

Strategic Open Space in East Sussex – study summary

Background

‘Strategic open spaces’ (SOS) are areas of countywide rather than solely local importance which are open free of charge and which reflect the special landscape character of our county. These spaces include open access land, commons, woodlands and nature reserves, or even a combination of these, often under a wide range of ownership.

Our strategic open space is a vital part of our county’s infrastructure, providing ‘ecosystem services’ such as clean air and water, food and raw materials, and health benefits through exercise, social opportunities, and stress relief. They attract visitors and businesses and thereby support our economy.

The East Sussex Landscape Resource

Strategic open space and woodlands are key parts of the County’s ever-changing landscape. Landscape Character Assessment is an objective way of looking at and describing landscape, using national guidance developed by Natural England, to help assess the effect of proposed changes on the landscape. Landscape looked at in this way is neither good nor bad quality, but its distinctiveness is described and analysed to distinguish what makes one area different to another.

One of the reasons that East Sussex is so special is that we have such a varied and distinctive range of landscape character areas, with 5 National Character Areas (the South Downs, High Weald, Low Weald, Pevensey Levels and Romney Marsh), which are subdivided into 25 County Landscape Character Areas (LCA). These help to provide a discrete sense of place.

What standards exist to help us to decide how much we need?

East Sussex has over 15,000 hectares (ha) of strategic open space i.e. single or well connected areas of 20 ha or more, open to the public at no charge, and where visitors have access to much of the area.

There are two standards of relevance:

1) Strategic Open Spaces: the only national standard for the quantity of open space is Natural England’s “Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard” (ANGSt). This was developed in the 1990s and updated in 2010. The ANGSt recommends that everyone should have a range of accessible natural open spaces of certain sizes within certain distances of where they live, namely:

- at least one of 2 hectares (ha) within 300m;
- at least one of 20 ha within 2 km;
- at least one of 100 ha within 5 km;
- at least one of 500 ha within 10km; and
- a minimum of 1 ha statutory Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population.

This report considered that 2 ha sites are only of local importance and are not part of strategic open space.

Strategic open space in terms of its quantity is considered in this report to be the larger 3 categories of the ANGSt (i.e. 20 ha and above).

2) Woodland: the Woodland Trust has developed the "Woodland Access Standard", which recommends that everyone should have at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than:

- 2 ha within 500m; and
- 20 ha within 4 km.

Again, this report considered access to woodland for only the larger category, with the 2 ha sites being considered to be of local rather than strategic importance.

How does East Sussex compare with the standards

Strategic Open Space:

Table 1 indicates that 92% of the county's population currently achieves the 20ha standard, 86% achieve the 100ha standard and 67% achieve the 500ha standard.

Local Nature Reserve provision is not a problem within East Sussex as it is well provided for, with nearly 2.0 ha per 1,000 population, although this varies greatly at a local level.

Woodland:

In East Sussex, 83% of local residents achieve the larger Woodland Trust standard. Map 5 illustrates that the main areas of deficiency are around Rye, Pevensey Levels and Newhaven. Other smaller areas of deficiency are scattered around in the more rural parts of the county.

Where Do We Need More Strategic Open Space and Woodland

Strategic Open Space:

If we concentrate on the largest category in the ANGSt analysis, namely 500ha sites within 10km of our homes, then Map 1 highlights that a wide band of deficiency exists from Hastings and Bexhill, through Battle and up to Heathfield.

Woodland:

Woodland is not part of the landscape character of the Rye and Pevensey Bay areas and, therefore, creating more woodland in these areas would not be appropriate. However, creating more woodland in the Newhaven area would address the largest area of remaining deficiency and would be in keeping with the local landscape character. Other areas (e.g. between Lewes and Uckfield), and south-east of Heathfield are lower priority, as at least some of these areas' needs could be met by increasing access to existing woodland. The other small, rural areas of deficiency are low priority areas to address because fewer people live in them.

How Could We Achieve A Good Level Against These Standards

It is proposed that the County Council adopts a policy to achieve 90% of the ANGSt and Woodland Access Standard for its residents, for the reasons outlined above. The actions outlined below would enable the County Council to achieve these standards.

Strategic Open Space:

Table 1 indicates that the development of Pebsham Countryside Park (PCP) will address the greatest deficiency in quantity and enable over 90% of residents to have access to the larger categories of the national standard. The PCP covers over 600 ha between Bexhill and Hastings, enabling a further 137,000 people to reach the 500 ha standard and bring the County total to 94% of all residents (see Map 2). Furthermore, PCP also improves the 100 ha performance from the current situation, illustrated in Map 3, to that shown in Map 4, enabling a further 46,000 people benefit, bringing the county total to 95%.

Woodland:

Woodland is proposed to be created in and around the Newhaven area of deficiency as part of the visual mitigation and environmental compensation work associated with the Energy from Waste facility. This will provide some local residents with access to woodland of 2 hectares or more within 500m of where they live.

Table 1. ACCESS TO STRATEGIC OPEN SPACE IN EAST SUSSEX - THE TOP 3 ANGST CATEGORIES

	ANGST CATEGORY											
	500ha space within 10km of home				100ha space within 5km of home				20ha space within 2km of home			
	People	% of total	Increase	% Increase	People	% of total	Increase	% Increase	People	% of total	Increase	% Increase
Current	339,657	67	n/a	n/a	439,041	86	n/a	n/a	470,002	92	n/a	n/a
1. With Rye Harbour Nature Reserve extension	365,620	72	25,963	8	457,039	90	17,998	4	470,002	92	n/a	n/a
2. With Pebsham only	477,107	94	137,450	40	485,200	95	46,159	11	472,825	93	2,823	> 1
With both 1. and 2.	491,216	96	151,559	45	485,200	95	46,159	11	472,825	93	2,823	> 1

Notes: 1) Population data based onONS, 2008 Mid Year Estimate, distributed according to current Address Point data.

2) There are some minor geographical overlaps between the 3 different additions. This has been removed from the population figures.











