53ha per 1,000 population. The average site size is 9.57ha although it varies significantly between analysis areas.

Table 8.1 Analysis area breakdown

Analysis area	Number of sites	Total hectares	Average site size (ha)
Battle	15	235.77	15.72
Bexhill	39	191.02	4.90
Rye	3	24.34	8.11
East Rother	37	357.41	9.66
West Rother	44	512.78	11.65

- 8.10 There are two main standards that relate to the provision of natural and semi natural green space. These are the Woodland Trust's standard for woodland areas and English Nature which has developed a standard for accessible natural greenspace (ANGSt).

8.11 The Woodland Trust standard is:

- no person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2ha in size
- there should be also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20ha within 4km (8km round-trip) of people's homes.

8.12 The English Nature Accessible Natural Greenspace standard is:

- that no person should live more than 300m from their nearest area of natural greenspace of at least 2ha in size
- provision of at least 1ha of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population
- that there should be at least one accessible 20ha site within 2km from home
- that there should be one accessible 100ha site within 5km
- that there should be one 500ha site within 20 km.

8.13 Overall opinion suggests that the current provision levels are about right or more than enough, with a total of 63% of respondents suggesting so. This is compared to only 21% of people who felt there was not enough of this type of open space.

8.14 Due to the differences between the urban and rural areas, two quantity standards have been set. The urban standard covers the Battle, Bexhill and Rye analysis areas whilst the rural standard covers the East and West Rother analysis areas.

8.15 The recommended local urban quantity standard is 2ha per 1,000 population for new large-scale developments. No new provision is required for small-scale developments. This is significantly below the current provision level and recognises that new natural and semi natural areas are not required in any of the urban areas. This quantity standard is in addition to the current provision level of each area and should not be interpreted that there is an excess of typology in any of the urban analysis areas.

8.16 The recommended rural quantity standard is also 2ha per 1,000 population. As per the urban standard, it is set for new large-scale developments only and is in addition to the current provision levels and should not be interpreted as an excess of provision in either of the rural areas. As per the urban areas, only quality and accessibility improvements will be sought from new small-scale developments.

**RECOMMENDED
LOCAL
QUANTITY
STANDARD**

*Urban and Rural
– 2ha per 1,000
population*

*For large scale
developments
only*

8.17 The full context and justification for this standard is outlined in Appendix G.

Quality Standard

- 8.18 There are no definitive national or local quality standards although the Countryside Agency state that land should be managed to conserve or enhance its rich landscape, bio-diversity, heritage and local customs.
- 8.19 The highest rated quality aspirations for this chapter from residents who used this typology most frequently were: clean and litter free, nature features, clear footpaths and dog walking facilities. Litter and dog fouling were considered the most significant quality issues at natural and semi-natural sites.
- 8.20 The average quality score for sites in the District is 51%. This is a relatively low score compared to other typologies and other local authorities. This score can be largely explained by the large number of sites outside of Council ownership whereby the Council are unable to control any quality issues.
- 8.21 The quality standard for natural and semi-natural greenspace needs to take into account the aspirations of the public and also the Countryside Agency's quality standard of well-managed conservation land encompassing bio-diversity and environmental education.
- 8.22 The quality standard provides the vision for any new provision and also a benchmark for existing natural and semi-natural greenspace to achieve in terms of enhancement. Appendix I provides further explanation on the suggested approach to the future benchmarking of sites.

RECOMMENDED LOCAL QUALITY STANDARD

"A site that encourages wildlife conservation and biodiversity. Opportunities to link natural sites together with green corridors should be maximised and clear pathways and dog-walking facilities should be provided. Litter bins should be provided and management of local sites should involve the community. There should be a clear focus on balancing wildlife needs with the access and recreational needs of the public where appropriate."

Accessibility standard

- 8.23 English Nature recommends accessibility standards for various sizes of accessible natural greenspace. The Woodland Trust recommends standards for the provision of woodland areas within different catchments for different size sites. This has been outlined previously. There are no existing local standards.
- 8.24 From the household survey, of those respondents who used natural and semi-natural greenspaces most frequently, the highest levels of satisfaction related to pathways, planted and grassed areas, general maintenance and management and information/signage. The highest level of dissatisfaction was towards the provision of toilets, litter bins and seats/benches.
- 8.25 The average access score for sites in the District is 50%. This is a relatively low score which is a result of the large number of sites where there is a lack of official access to the public. Natural and semi natural sites tend to score lower than other typologies due to access issues with wheelchairs and pushchairs.

RECOMMENDED ACCESSIBILITY STANDARD

**15 minute walk
(1.2km)**

- 8.26 Walking was the preferred method of transport (62%) by residents that use this type of open space most frequently and also by all respondents of the household survey (55%). It should be noted that residents in the Rye analysis area preferred to drive to such an area. The calculated travel time is 15 minutes, based on the 75th percentile of respondents to the household survey. This distance along roads and footpaths equates to a 720m straight line distance.

Applying provision standards – identifying geographical areas

- 8.27 In order to identify important geographical areas and those areas with local need we apply the quantity standard and accessibility standard together. 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 important. This is important in the urban areas but it is sometimes less meaningful in rural areas due to the large tracts of accessible countryside that can surround settlements.
- 8.28 Map 8.1 overleaf provides an overview of all sites in Rother District. The map shows that the West Rother analysis area is well served by this typology. There are only two gaps in provision, at Ticehurst and Hurst Green. In Ticehurst there are a large number of woods just outside of the urban settlement, such as Devilsden and Singlehurst Wood. Therefore new provision is not recommended and enhancing the quality and accessibility of current sites should be focused upon. In Hurst Green there is ample coverage from the Burgh Wood site so again qualitative and accessibility improvements should be the Council's main focus.
- 8.29 The East Rother analysis area is also well served by this typology. The only gaps of note are for Westfield, Icklesham and Winchelsea Beach. Although there are no wooded areas in the centre of Westfield there are significant resources at the edge of the settlement, therefore new provision here is not recommended. The same situation is evident in Icklesham.
- 8.30 In Winchelsea and Winchelsea Beach there are no significant natural or semi natural open spaces however there are large tracts of fields, many of which are usually unofficially by members of the public. Therefore new provision here should only be of a low priority.

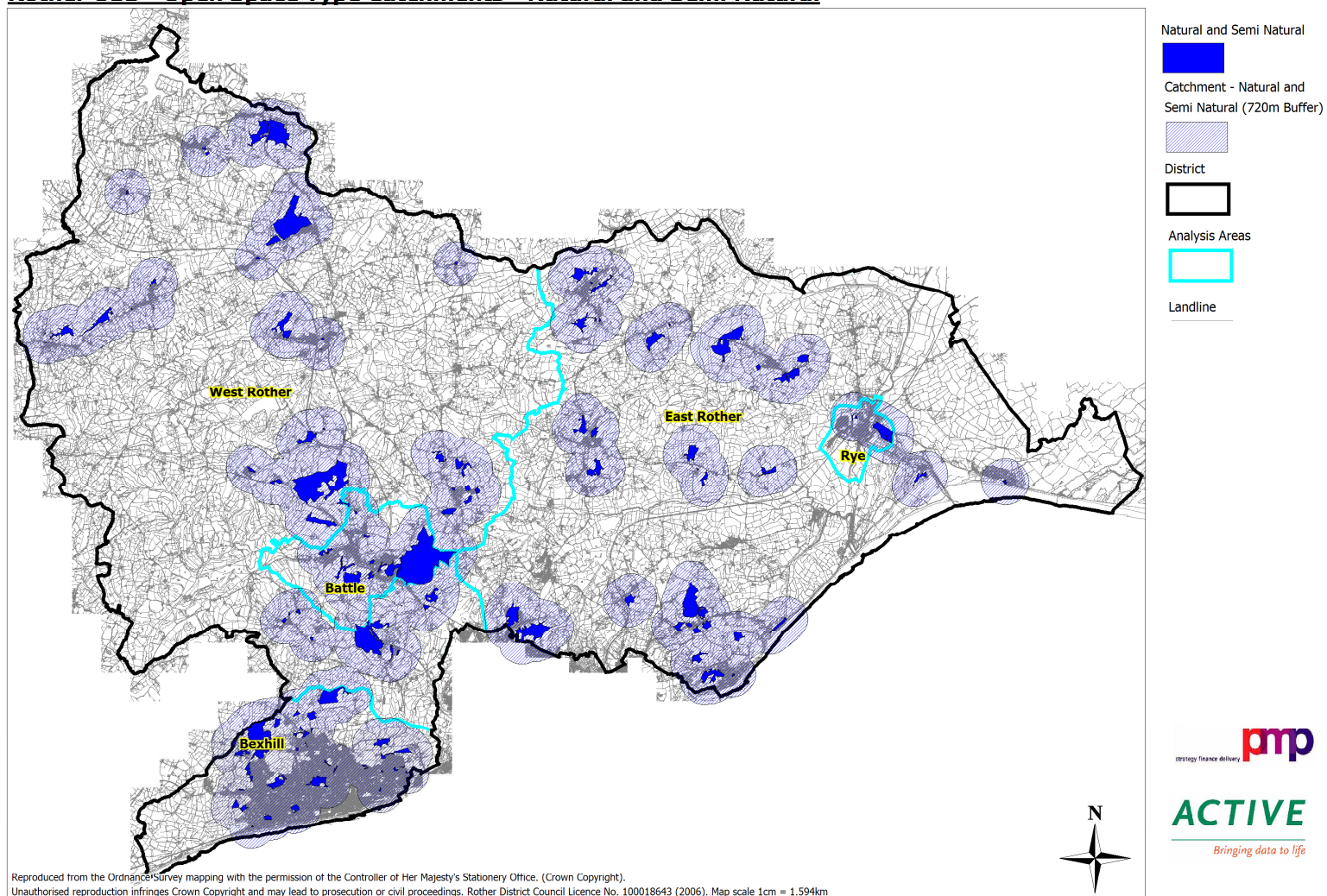
NSN 1

The Council to concentrate on qualitative and accessibility improvements in all rural areas with the exception of Winchelsea where new provision is a low priority.

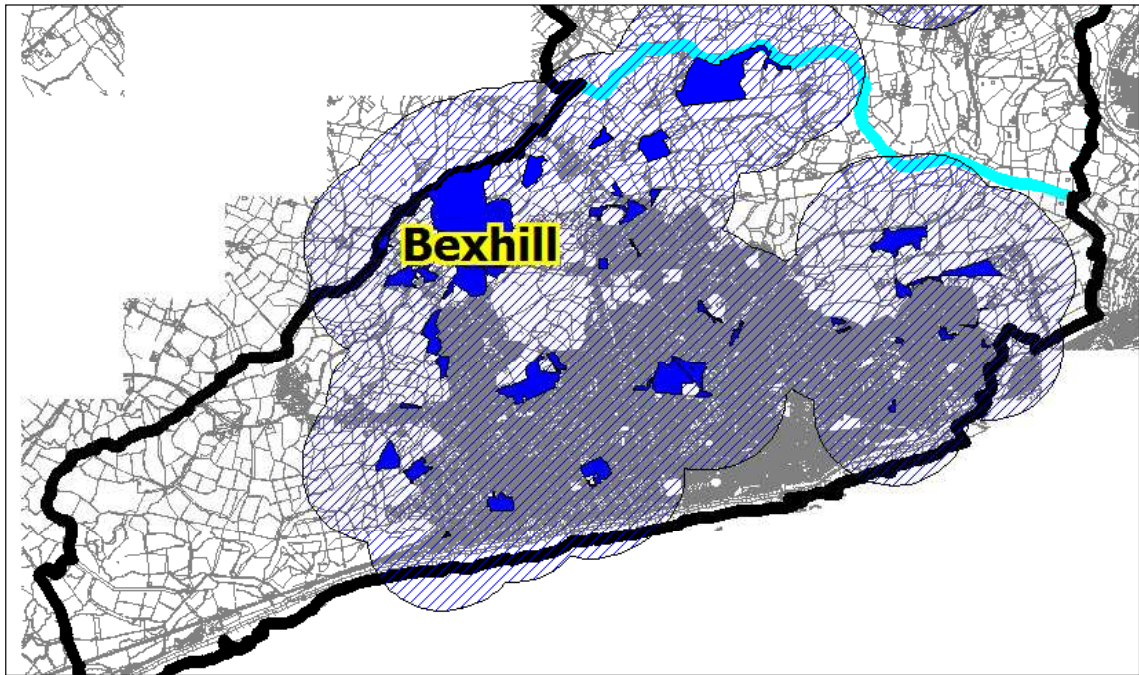
SECTION 8 – NATURAL AND SEMI-NATURAL OPEN SPACE

Map 8.1 – Accessibility catchment for natural and semi natural sites

Rother OSS - Open Space Type Catchments - Natural and Semi Natural



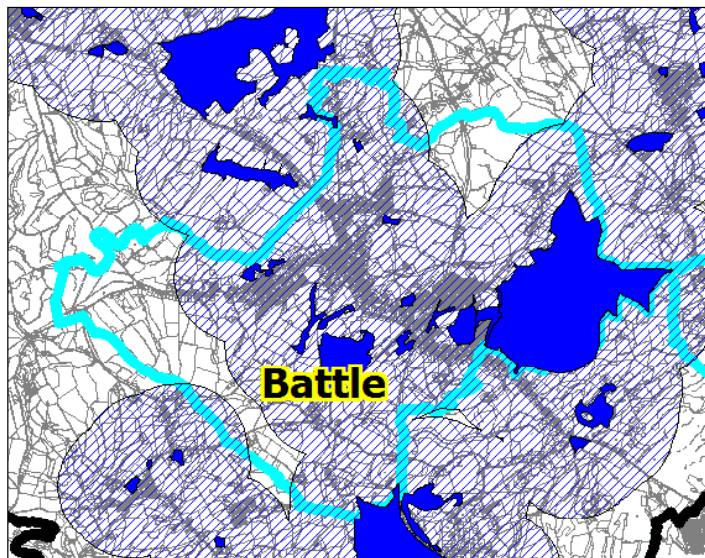
Map 8.2 Natural and semi natural sites in Bexhill



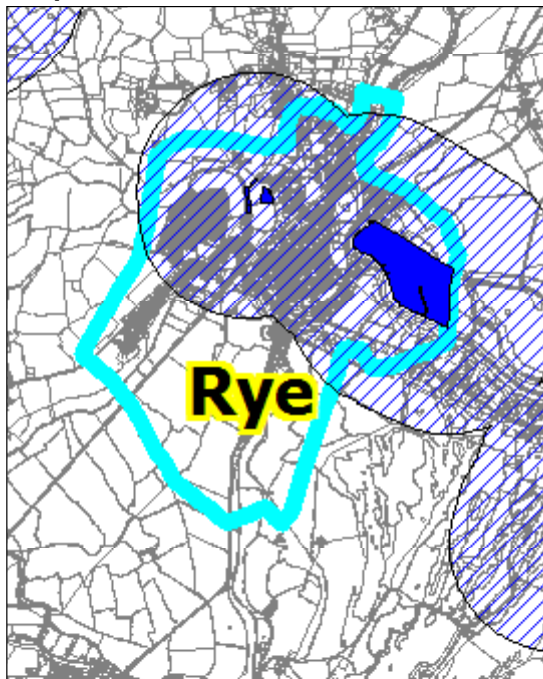
- 8.31 Map 8.2 shows an almost universal coverage of the Bexhill area by this typology. The only area without provision is in the southeast. Unfortunately it is not possible to create a new space without major redevelopment or the redesignation of an existing open space site. As both of these are unlikely, the Council should ensure other open spaces in this area are of a high quality in order to compensate.

NSN 2	The Council to concentrate on qualitative improvements to other open spaces in southeast Bexhill to compensate for the lack of a natural or semi natural site.
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Map 8.3 Natural and semi natural sites in Battle



Map 8.4 Natural and semi natural sites in Rye



- 8.32 Maps 8.3 and 8.4 display virtually complete coverage in both areas for this typology. Therefore the Council should concentrate on qualitative improvements rather than new provision for both areas.

NSN 3

The Council to concentrate on qualitative improvements on existing sites over new provision in Battle and Rye.

- 8.33 Open accessible countryside is not included in the audit of open space for Rother and therefore is not illustrated on the maps. However it is assumed that people living within rural settlements have easy access to natural areas within the open countryside.

Value assessment – identifying specific sites

- 8.34 Assessing quality and value is fundamental to effective planning for future provision for natural and semi-natural greenspace. This can be done simply through comparing value with quality or by assessing all options and combinations when comparing quality, accessibility and usage of sites.
- 8.35 The value scores are based on the average scores for quality and accessibility and the usage scoring for the site. The highest scoring sites for both these factors are:
- Sidley Woods, Bexhill (Site ID 195)
 - St Mary's Lane NSN, Bexhill (Site ID 172)
 - Long plantation, Battle (Site ID 273)
 - The Suttons NSN, East Rother (Site ID 23).

- 8.36 The lower scoring sites were predominantly in rural areas and suffered from a lack of control by the District or applicable Parish Council. This also means it is difficult for the Council to control any improvements to the sites. Examples include:
- Halfhouse Wood, East Rother (Site ID 635)
 - Corner Wood, East Rother (Site ID 717).

Summary and recommendations

- 8.37 There is a large quantity of natural and semi natural sites in the District and the proposed Pebsham Country Park will contain significant semi natural areas. Because of the lack of quantity issues, the Council should prioritise quality and access issues over quantity issues.
- 8.38 It is recognised that a large proportion of the sites in Rother are outside of District or Parish Council control, therefore it is difficult for the Council to affect any changes. However this still leaves a significant number of sites that can be improved.
- 8.39 In the short term the Council should provide one fully accessible site in each of the urban areas. In order to be fully accessible the Council will need to remove any restrictive entrance barriers whilst providing level pathways. This is likely to incur significant expense to the Council, hence the short term aim of only one site per urban area in the short term.

NSN 1	The Council to concentrate on qualitative and accessibility improvements in all rural areas with the exception of Winchelsea where new provision is a low priority.
NSN 2	The Council to concentrate on qualitative improvements to other open spaces in southeast Bexhill to compensate for the lack of a natural or semi natural site.
NSN 3	The Council to concentrate on qualitative improvements on existing sites over new provision in Battle and Rye.