



Rother Green and Blue Infrastructure Study

Final Report

Rother District Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 LUC was commissioned by Rother District Council (RDC) in May 2026 to prepare a Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Study and Open Space Audit to form an important part of the evidence base for the emerging Rother Local Plan (2025-2042). The study will serve as a robust, locally specific evidence base to support the Plan, ensuring decisions around green and blue infrastructure and open space provision are justified, policy compliant and capable of withstanding scrutiny. The delivery of high-quality GBI will underpin the proposed Local Plan objectives by supporting sustainable development, addressing health and social inequalities, conserving and enhancing built and natural heritage, improving social cohesion, facilitating active travel and building environmental and climate resilience. Once adopted, the Local Plan will guide development to 2042 and act as a key delivery mechanism for GBI and open space across the district.

1.2 The study has assessed the existing GBI network and open space provision across Rother District, identified gaps and opportunities, and developed evidence-based recommendations to strengthen and enhance the network. These recommendations support the integration of GBI and open space into future planning policies and development. They include measures that can be delivered as part of new development through the planning process, as well as those requiring wider partnership working and other delivery mechanisms.

Definitions and terminology

What is GBI?

1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) 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” **[See reference 1]**.

1.4 GBI networks can include, but are not limited to:

- Managed and natural greenspaces: Public parks and gardens, nature conservation sites, allotments, cemeteries and community gardens.

- Linear Linkages and corridors: Hedgerows, Public Rights of Way (PRoW), walking and cycling routes and river corridors.
- Elements of the built environment: Roadside verges, street trees, public realm, private gardens, sustainable urban drainage systems (e.g. rain gardens) and greening features (e.g. green roofs and walls).
- Aspects of the wider landscape and countryside: Farmland, wetlands/flood plains, and woodlands.
- Blue infrastructure: Water elements of green infrastructure including rivers, canals, lakes, ponds and wetlands.

What is Open Space?

1.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines open spaces as “All open space (i.e. outdoor areas) 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” [\[See reference 2\]](#).

1.6 An alternative term ‘greenspace’ is sometimes used instead of open space. This usually refers to those open spaces that are primarily natural or green cover.

1.7 Open space standards are used in local open space assessments to guide the provision, design and management of open spaces. There are three types of standards that are usually recommended:

- **Quantity standard:** The quantity standard refers to the amount of open space available compared to the population. It is usually expressed in hectares per 1,000 of the population. This may also be referred to as a capacity standard.
- **Accessibility standard:** The accessibility standard sets out how far people may be expected to travel to access open spaces. It may be expressed as a straight-line distance (in metres or kilometres) or as a travel time (in minutes) based on the road and path network. This may also be referred to as a proximity, or size-proximity, standard.
- **Quality and value standard:** The quality standard sets out expectations for the condition and functionality of open spaces. It is often divided into value (the functionality of and facilities within an open space) and quality (the condition and maintenance of these features). A structured set of criteria and scoring is usually used to translate quality and value assessments into numerical scores to which a standard can be applied.

Structure of the report

1.8 The remainder of this report is structured as set out below:

- **Chapter 2: Policy and Strategic Context** sets out the strategic context for the study as well as a review of relevant national, regional and local policy and guidance to GBI and open space in the district.
- **Chapter 3: Open Space Typology and Hierarchy** details the open space typologies used to classify open space types, as well as the size-based open space hierarchies.
- **Chapter 4: Quantity Assessment and Standards** outlines current open space provision, proposed quantity standards and the findings of the quantity assessment based on those standards.
- **Chapter 5: Accessibility Assessment and Standards** outlines proposed accessibility standards and the findings of the accessibility assessment based on those standards.
- **Chapter 6: Quality Assessment and Standards** presents the findings from the site audits that were undertaken, outlines proposed quality and value benchmarks and the findings of the quality assessment based on those standards.
- **Chapter 7: Existing Green and Blue Infrastructure Network** provides an assessment of Rother District's existing GBI network and its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to enhancing the network.
- **Chapter 8: GBI Strategic Opportunities** based on the outputs of the spatial analysis, a schedule of GBI projects to strengthen and enhance the GBI and open space network in the direct are identified. For each project the intervention type, location, justification for inclusion and indicative priority are provided.
- **Chapter 9: Next Steps and Recommendations** presents a summary of the recommendations provided throughout the report as well as identifying key next steps to ensure their delivery.

Chapter 2

Policy and Strategic Context

2.1 This chapter sets out the strategic context for the study as well as a review of relevant national, regional and local policy and guidance.

Policy review

National

25 Year Environment Plan (2018) and Environmental Improvement Plan (2025)

2.2 The 2018 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) [\[See reference 3\]](#) outlines the strategic direction behind the Environment Act (2021) [\[See reference 4\]](#), including long-term environmental improvement targets. The plan also outlines several actions that relate to delivering social benefits through the provision of greenspace. Chapter 3 of the 25YEP is dedicated to the importance of connecting people with the environment, recognising that this can improve health and wellbeing. Greenspaces are noted for their role in providing health and wellbeing benefits and economic benefits.

2.3 Additionally, the Plan commits to establishing a national Green Infrastructure (GI) framework and creating a network of 'nature recovery areas'. The plan embeds the principle of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) into development practices. BNG is a mandatory approach, adopted in 2024, that requires development projects to demonstrate an environmental enhancement by at least 10%.

2.4 The 2025 Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) [\[See reference 5\]](#) is the Government's second update to the 25YEP. It builds on the original vision, detailing how the Government will collaborate with landowners, communities, and businesses to achieve environmental goals. The EIP identifies actions to support nature recovery, reduce pollution, mitigate climate change, and promote sustainable resource use. It also outlines specific Government support for habitat creation, sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) that serve multiple functions, and accessible natural spaces near where people live and work. These initiatives are accompanied by interim targets to track progress. Goal 10: 'Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment' includes the specific target to ensure everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space.

2.5 The EIP emphasises the importance of sustained, long-term efforts to enhance both the environment and people's quality of life. A central mechanism for delivering these improvements is the planning system, which has incorporated BNG into development processes. The plan also aims to increase public access to high-quality green spaces.

The Environment Act (2021)

2.6 The Environment Act [See reference 6] published in 2021 sets out provisions to make targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment. It requires the Government to establish clear targets that support transformative change and promote a landscape-scale, nature-led recovery approach. The Act identifies four key priority areas: water, air quality, biodiversity, and resource efficiency, including waste reduction. Additionally, it introduces BNG requirements and places a duty on local authorities to review all nature conservation policies at least once every five years.

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

2.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) [See reference 7] sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The NPPF was updated in 2026, however, the Council's Local Plan will be examined under the 2024 NPPF [See reference 8].

2.8 The framework includes requirements for assessing open space, highlighting the importance of incorporating open space, green infrastructure and sports provision in the development of local plans.

2.9 Paragraphs 96 and 98 require that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places; referencing safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities and high-quality public space as a means to achieving this. Emphasis is placed on positive planning for the provision and resilience of shared spaces and community facilities, such as sports venues and open spaces.

2.10 Paragraph 103 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".

2.11 The paragraph also specifies that up-to-date, robust assessments of open space will be required to support planning policies. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine open space provision needs and subsequently "plans should seek to accommodate" this need.

2.12 Paragraph 104 outlines circumstances in which open space can be developed for different uses. It sets out that existing open space 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.

2.13 Paragraph 188 states that a strategic approach to plan-making should be undertaken to ensure that, within the plan area, networks of habitats and green infrastructure are maintained and enhanced. This approach should also be taken when planning for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

2.14 The 2026 NPPF broadly retains the 2024 approach to protecting existing open space, but strengthens the policy framework by placing greater emphasis on accessibility, green infrastructure and local standards for recreational provision. In particular, replacement open space must now provide comparable or improved accessibility as well as equivalent or better quantity and quality.

National Planning Practice Guidance

2.15 National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) provides further detail on the development and implementation of policies within the NPPF [\[See reference 9\]](#). Guidance on natural environment and open space includes:

- **Natural environment:** This section highlights green infrastructure as a network of natural capital assets (including parks and open space, woodlands, allotments etc.) that provide multiple environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Guidance is provided regarding the use of GBI in planning, including how GBI can be considered in planning decisions and examples of how GBI can help in the delivery of specific goals such as building a strong economy, achieving well-designed places, promoting healthy and safe communities, conserving and enhancing the natural environment and mitigating climate change.
- **Open space, sport and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space:** This section emphasises that planning authorities and developers should have regard for the duty to cooperate where open space serves a wider

area. The document defines open space as “open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. It can provide health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby; have an ecological value and contribute to green infrastructure”. Guidance covers how open space should be incorporated into planning, including signposting to information surrounding needs assessment, local public right of way (PRoW) networks and Local Green Space Designation. The guidance also advises that authorities and developers refer to Sport England Guidance in assessing the need for sports and recreation facilities and that they may need to consult Sport England where development has the potential to impact upon such facilities.

Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework

2.16 The Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework 2023 (NEGIF) [See reference 10] supports the Government’s commitments outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan. The framework includes 15 core principles for Green Infrastructure (GI), 5 headline GI standards, a GI design guide, process journeys, case studies, an online GI mapping tool with a user guide, and a monitoring and evaluation strategy.

2.17 The framework introduces voluntary Green Infrastructure Standards designed to help local authorities align with both national and local planning policies. These standards differentiate between those intended for major new developments and those applicable at a wider, area-based scale. Most relevant to the development of this study is the Accessible Greenspace Standard, which includes:

- **Size and Proximity criteria** (accessibility): The headline accessibility criteria are intended to ensure access to green and blue spaces close to home. This is defined as being within the access buffer of at least one doorstep OR local space, AND a neighbourhood space. Access buffers for different sizes of greenspace are shown in **Table 3.1** below.
- **Capacity criteria** (quantity): Local authorities have at least three hectares of publicly accessible greenspace per 1,000 population and there is no net loss or reduction in capacity of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population at an area-wide scale. Local authorities specify capacity targets for all major residential development informed by a local accessible greenspace baseline, and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints. The NEGIF also provides an Urban Nature Recovery Standard which proposes local authorities “provide 1 hectare of Local Nature Reserve (LNR) per 1,000 population (for nature conservation and quiet enjoyment)”.

- **Quality criteria:** Accessible greenspace meets the Green Flag Award criteria and best practice in accessibility for all within the Sensory Trust’s By All Reasonable Means: Least restrictive access to the outdoors guide.

Table 2.1: Natural England access to greenspace buffers

Hierarchy	Minimum Size	Buffer Size
Doorstep	0.5ha	200m
Local	2ha	300m
Neighbourhood	10ha	1,000m
Wider Neighbourhood	20ha	2,000m
District	100ha	5,000m
Sub-regional	500ha	10,000m

National Design Guide (2021)

2.18 The National Design Guide [See reference 11] sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. It forms part of the government’s collection of planning practice guidance. The guide recognises the role of open spaces and GBI in well-designed places, primarily under the Nature characteristic. Section Nature 1, paragraphs 92 to 95 of the Nature section states that open spaces and green infrastructure systems should be high quality and adaptable to remain fit for use over time (including through well-considered maintenance and management regimes).

2.19 Section N2, paragraphs 96 and 97 suggests that sustainable water management is linked closely to GBI through sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). Well-designed places integrate green and brown roofs, swales, rain gardens and water features that manage drainage whilst also enhancing the attractiveness of open space and adaptation to flood conditions.

2.20 Section N3, paragraph 98 outlines that well-designed developments include site specific enhancements to achieve biodiversity net gains across open spaces and the GBI network. The guide highlights the use of green corridors as an opportunity to enhance the existing open space and GBI network.

2.21 The design guide notes that open spaces should include public, shared and private outdoor spaces. These should incorporate a range of sizes and locations, with natural and designed features, facilities to suit a range of needs, supporting formal and informal play and exercise. In addition, considerations including drainage,

ecology, shading, recreation, food production and contribution to BNG should all be considered within open space and GBI design.

Sport England Planning for Sport Guidance (2019)

2.22 Sport England Planning for Sport Guidance sets out 12 principles for planning for sport, centred on the “Protect, Enhance, Provide” model [\[See reference 12\]](#). While this study excludes primary pitch assessment, the overarching policy recommendations and standards for “active environments” must align with Sport England’s principles.

Fields in Trust Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play

2.23 Fields in Trust (FiT) provides widely accepted benchmark standards for open space quantity, quality, and accessibility (particularly for Local Areas for Play (LAPs), Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs), and Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs)) [\[See reference 13\]](#).

Regional

East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Local Nature Recovery Strategy

2.24 East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) sets out the main principles and priorities for nature recovery and the actions needed to deliver them [\[See reference 14\]](#). The LNRS includes eight principles to guide the strategy’s approach to nature recovery with 24 habitat priorities and 106 practical measures for delivery.

2.25 The LNRS presents open space and green infrastructure as critical mechanisms for nature recovery addressed mainly through its Urban Nature priorities (U1 and U2) and the green/blue corridors priority (Cor2). It calls for new accessible greenspace, from pocket parks to larger parks. This should be targeted at areas of nature deficit and health inequality. It also calls for better management of existing parks, playing fields, and allotments. This means nature-friendly mowing, less pesticide use, and features like ponds and hedgerows. Green infrastructure, street trees, SuDS, green walls, verges, should deliver multiple benefits at once: habitat, flood risk reduction, temperature regulation, and health and wellbeing.

2.26 Corridors of green and open space should connect urban and rural areas. Throughout, the Strategy pushes for all this to sit within local plan policies and Green

Infrastructure strategies, delivered by councils, developers, and communities together.

High Weald National Landscape Management Plan (2024)

2.27 The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 sets out the National Landscape's five-year implementation strategy within a broader 20-year vision [See reference 15]. The plan is structured around eight core character components of natural beauty and five cross-cutting drivers of change, together providing a framework for conserving and enhancing the High Weald's outstanding landscape for current and future generations.

2.28 The eight character components, Natural Systems, Settlement, Routeways, Woodland, Fieldscape and Heath, Dark Skies, Aesthetic and Perceptual Qualities, and Land-based Economy and Rural Living, each carry equal standing and define what must be protected. The plan makes clear that harm to any single component constitutes harm to the National Landscape as a whole.

2.29 The five cross-cutting drivers of change, Soil Health and Regenerative Land Management, Nature Recovery and Biodiversity, the Climate Crisis, People and Access, and Planning and Development, cut across all character components and form the basis of the plan's investment strategy and action priorities for 2024-2029.

2.30 Drivers most relevant to open space and green infrastructure include:

- **Nature Recovery and Biodiversity** – seeks to reverse habitat and species decline by treating the High Weald's mosaic of ancient woodland, grassland, hedgerows, gill streams and open heath as a single landscape-scale network. This will require improved connectivity and condition across all open spaces, not just designated sites.
- **Climate Crisis** – commits to a landscape-led net zero future in which open and green spaces are the primary mechanism for climate adaptation, prioritising carbon sequestration in soils and woodland, natural flood management and nature-based solutions over engineered responses.
- **People and Access** – frames the High Weald's open and green spaces as a natural health service, calling for fair access for all through improved active travel connections, ecological literacy in schools and community engagement.
- **Planning and Development** – responds to the High Weald's status as the most heavily pressured National Landscape for development in England. Calling for explicit protection of open space, green gaps and green infrastructure in local

planning policy, and landscape-led design that enhances rather than erodes the verdant, open character of the area.

Environment Strategy for East Sussex (2020)

2.31 The Environment Strategy for East Sussex (2020) [See reference 16] sets out a framework for achieving measurable environmental improvements while maintaining East Sussex as a desirable place to live, work, study and visit. The strategy is structured around five key themes: climate change, natural capital, air quality, water, and resource efficiency. It acknowledges that access to the natural environment can enhance mental health and wellbeing and identifies open spaces as an important means of improving public health and reducing associated costs. The strategy is built around enhancing natural capital and green infrastructure, creating a more connected ecological network rather than viewing spaces as isolated assets.

Local

Emerging Local Plan 2025-2042

2.32 The Council is currently reviewing and updating the Local Plan [See reference 17]. The Council intends to submit the Plan to the Secretary of State in December 2026, following a Regulation 19 period beginning in October 2026.

2.33 There are currently two Regulation 18 consultation documents for the emerging Local Plan:

- Draft Rother Local Plan 2020-2040 – focuses on planning policies but does not include site allocations. Published for consultation April 2024.
- Draft Rother Local Plan 2025-2042 – focused consultation on site policies and introduces new proposed site allocations across the district. Published for consultation January 2026.

2.34 Key relevant policies in the emerging Draft Local Plan (consulted in 2024) include:

- Policy LAN1: Rural Environments and Landscape Character
- Policy ENV5: Habitats and Species
- Policy GTC7: Local Nature Recovery Areas
- Policy GTC8: Biodiversity Net Gain

- Policy LWL2: Facilities and Services
- Policy HWB5: Blue and Green Infrastructure

Council Plan 2025-2029 (2026)

2.35 The recently updated Rother District Council Plan 2025-2029 [\[See reference 18\]](#) sets out the council's four-year strategy organised around three themes: A Thriving Local Economy, Live Well Locally, and Green to the Core, underpinned by a Fit for the Future programme. The plan's 2040 vision is for Rother to be recognised for leading the response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies and protecting the historic and natural environment, within a district where 83% of land falls within the High Weald National Landscape.

2.36 The Green to the Core theme is the most relevant to the importance of open and GBI:

- **Protected and Resilient Natural and Historical Environments:** The plan commits to adopting a Local Plan that ensures developments conserve and enhance the landscape and protect historic areas from inappropriate development.
- **Strengthened Support for the Recovery and Protection of Nature:** The plan commits to implementing a programme to enhance the council's green and blue assets as sites for nature recovery, maximising the benefits of BNG including through use of the council's own land, and supporting delivery of the LNRS. Green and blue open spaces are explicitly defined in the plan as areas of natural vegetation and bodies of water that are publicly accessible.

2.37 The Live Well Locally theme frames open and green space as essential infrastructure for health and wellbeing:

- **Foundations for Fairer Access to Good Health:** The plan commits to strengthening environmental protections to safeguard residents' wellbeing, recognising the role of accessible natural and green spaces in supporting healthy ageing and independent living.
- **More People Have Access to and Enjoy Active Lifestyles:** The plan commits to improving indoor and outdoor leisure facilities and supporting the delivery of community spaces for sports and recreational activities.

2.38 The A Thriving Local Economy theme recognises open and green space as an economic and visitor asset:

- **Sustainable Places and Communities that Attract People, Visitors and Businesses:** The plan commits to making best economic and social use of the district's seafront, heritage and cultural assets and developing Rother as a sustainable visitor destination. All outcomes that depend directly on the quality and accessibility of the landscape and its open spaces.

2.39 Across all three themes, the plan treats green and blue spaces as assets that must be actively protected, enhanced and made accessible.

Rother and Hastings Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategy 2023-2039 (2023)

2.40 A joint Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategy was developed for Rother District Council and Hastings Borough Council [\[See reference 19\]](#). This 2023 Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategy covers the period to 2039 and updates the 2016 Playing Pitch Strategy, now also incorporating a Built Facilities Strategy covering indoor sports.

2.41 Since the 2016 strategy, new 3G artificial grass pitches have been delivered at Battle Sports Centre and Bexhill College, alongside drainage and maintenance improvements at several grass pitch sites. However, significant issues remain for outdoor provision:

- Most grass football pitches are poor quality due to drainage problems and overuse, with persistent shortfalls for youth and mini-soccer on Sundays and midweek evenings;
- Five additional full-size 3G AGPs are recommended to 2039, with Sidley Sports Ground identified as a key opportunity site;
- Cricket has a distribution problem rather than an overall shortage, with Bexhill and Hastings clubs struggling for Saturday match slots, and both Hastings Priory CC and Sidley CC displaced from their home grounds;
- Rugby has adequate match pitches but insufficient training provision; and
- Hockey faces the most urgent issue – South Saxons HC has no secure home, with the only available sand-based AGP at Horntye Park in poor condition and at risk of closure.

2.42 Across all facilities, the central challenge is protecting the existing stock and planning new investment ahead of forecast population growth to 2039.

Climate Strategy (2023)

2.43 In December 2023, Rother District Council formally adopted a Climate Strategy which builds on the work of the Environment Strategy 2020 [See reference 20]. The strategy sets out how the Council will improve climate resilience across the district and reduce emissions to net zero, by 2030.

2.44 The strategy treats open space as multi-functional spaces. Trees, hedgerows, woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands are valued for their role in carbon sequestration, flood risk reduction, cooling, biodiversity, and public health. The strategy is backed by practical commitments including a Tree Planting Strategy for Bexhill, a requirement for 20% Biodiversity Net Gain in new developments, and a pledge to assess and enhance all Council-owned green and blue assets for nature recovery.

Green Infrastructure Study (2011)

2.45 The Green Infrastructure Study [See reference 21] was delivered as part of background evidence for the adopted Local Plan (2011-2028). The study identified spaces that contribute to GI in the district and potential opportunities for future GI provision.

2.46 The study found that in terms of existing provision, Rother is dominated by the High Weald National Landscape (covering 83% of the district) and contains a rich array of ecological assets including 21 SSSIs, extensive ancient woodland, and internationally designated wetland areas at Pevensey Levels and Rye Bay. The district has a reasonable supply of natural and semi-natural greenspace overall, and a dense network of footpaths and bridleways. However, recreational open space provision is notably poor, particularly in Bexhill, where significant deficits exist across amenity greenspace, outdoor sports facilities, parks and allotments. The east side of the county more broadly has far less strategic open space than the rest of East Sussex.

2.47 Looking ahead, the most significant opportunity identified is the Pebsham Countryside Park (since renamed the Combe Valley Countryside Park) between Bexhill and Hastings, which would address strategic greenspace deficits and bring an additional 137,000 people within reach of the 500 hectares accessible natural greenspace standard.

2.48 Other opportunities identified include expanding access to woodland (particularly in east Bexhill, Ticehurst and Westfield), strengthening green corridors through new developments, enhancing Biodiversity Opportunity Areas such as the

Romney Marshes and Combe Haven, improving access to Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, and using new development across all areas to deliver allotments, hedgerow restoration, sustainable drainage and habitat connectivity.

Greenspaces, Sport and Recreation Study (2009)

2.49 Rother District Council previously commissioned a Greenspaces, Sport and Recreation Study [See reference 22] to provide an evidence base to inform future policy and planned development within the district. The study looked at all green space and sports provision within the district.

2.50 Local standards for quality, quantity and accessibility of provision were set and are summarised in **Table 1.2**. Standards were not set for cemeteries and churchyards, green corridors or beaches and coastal areas.

Table 2.2: Greenspaces, Sport and Recreation Study (2009) Quantity and Accessibility Standards

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantity Standards
Allotments and Community Gardens	20-minute walk	Urban: 0.45ha per 1,000 population Rural: 0.17ha per 1,000 population
Amenity Greenspace	15-minute walk	1.73ha per 1,000 population
Natural and Semi-Natural Open Space	15-minute walk	2ha per 1,000 population
Outdoor Sports Facilities	20-minute walk	Bexhill: 0.95ha per 1,000 population Battle and Rye: 3.33ha per 1,000 population Rural: 2.10ha per 1,000 population
Parks and Gardens	Urban: 20-minute walk Rural: 20-minute drive	Urban: 0.43ha per 1,000 population Rural: 0.71ha per 1,000 population
Provision for Children and Young People	Younger children: 10-minute walk Older children/teenagers: 15-minute walk	0.2ha per 1,000 population

Neighbourhood Plans

2.51 The following Neighbourhood Plans have been formally adopted by Rother District Council [\[See reference 23\]](#):

- Battle CP Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2028 (November 2021);
- Burwash Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2028 (July 2022);
- Crowhurst Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2028 (May 2025);
- Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan 2021-2028 (December 2025);
- Peasmarch Neighbourhood Plan 2021-2028 (April 2024);
- Rye Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2028 (May 2019);
- Salehurst & Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2028 (July 2018);
- Sedlescombe Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2028 (April 2018); and
- Ticehurst Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2028 (July 2019).

2.52 Across all nine plans there is a consistent focus on:

- Protecting Local Green Spaces and open countryside;
- Maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure networks;
- Supporting recreation through footpaths, bridleways, parks and sports facilities;
- Protecting biodiversity and strengthening habitat connectivity;
- Managing landscape character and settlement gaps; and
- Addressing climate change.

Population and social context

2.53 This section of the report outlines the relevant population and social context to inform the assessment of open space and GBI.

Population and demographics

2.54 Rother District has a population of 96,133 in 2024 [\[See reference 24\]](#), compared to 93,100 recorded in the 2021 Census [\[See reference 25\]](#), where the district ranked 261st for total population out of 309 local authority areas in England. Between 2011 and 2021, the population size has increased by 2.8%, which is notably

lower than the national average for England (6.6%) and the average for the south-east (7.5%). Rother District also shows a population increase lower than those shown for surrounding areas such as Wealden (7.5%) and Ashford (12.5%), but has a greater increase compared to Hastings (0.9%) and Tunbridge Wells (0.2%).

2.55 Rother District has scattered villages and some larger settlements but is a predominantly rural area, with an average population density of 189 residents per square kilometre [See reference 26]. The district is the third least densely populated of the South East's 64 local authorities. Population density is generally low across most of the district, with the highest population density within Bexhill-on-Sea.

2.56 Population density is shown in **Figure 2.1**. The average median age in the district is 53, 14.6% of the population are under 15, compared to 32.5% of the population being over 65 [See reference 27]. This is considerably higher than the national average median age for England (40) and national population aged over 65 for England (18.7%). Between 2011 and 2021, the district saw an increase of 17.2% in people aged 65 years and over and a decrease of 3.9% in children aged under 15 years [See reference 28].

The provision of open spaces which are accessible and facilitate the needs of older users will be particularly important. Areas of higher population density, will result in increased pressure on land, potentially requiring a greater provision of open spaces and GBI. Rural areas with lower population density will result in increased reliance on the public rights of way for access to open space, requiring a well-connected network to nearby open spaces.

Deprivation

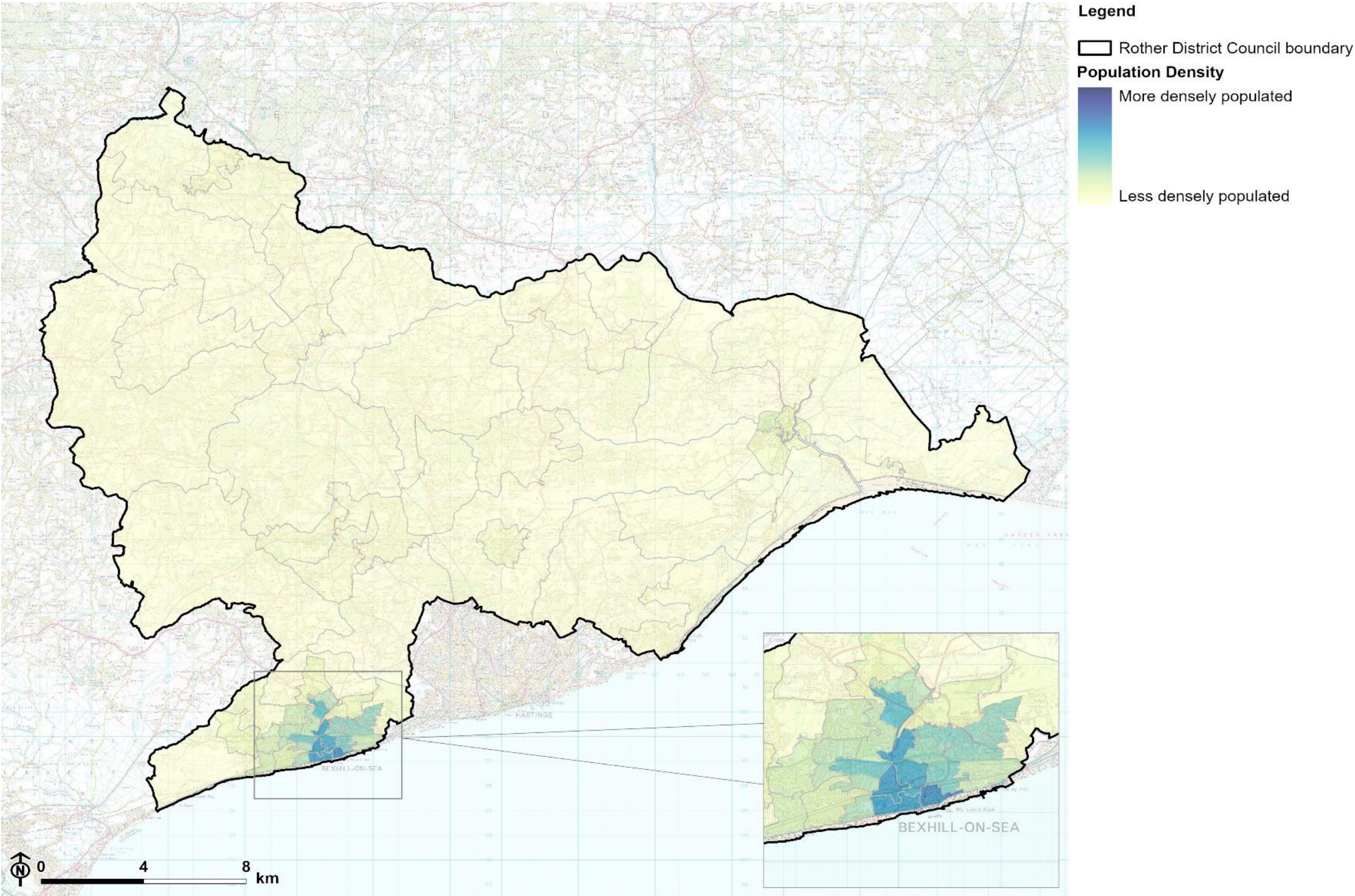
2.57 The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) provides a ranking of the most to least deprived areas within England. This is based on a weighted ranking of a combination of seven deprivation domains. These domains cover income, education, crime, living environment, employment, health and barriers to housing.

2.58 Nationally, Rother District is ranked in the upper of the rankings for Local Authorities at 93rd most deprived Local Authority district out of the 317 in England [See reference 29]. **Figure 2.2** shows the level of deprivation across the district. The highest areas of deprivation are around the centre of Bexhill-on-Sea and to the north around Sidley. Deprivation is also high in the east of the district, and there are pockets of deprivation elsewhere including around Westfield and Icklesham, in the north of the district around Robertsbridge, Ticehurst and Bodiam and in the centre of the district around Battle.

2.59 Within the domains of deprivation, the health and disability domain is of particular relevance to open space and green infrastructure provision. The district scores slightly better within this domain compared to the overall score, but 3% of Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are within the most 10% deprived nationally for this domain and 34% within the 40% most deprived [\[See reference 30\]](#).

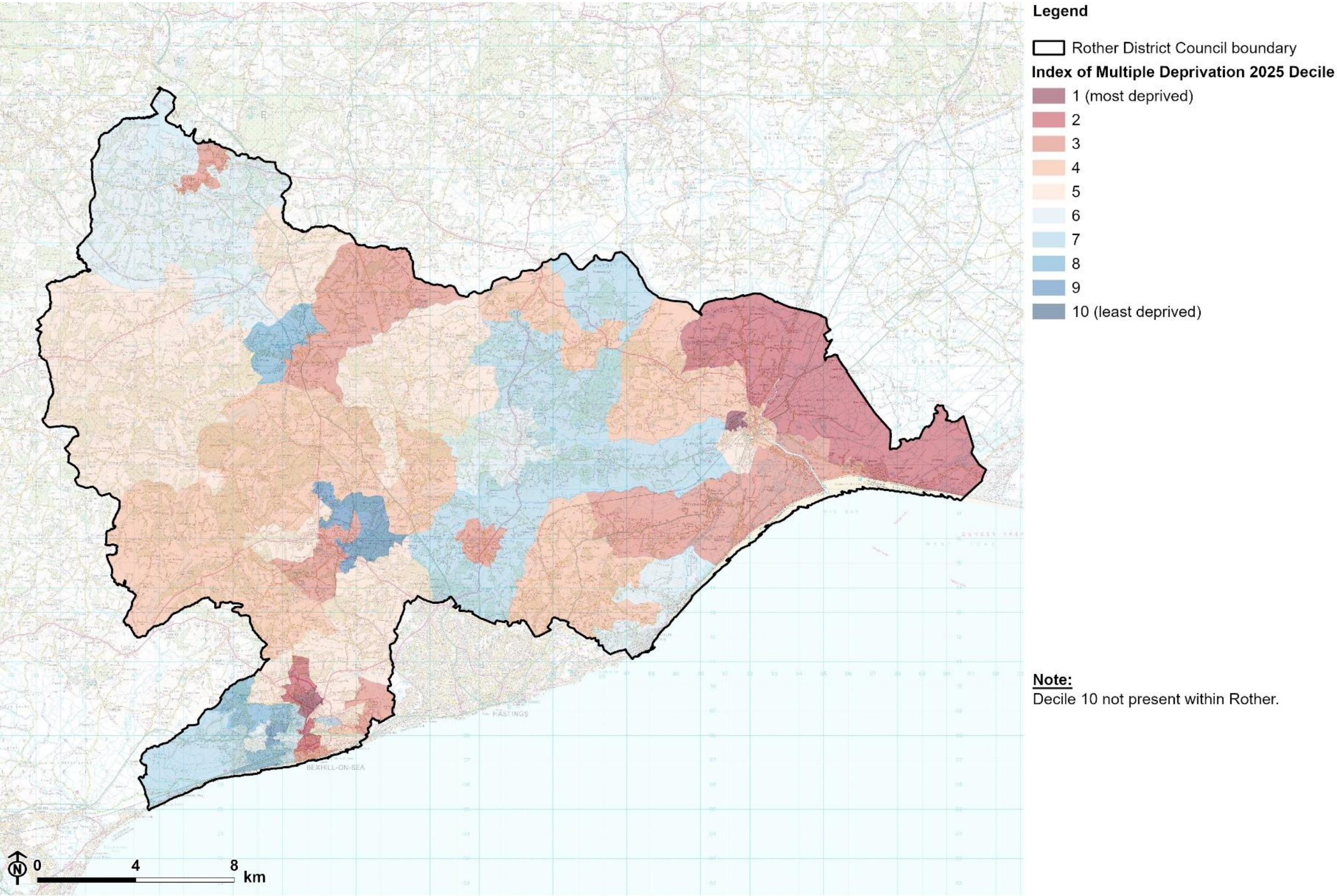
There will be a need to ensure appropriate open space and GBI is provided in more deprived areas, particularly for the ageing population. This may include more multi-functional spaces which provide a variety of functions and facilities but also have accessible paths and amenities such as benches and lighting.

Figure 2.1: Population density



Created by LUC - 17270_001_Open_Space_Figures/17270_008 Population Density 18/09/2026
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Figure 2.2: Overall Indices of Multiple Deprivation



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Health, wellbeing and physical activity

2.60 A review of the November 2024/25 Sport England's Active Lives Survey completed by 383 residents of Rother, found that 14% of respondents were considered to be 'inactive' (no weekly exercise) [\[See reference 31\]](#). This compares to 15% in England and 13% within East Sussex. However, the majority of respondents (64.2%) were found to be active (at least 150 minutes a week).

2.61 Prevalence of obesity in adults (18 years+) has slowly risen in the district [\[See reference 32\]](#). Adult obesity was reported in 2024/25 to be slightly below the national average of 26.6% at 22.6%. Prevalence of obesity in children aged (10-11 years) was slightly lower than the national average of 22.2%, at 19.6% [\[See reference 33\]](#).

2.62 The mortality rate from all cardiovascular disease for under those aged 75 is significantly lower than average for England (30.2%) in the district (21.7%) [\[See reference 34\]](#).

GBI, including open spaces provide important areas for both informal and formal recreation. Spaces that promote greater usage particularly for older people and children should be promoted. This may include appropriate provision of amenity greenspaces and more formal outdoor sport areas.

Environmental context

2.63 This section of the report provides the relevant environmental context of Rother District to inform the study.

Landscape and heritage

2.64 The High Weald National Landscape forms a significant part of the wider landscape, covering 83% of the district. In addition, 7% of the district includes nationally or internationally protected sites for nature conservation, including the Pevensey Levels and Dungeness Complex of Habitats Sites.

2.65 Heritage designations identified within the district include over 2,100 listed building and 47 Scheduled Monuments. There are seven Registered Parks and Gardens including one Grade I listed, three Grade II listed and three Grade II listed*. There is one registered Battlefield for the Battle of Hastings 1066.

2.66 There are 10 Conservation Areas designated in Rother District. Open space, parks and landscape often form an important part of the setting of Conservation Areas.

2.67 Rother District benefits from an extensive network of public rights of way, long-distance trails and cycle routes that support active travel, recreation and access to the wider landscape. Key routes include the England Coast Path and National Cycle Route 2 along the coast, the High Weald Landscape Trail and Sussex Border Path linking the district's rural hinterland, and the 1066 Country Walk connecting settlements through the heart of the district. These routes provide opportunities for walking and cycling between communities and connect people to over 1,700 hectares of accessible greenspace, supporting healthier lifestyles, access to nature and improved wellbeing.

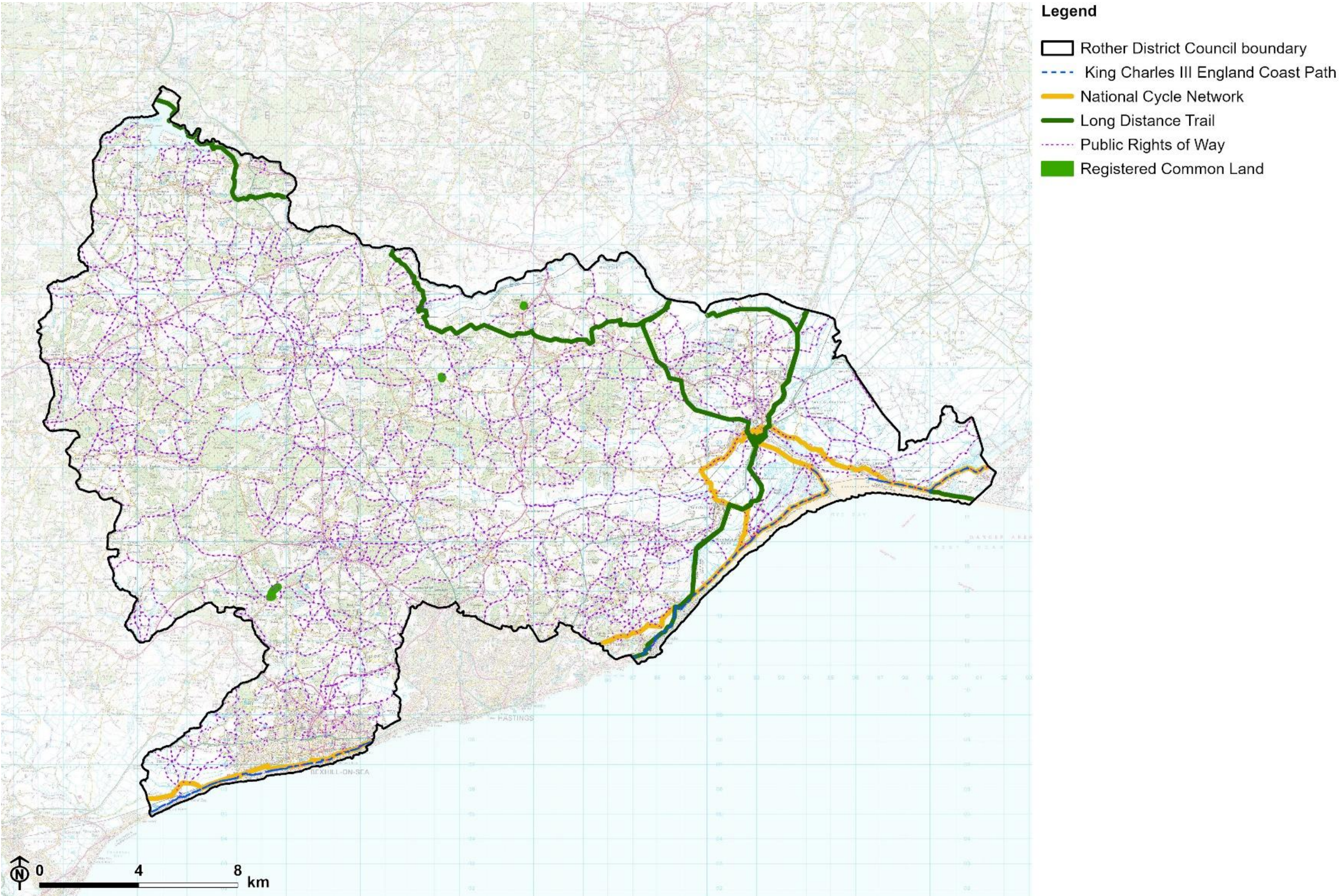
2.68 The following datasets were reviewed and are mapped in **Figure 2.3**:

- National Cycle Network;
- King Charles III England Coast Path; and
- East Sussex County Council Rights of Way and Registered Common Land.

2.69 **Figure 2.4** shows the heritage assets in the district.

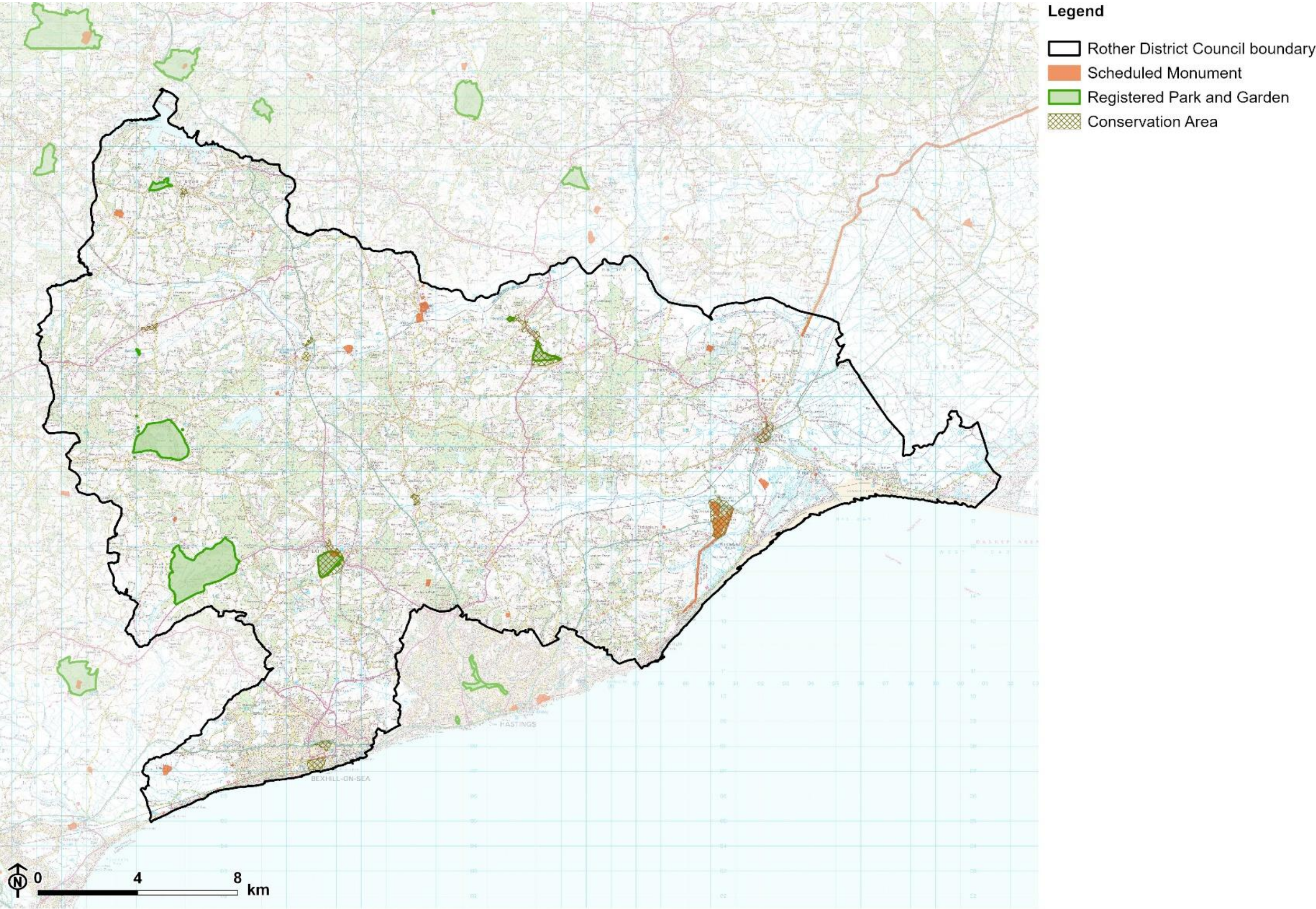
GBI and open spaces can conserve and promote important cultural heritage assets. Open spaces can provide an opportunity for users to understand and learn about assets.

Figure 2.3: Active Travel Network



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Figure 2.4: Landscape and Heritage Features



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Biodiversity

2.70 Internationally important sites for wildlife within Rother District include the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Areas (SPA) and RAMSAR, the Dungeness SAC, and the Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and RAMSAR.

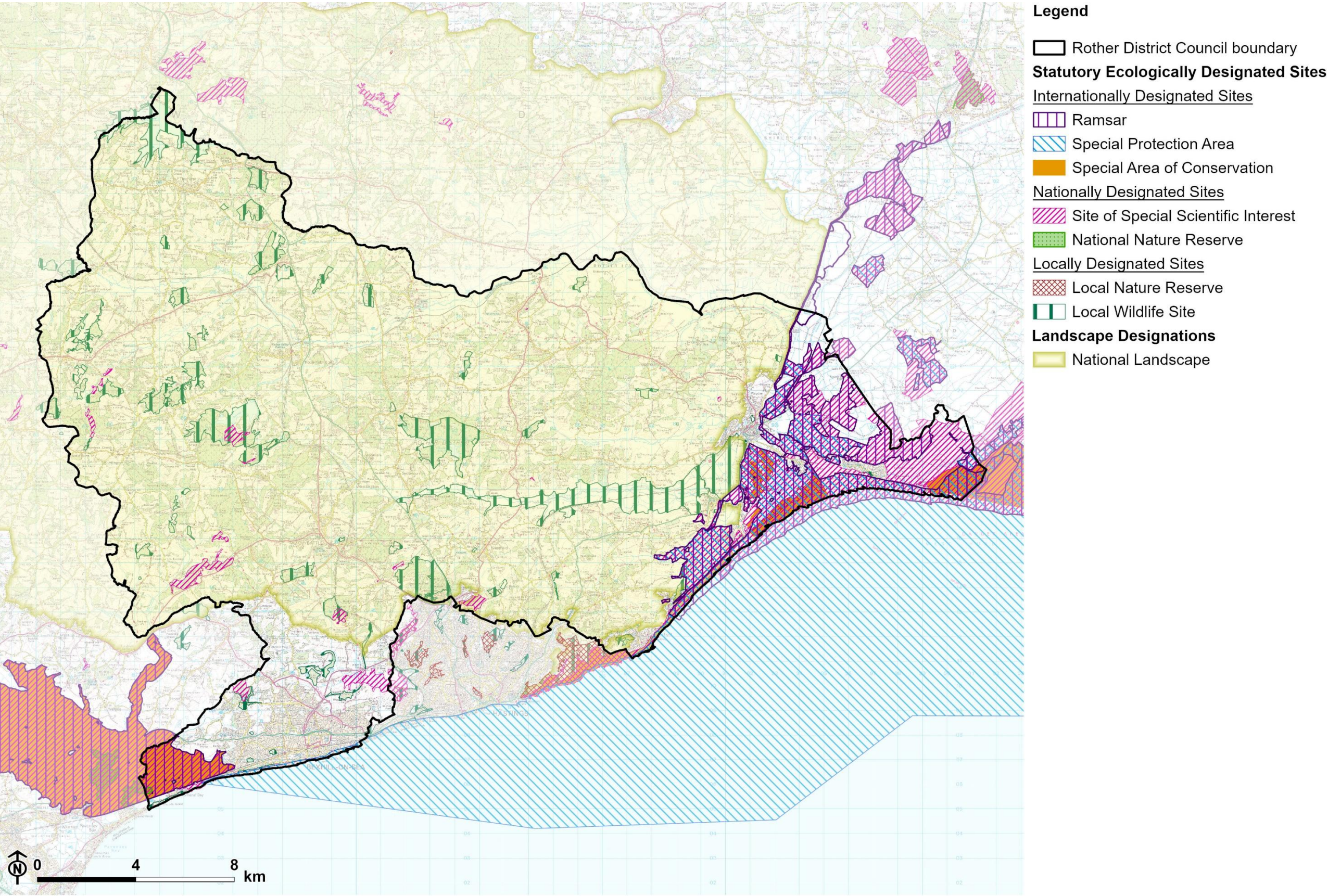
2.71 21 Nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are found across the district. There is one National Nature Reserve (NNR), Pevensey Levels NNR. Designated sites for natural heritage are shown on **Figure 2.4**.

2.72 These sites support a myriad of habitats and species including coastal vegetation, wetlands, lowland meadows, and other species-rich grasslands, woodlands and the fauna they support.

2.73 The district has one Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Rye Harbour LNR.

GBI, including open spaces that overlap with designated nature sites provide important opportunities for users to connect with nature. Recreational activities and pressure should be monitored to avoid damaging ecologically sensitive sites.

Figure 2.3: Natural Heritage Statutory Designations



Created by LUC - 17270_001_Open_Space_Figures/17270_010 Natural Heritage Assets 13/10/2026
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026. Ordnance Survey Licence Number AC0000850558. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. © Natural England 2026. Local Wildlife Site boundaries maintained by Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre on behalf of Sussex Local Wildlife Sites Initiative.

Blue network (including flooding)

2.74 A series of rivers and watercourses form a blue network across Rother district, including the River Brede, River Rother and River Tillingham (**Figure 2.5**).

2.75 The River Brede is currently classified as being in poor ecological status, with this classification driven primarily by elevated phosphate levels and impacts on aquatic plant communities. The main pressures arise from diffuse agricultural pollution, including nutrient and livestock management issues, alongside sewage discharges, although the river is targeted to achieve good ecological status by 2027 [\[See reference 35\]](#).

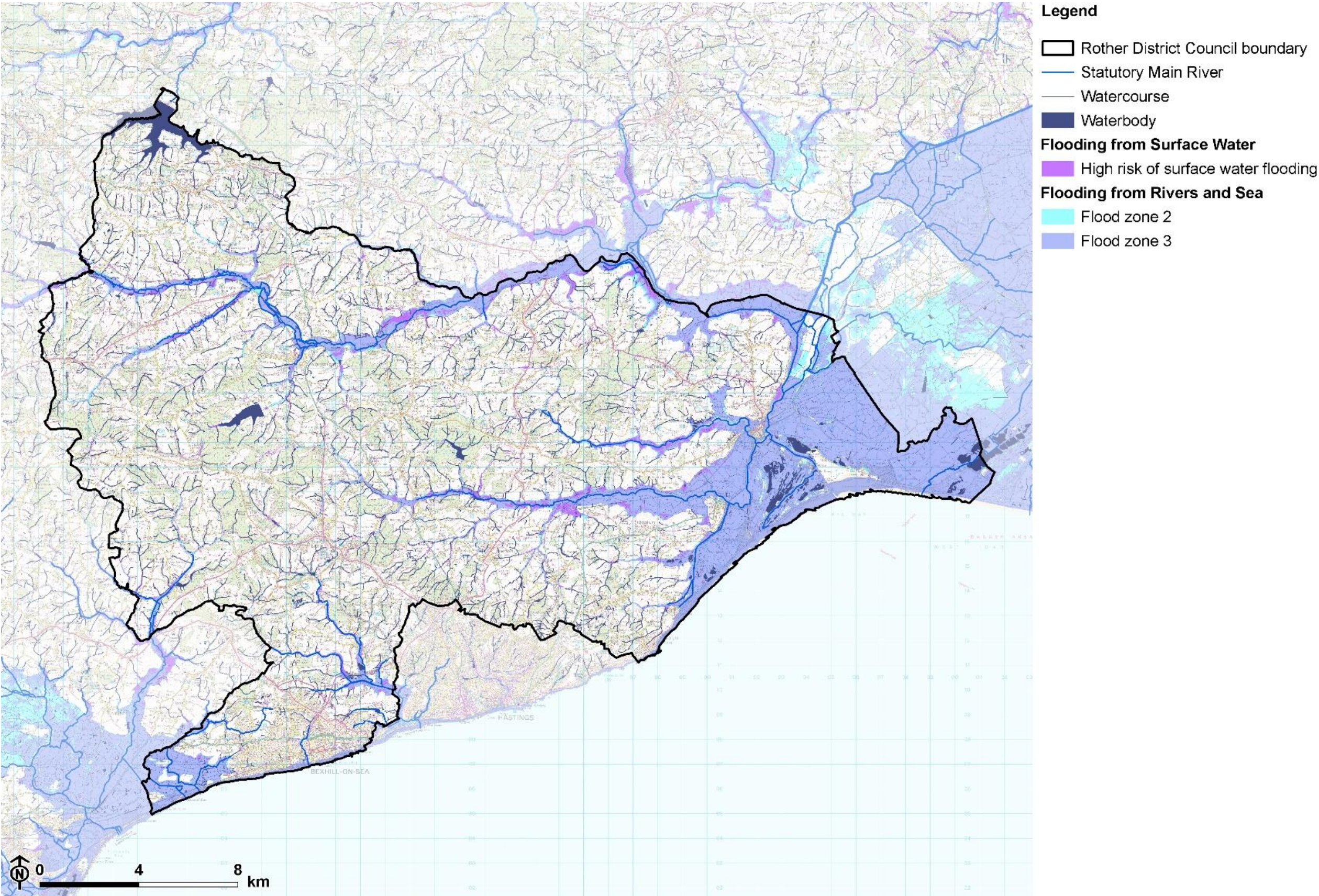
2.76 Compared with the River Brede, the River Rother is in a better ecological condition, achieving moderate ecological status rather than poor status. However, nutrient pollution, land drainage modifications and wastewater inputs continue to affect water quality, highlighting the need for catchment-wide measures that improve river habitat, reduce diffuse pollution and support ecological recovery [\[See reference 36\]](#).

2.77 The River Tillingham is in moderate ecological condition, with its status influenced by a combination of water quality pressures and historic modifications to the river system. Land drainage, barriers to fish movement, agricultural runoff and wastewater inputs continue to affect ecological health, highlighting the importance of measures that restore natural river processes, improve habitat connectivity and support wider catchment resilience [\[See reference 37\]](#).

2.78 Areas of Rother District surrounding the River Brede, River Rother and River Tillingham and their tributaries are located within Flood Zones 2 and 3 (**Figure 2.5**). Flood Zone 2 suggests a medium probability of flooding, 0.1%-1% annual chance of river flooding and Flood Zone 3, 1% or greater annual chance.

GBI and open spaces within flood zones can mitigate the risk of flooding and provide natural flood management opportunities.

Figure 2.4: Blue Network



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Air pollution

2.79 Rother District has no declared Air Quality Management Areas.

2.80 Monthly recordings of air pollution (NO₂, PM₁₀, PM_{2.5} and O₃) across Air Quality Management Areas in East Sussex in 2025 did not exceed the annual mean objective during any month for Rother District [\[See reference 38\]](#).

Heat vulnerability

2.81 The Climate Just Sensitivity Index mapping [\[See reference 39\]](#) considers personal and demographic characteristics that may influence how people are affected by climate-related events such as heatwaves and flooding. The mapping shows that much of the district has relatively low or average sensitivity, indicating that, compared with areas with higher sensitivity, residents are generally less likely to experience significant health or welfare impacts during such events. Similarly, the heat disadvantage mapping, which considers how well areas are adapted to increasing temperatures using 2022 heat data, identifies most of the district as having relatively low heat disadvantage. This means residents are generally less likely to be vulnerable to the impacts of extreme heat or have low risk of experiencing high temperatures. Part of the reason for this is likely to be due to the high levels of woodland and tree cover across much of the district, which can provide shade and help to reduce local temperatures during periods of hot weather.

2.82 Bexhill-on-Sea and some of the surrounding areas are identified as having higher sensitivity, with the mapping showing a mix of relatively high, extremely high and acute sensitivity. This does not mean that these areas are at high risk of experiencing harmful impacts, but rather that residents may be more vulnerable to the effects of an extreme heat or flooding event if one occurs. The heat disadvantage mapping also identifies a somewhat higher level of disadvantage in these areas compared with the wider district. This is likely to be partly associated with lower levels of tree and greenspace cover and a greater proportion of hard surfaces, such as roads and buildings. These characteristics can increase local temperatures and reduce the availability of natural shade and cooling. As a result, Bexhill-on-Sea may experience greater challenges in managing the effects of rising temperatures than the more rural parts of the district. The mapping highlights areas where measures such as increasing tree cover, providing shade and protecting or enhancing green spaces could help to improve resilience to future extreme heat events.

Chapter 3

Open Space Typology and Hierarchy

3.1 This chapter presents how open space has been categorised to complete the quantity, accessibility and quality assessment and setting of standards.

Categorisation of sites by typology

3.2 Each site has been assigned a primary typology based on key characteristics and functionality. These are split into accessible greenspace and other typologies.

3.3 Within the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework (NEGIF) (see **Chapter 2** above), the term ‘accessible greenspace’ is used. The NEGIF defines greenspace as “An area of vegetation that is set within a landscape or townscape. Greenspace can include blue space (i.e. lakes, rivers and wetlands) and may include built environment features” [See reference 40]. The main difference between greenspace and open space is the emphasis on vegetation, which is not explicitly included in the NPPF open space definition. The NEGIF defines ‘accessible greenspace’ as greenspace, which is specifically for public access, or where there is a right to open access. The access should include availability at any reasonable time and for free. In addition, the definition emphasises the importance of the accessible greenspace being available to the public for a range of pastimes and that reasonable effort is made to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2020.

3.4 Three typologies of accessible greenspace have been identified in Rother District:

- **Amenity greenspace:** Often small-scale areas close to home or work, but also larger general purpose open space offering opportunities for informal activities, e.g. kick about, or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
- **Natural and semi-natural greenspace:** Includes publicly accessible woodlands, country parks, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (e.g. downlands, commons, meadows), wetlands, open and running water and wastelands. Provides opportunities for access to nature, wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education awareness.
- **Parks and gardens:** Accessible, high-quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events. More multi-functional than other open space, offering space for quiet relaxation as well as a range of amenities and activities for visitors. Includes urban parks and formal gardens. Parks often include children’s play, youth and/or outdoor sports facilities.

3.5 In addition, seven other typologies have been identified:

- **Allotments, community gardens and city farms:** Opportunities for the community to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion.
- **Beach:** Areas of beach which provide a range of opportunities for play, informal recreation, exercise and access to nature.
- **Cemeteries and churchyards:** Cemeteries and churchyards including disused churchyards and other burial grounds.
- **Civic spaces:** Includes civic and market squares and other hard surfaced community areas. Areas which are designed for pedestrians and include those that have a primary purpose of providing a setting for public events.
- **Green corridors:** Green links between areas, free of motorised traffic, offering opportunities for walking, cycling, and horse riding for leisure or travel purposes. Includes towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines.
- **Incidental greenspaces:** Amenity greenspaces, natural and semi-natural greenspaces and parks and gardens sites that are smaller than 0.5 hectares and are not seen as having the functionality to count as accessible greenspaces following NEGIF recommendations.
- **Outdoor sports facilities:** Facilities which provide opportunities for participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics and water sports.
- **Provision for children and teenagers:** Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people.

Open space hierarchy

3.6 An open space hierarchy has been used to further split some of the typologies. Hierarchies are usually assigned based on size to take account of the fact that different open spaces of the same typology can be expected to provide a different 'offer' based on their size and thus the number of facilities they can be expected to accommodate. It can therefore be appropriate to assign different quality or value standards to different hierarchies of open space. Site users can be expected to travel further to reach a larger site that has the capacity to provide a more significant and varied offer (i.e. more or larger features and facilities) which may encourage visitors to stay for longer.

3.7 The NEGIF proposes primarily size-based hierarchies, although in their mapping methodology ‘playing fields’ are restricted to the doorstep hierarchy regardless of size. The size-based hierarchies selected for assessing Rother’s open spaces are set out below in **Table 3.1**. This largely aligns with the NEGIF with the exception of doorstep spaces where a minimum size of 0.2 hectares has been used rather than 0.5 hectares. This considers the large number of spaces smaller than 0.5 hectares that are present and acknowledges that a space of 0.2 hectares is still able to provide a good quality recreational offer.

3.8 The hierarchy is not applied universally to all typologies. Some typologies have no hierarchy applied, as the use and function of the site is less reliant on the overall size of the site (e.g. green corridors; allotments, community gardens and city farms; and cemeteries and religious grounds). A separate hierarchy is set out for provision for children and teenagers based on the age ranges that the space caters to. Further analysis on the provision of outdoor sports is provided in the emerging Playing Pitch Strategy. Therefore, no further breakdown of outdoor sports is set out in this Study.

Table 3.1: Size based hierarchies

Name	Size Threshold/Criteria	Typologies Applicable	Notes
Sub-regional Greenspace	Over 500ha	Natural and semi-natural greenspace Parks and gardens	Large open spaces that offer an escape from urban living. Visits to such places are likely to be lengthy (a few hours or above) and so visitors are likely to travel further to reach these spaces.
District Greenspace	Over 100ha	Natural and semi-natural greenspace Parks and gardens	Large open spaces that offer an escape from urban living. Visits to such places are likely to be lengthy (a few hours or above) and so visitors are likely to travel further to reach these spaces.
Wider Neighbourhood Greenspace	Over 20ha	Natural and semi-natural greenspace Parks and gardens	Destination open spaces that offer a range of facilities and interest. Support longer, less frequent open space visits and so are likely to draw people from a wider area.
Neighbourhood Greenspace	Over 10ha	Natural and semi-natural greenspace Parks and gardens	Notable open spaces offering something for a range of visitors. May support for visits for up to a couple of hours and likely to be the types of spaces people use once every few weeks or months.
Local Greenspace	Over 2ha	Amenity greenspace Recreation ground Natural and semi-natural greenspace Parks and gardens	Open spaces which break up grey infrastructure of urban areas. Likely to support short visits, with a limited offer but important for offering some open/natural features close to people's homes which may be used daily or weekly. Amenity greenspaces will be capped at local greenspace hierarchy due to the limited functionality.
Doorstep Greenspace	Over 0.2ha	Amenity greenspace Recreation ground Natural and semi-natural greenspace Parks and gardens	Open spaces which break up grey infrastructure of urban areas. Likely to support short visits, with a limited offer but important for offering some open/natural features close to people's homes which may be used daily or weekly.

Open space access levels

3.9 Finally, open spaces have also been categorised according to their access level. This refers to who can access the open space and how. The following access categories have been applied.

- Publicly accessible: Everyone can enter and use the site freely. This includes open spaces that are always accessible and those that have opening hours.
- Restricted access – Members only: Entry and use of the site is limited to certain groups or members (e.g. school sites, sports clubs, allotments).
- No access: Sites which are not publicly accessible. These will not be considered further within the open space calculations.

Chapter 4

Quantity Assessment and Standards

4.1 This chapter provides an overview of the quantity standard alongside an analysis of existing provision across the district. An assessment of the current quantity of open space provision is broken down by typology and compares provision to the population for the whole of the district.

4.2 The chapter then assesses quantity provision to provide recommendations for increasing the quantity of open space. Finally, the chapter provides recommended quantity standards for accessible greenspace, play, and allotments, community growing spaces and city farms.

Overview of a quantity standard

4.3 The quantity standard refers to the amount of open space available compared to the population. It is usually expressed in hectares per 1,000 of the population. This may also be referred to as a capacity standard.

4.4 The purpose of a quantity standard is to set a level of provision of open space that meets local needs and ensures that adequate space is available for local communities to enjoy and use.

4.5 Current best practice guidance proposes the following quantity standards:

- 3 hectares of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population – Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework [\[See reference 41\]](#).
- 0.55 hectares of play provision per 1,000 population – Fields in Trust [\[See reference 42\]](#).
- 0.21 hectares of allotments, community growing spaces and city farms per 1,000 population – National Allotment Society [\[See reference 43\]](#).

Quantity analysis

4.6 The open space quantity analysis has been broken down into two analyses:

- Quantity of open space in hectares per typology; and
- Quantity analysis of open space per 1,000 population.

4.7 All open space in the district has been analysed to identify the number of sites and area in hectares for each typology. Quantity of each has been broken down into all sites and only accessible sites.

4.8 In order to understand the quantity and demand for open space provision, data from the 2021 Census has been used to assess current open space provision. ONS population projections for local authorities have been used to derive projections for annual population through to 2042 [See reference 44]. These estimations have been used to assess the provision of open space at the end of the Local Plan period, should there be no additional provision during this timescale.

4.9 The quantity of each typology per 1,000 population is set out. As sub-area population data was not available, provision per 1,000 population has been presented district wide.

Current open space provision

4.10 The location of current open space within Rother District by typology is shown in **Figure 4.1**. **Table 4.1** outlines the quantity (area in hectares) and number of individual sites identified in the district as part of the assessment.

Table 4.1: Quantity of open space in Rother District

Primary Sites	Area of All Sites	Number of All Sites	Area of Only Accessible Sites	Number of Only Accessible Sites
Allotments, Community Gardens and City Farms	16.47ha	30	0.00ha	0
Amenity Greenspace	159.98ha	122	154.13ha	118
Beaches	106.87ha	5	106.87ha	5
Cemeteries and Churchyards	37.29ha	54	37.29ha	54
Civic Spaces	7.93ha	5	7.93ha	5
Green Corridors	3.92ha	4	0.27ha	1
Incidental Greenspace	9.33ha	119	9.33ha	119
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	2,265.94ha	159	1,562.60ha	73

Primary Sites	Area of All Sites	Number of All Sites	Area of Only Accessible Sites	Number of Only Accessible Sites
Outdoor Sports Facilities*	526.43ha	102	5.36ha	11
Parks and Gardens	25.28ha	12	8.39ha	6
Provision for Children and Teenagers*	6.64ha	90	6.64ha	90
Total	3,166.07ha	702	1,898.81ha	482

*The totals provided are for standalone sites. Secondary sites (typologies contained within the area of other typologies) provided within larger sites, such as play within a park, have been subsumed within the total area of the larger site typology, i.e. park and garden.

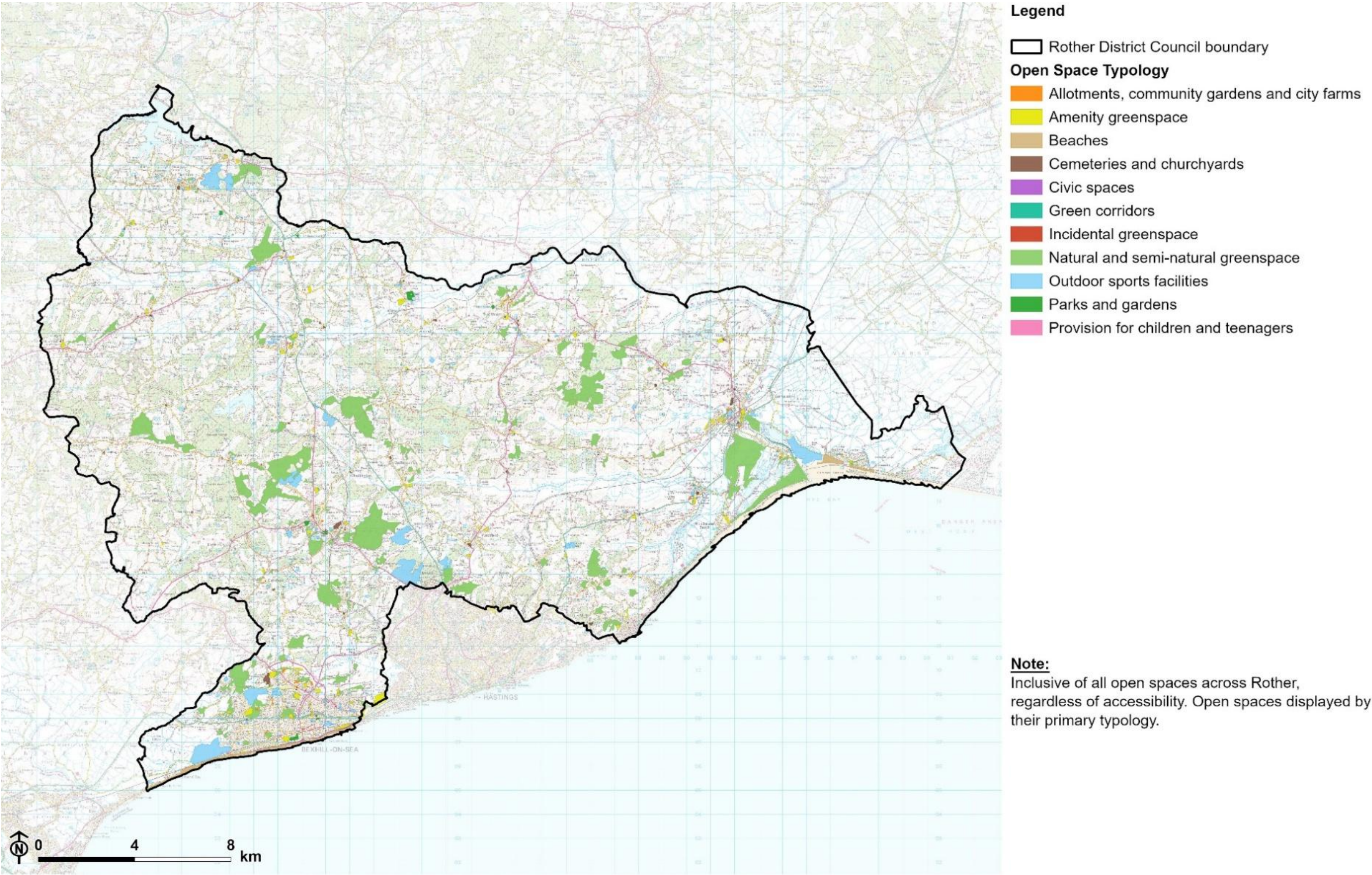
4.11 Overall, there are 702 open space sites in the district, covering 3,166.07 hectares. When accounting only for freely accessible sites (excluding private or paid-access sites such as allotments and paid outdoor sports facilities), the total area of open space reduces to 1,898.81 hectares, provided by 482 sites.

4.12 Natural and semi-natural greenspace contributes to a large proportion of accessible open space, making up 82% of the total area while only making up approximately 15% of the number of sites.

4.13 Amenity greenspaces and beaches account for the second and third largest area of accessible open space land, 8% and 5% respectively.

4.14 All play areas within the district are publicly accessible, whereas allotments are inaccessible to the general public.

Figure 4.1: Open spaces in Rother District



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Quantity analysis per 1,000 population

4.15 The current and projected 2042 quantity of accessible greenspace, play and allotments, community growing spaces and city farms per 1,000 population is set out in **Table 4.2**. Projected quantities for 2042 have been calculated assuming there is no additional provision during this timescale.

Table 4.2: Quantity of open space per 1,000 population

Typology	Current Quantity	2042 Quantity
Amenity Greenspace	1.59ha per 1,000 population	1.42ha per 1,000 population
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	16.12ha per 1,000 population	14.41ha per 1,000 population
Parks and Gardens	0.09ha per 1,000 population	0.08ha per 1,000 population
Total Accessible Greenspace	17.8ha per 1,000 population	15.91ha per 1,000 population
Allotments, Community Growing Spaces and City Farms*	0.17ha per 1,000 population	0.15ha per 1,000 population
Provision for Children and Teenagers	0.07ha per 1,000 population	0.06ha per 1,000 population

*Includes restricted access sites.

4.16 There is good provision of accessible greenspace across the district, with the total area of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population over five times the 3-hectare standard recommended in the NEGIF (17.8 hectares per 1,000 population).

4.17 Accessible greenspace within the district mainly consists of natural and semi-natural greenspace, comprising 90% of the total area of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population. Natural and semi-natural greenspace provision also substantially exceeds the FiT benchmark of 1.8 hectares per 1,000 people. This aligns with the findings found during the stakeholder consultation with parish and town councils in the district. No respondents perceived the quantity of natural and semi-natural greenspaces in their area to be 'low' but instead 5% of respondents agreed the quality was 'very high', 32% 'high' and 42% 'moderate'.

4.18 Provision for amenity greenspace is considerably greater than the provision of parks and gardens at 1.59 hectares per 1,000 population compared to 0.09 hectares per 1,000 population respectively. Provision for amenity greenspace exceeds the

recommended FiT benchmark of 0.6 hectares per 1,000 population, whereas provision for parks and gardens falls significantly below the FiT recommended standard of 0.8 hectares per 1,000 population.

4.19 Similar to natural and semi-natural greenspaces, the perception of quantity of amenity greenspace by local councils was positive. 5% of respondents agreed the quantity was 'very high', 32% 'high' and 42% 'moderate'. Although, four respondents (21%) thought the quantity of local amenity greenspace was 'low'.

4.20 However, the perception of quantity of parks and gardens by parish and town councils compared to the findings of the quantity analysis are very contrasting. Of the 23 respondents, 5% agreed the quantity was 'very high', 32% 'high' and 42% 'moderate'. Only one respondent thought quantity of local parks and garden was low. This suggests that while current provision of parks and gardens is low and below recommended standards, this is not perceived by respondents to the survey. It is possible that having good access to other open space typologies, such as natural and semi-natural greenspaces, which perform many of the same functions, is reducing the demand for parks and gardens.

4.21 Provision for children and teenagers is significantly below the recommended FiT standard of 0.55 hectares per 1,000 population at 0.07 hectares per 1,000 population. Future projections also anticipate a decline of approximately 0.01 hectares per 1,000 population by 2042.

4.22 Provision of allotments community growing spaces and city farms is slightly below the recommended 0.21 hectares per 1,000 population standard at 0.17 hectares per 1,000 population.

Recommendations

There is overall good provision of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population but the amount of this constituting parks and gardens could be increased to ensure greenspaces are providing a range of services and functions.

Natural and semi-natural greenspace comprise a significant proportion of accessible greenspace, consideration of adding features expected in parks and gardens could help address deficiencies. Additional features could include children's play and youth spaces, public noticeboards, public art, accessible paths or picnic areas. Example sites include Knowle Wood, Bexhill Down, Broad Oak Park, Rye Harbour NSN which are natural and semi-natural sites adjacent or within towns with little or no provision of parks and gardens.

Inclusion of play equipment in new spaces could address deficiencies in access to provision for children and teenagers. In addition, community growing spaces could be incorporated into existing and any new greenspace especially where there is evidence of high demand e.g. allotment waiting lists.

Proposed quantity standards

4.23 A proposed set of quantity standards have been identified for accessible greenspace typologies (amenity greenspace, natural and semi-natural greenspace and parks and gardens), allotments and community gardens and provision for children and teenagers.

4.24 These standards have been developed based on a review of the existing open space standards, established in the previous Greenspaces, Sport and Recreation Study (2009), a review of best practice standards from Fields in Trust and the Allotment Society, and the assessment of current and future provision provided above.

Accessible greenspace

4.25 To sustain the high levels of accessible greenspace provision across Rother, it is recommended that the overarching level of provision established through the 2009 Study is maintained as an evidence-based target. However, this study has also highlighted a significant imbalance in the distribution of greenspace typologies across the district, specifically an imbalance between the provision of natural and semi-natural greenspace and parks and gardens.

4.26 It is recommended that the revised standards seek to address the imbalance in accessible greenspace while also ensuring no net loss overall. To achieve this, the recommended standards align amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural greenspace provision with the FiT benchmarks, while increasing the parks and gardens standard to 2.1 hectares per 1,000 people. This should help rebalance the mix of accessible greenspace provision, increase access to formal recreational spaces, and maintain the overall quantity of accessible greenspace across the district.

Allotments and community gardens

4.27 For allotments and community gardens, the previous Greenspaces, Sport and Recreation Study (2009) established separate standards for urban areas (0.45

hectares per 1,000 population) and rural areas (0.17 hectares per 1,000 population). A district wide standard has been identified as a preference to provide more clarity for developers in the new Local Plan policy. Current provision is in line with the previous standard and so its retention would ensure no net loss. The Allotment society provides a suggested standard of 0.5 hectares per 1,000 households which translates to 0.21 hectares per 1,000 population when calculated using an average occupancy rate of 2.36.

4.28 Consistent data on allotment waiting lists across the district is not available, as waiting list information is typically held by individual parish and town councils and could not be collected as part of this study. As a result, it has not been possible to undertake a comprehensive assessment of current or future demand for allotments, and there is limited justification for the use of the previous 0.45 hectares urban standard. As such it is recommended that the standard of 0.21 hectares be used to be in line with national benchmarks and provide an uplift on existing provision.

Provision for children and teenagers

4.29 The previous 2009 study had a standard of 0.4 hectares of provision per 1,000 population for children and teenagers. This is lower than the Fields in Trust Standard of 0.55 hectares per 1,000 population. Current provision is only 0.07 hectares per 1,000 population. For provision for children and teenagers, it is recommended that the FiT standard of 0.55 hectares per 1,000 population be adopted to address the current deficit in provision. It should be noted that given the low existing provision, it is unlikely that this standard will be able to be achieved, however including this as an aspirational target should help to address the deficit.

4.30 Proposed quantity standards are presented in **Table 4.3**.

Table 4.3: Proposed quantity standards

Typology	Quantity Standard
Amenity Greenspace	0.6ha per 1,000 population
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	1.8ha per 1,000 population
Parks and Gardens	2.1ha per 1,000 population
Total Accessible Greenspace	4.5ha per 1,000 population
Allotments, Community Growing Spaces and City Farms	0.21ha per 1,000 population
Provision for Children and Teenagers	0.55ha per 1,000 population

4.31 The emerging viability evidence identifies open space requirements based on the FiT accessible greenspace standards and proposes that these apply only to developments of more than 500 dwellings. However, restricting provision to large strategic sites would fail to capture the cumulative impact of smaller developments, which collectively contribute a significant proportion of housing growth across the district. This could result in a gap between the level of provision required and that delivered through new development, placing increasing pressure on existing green infrastructure assets.

4.32 To address this issue, it is recommended that open space standards are applied to developments of 20 dwellings or more, with provision scaled proportionately to the size and nature of the scheme. This threshold would ensure that developments make a meaningful contribution to meeting identified open space needs while creating spaces of sufficient size and quality to be functional, attractive and capable of delivering recreational, health and environmental benefits.

4.33 Applying the standards in this way would help secure more consistent provision across the district and support the delivery of a comprehensive green infrastructure network to serve both existing and future communities.

4.34 These standards should also be applied with the following considerations:

- While an overall accessible greenspace standard has been applied, any new provision should incorporate a range of features reflecting the characteristics of parks and gardens, amenity greenspace, and natural and semi-natural greenspace.
- Where existing provision falls below the recommended standards, new development should, wherever possible, provide additional open space of the relevant typology. This will help to improve overall provision across the district and support progress towards the recommended standard.
- Where existing provision is significantly above the recommended standard, there may be justification for new development not to provide additional open space of that typology. In such circumstances, it may be appropriate for developer contributions to be directed towards the enhancement, maintenance, or improved management of existing spaces, helping to ensure they can accommodate increased demand and reduce pressure on these areas.

Chapter 5

Accessibility Assessment and Standards

5.1 This chapter provides an overview of accessibility standards alongside an accessibility analysis within each sub-area. The district has been broken down into five sub areas to better understand spatial distribution of open space across the district. The five spatial sub-areas align with those included in both the Regulation 18 Rother Local Plans (2024, 2026).

5.2 The chapter then provides recommendations for improving accessibility to accessible greenspace, play and allotments, community growing spaces and city farms based on the findings of the analysis. Finally, the chapter provides recommended accessibility standards for accessible greenspace, play, and allotments, community growing spaces and city farms.

Overview of accessibility standards

5.3 Accessibility standards relate to proximity of open space. The accessibility standard sets out how far people may be expected to travel to access open spaces. It may be expressed as a straight-line distance (in metres or kilometres) or as a travel time (in minutes) based on the road and path network. This may also be referred to as a proximity, or size proximity, standard.

5.4 The Natural England Accessible Greenspace Standards (AGSt) recommends the following access catchments for each open space hierarchy:

- 200-metre buffer for doorstep accessible greenspace over 0.2 hectares;
- 300-metre buffer for local accessible greenspace over 2 hectares;
- 1,000-metre buffer for neighbourhood accessible greenspace over 10 hectares;
- 2-kilometre buffer for wider neighbourhood accessible greenspace over 20 hectares; and
- 5-kilometre buffer for district accessible greenspace over 100 hectares.

5.5 The NEGIF also provides a Greenspace Close to Home Access target, which states that all residents should lie within:

- 1 kilometre of a neighbourhood accessible greenspace (no more than 15-minute standard); and

- Either 300 metres of a local accessible greenspace or 200 metres of a doorstep accessible greenspace (no more than 5-minute standard).

5.6 Fields in Trust access standards were applied for provision for children and young people with the following buffers applied:

- 100-metre buffer for LAPs;
- 400-metre buffer for LEAPs;
- 700-metre buffer for youth space; and
- 1,000-metre buffer for NEAPs.

5.7 The National Allotment Society Standard recommends access to allotments or growing space within a 1-kilometre buffer.

Accessibility analysis across Rother District sub-areas

5.8 To assess accessibility, access distances have been applied using network analysis, rather than as a straight-line distance. This uses the road and footpath network to identify the actual walking distances to open spaces. The following datasets were used to identify the road and footpath network and identify the access points to open spaces for calculating access catchments:

- Network analysis was carried out using Ordnance Survey (OS) Multi Modal Routing Network:
 - A 6-kilometre buffer around Tameside was set to ensure journeys that exit and then re-enter the borough are included.
- The routing network was filtered to where Foot equalled “yes” or “designated”.
- Access points were created using the following layers:
 - OS National Geographic Database Site Access;
 - Intersecting points between network and open spaces; and
 - Intersecting points between 5-metre buffer of network and open spaces.
- Instead of generating points every 100 metres for these sites, access points were manually added using aerial imagery. 11 sites did not intersect with any access point or the 5-metre buffer from the network.

5.9 Accessibility standards have been tested for accessible greenspace, provision for children and teenagers and allotments using recognised best practice FiT, NEGIF

and National Allotment Society standards. It should be noted that the assessment of provision for children and teenagers has been undertaken as a single category, as typology-specific data was not available to support a more detailed analysis. Different access standards have been tested for different hierarchies of accessible greenspace.

5.10 The following analysis of open space accessibility across the district is provided by sub-area.

Battle sub-area

5.11 Figure 5.1 shows access to accessible greenspace close to home. Immediate ‘Doorstep’ and ‘Local’ access is strong across the town of Battle and nearby villages of Sedlescombe, Mountfield and Wood’s Corner. Access to neighbourhood scale greenspace is also generally good. Other villages with varying access include Telham and Netherfield, which show no access to doorstep or local accessible greenspace in the centre of both villages but fall within the access catchment of neighbourhood scale greenspace. Villages with no access to any of the Greenspace Close to Home hierarchies include Catsfield, Dallington, Whatlington.

5.12 Residents in rural areas falling outside access catchments for local, doorstep and neighbourhood scale greenspace include between Dallington and Catsfield and between Mountfield and Sedlescombe. Residents within these areas will be required to travel further to access open space and do not meet the Greenspace Close to Home target. Villages or individual dwellings with limited or no access to any of the Greenspace Close to Home hierarchies will also rely heavily on the PRoW network to provide access to nature across the wider countryside.

5.13 Figure 5.2 shows access to wider neighbourhood and district scale accessible greenspace. There is generally good access to wider neighbourhood scale greenspace, with Battle and most surrounding villages falling within the catchment. Villages outside of the catchment include Mountfield, Whatlington and Catsfield. Access to district scale greenspace is limited to the east of the sub-area, with the villages of Netherfield, Dallington and Wood’s corner falling outside of the district-scale greenspace catchment.

5.14 Figure 5.3 shows access to hierarchies of provision for children and teenagers in the sub-area. Access to play space is limited to the town of Battle and within the villages of Netherfield, Sedlescombe, Catsfield and Mountfield, all of which show good coverage for NEAPs. Access to LAPs and LEAPs are concentrated in the centre of each settlement. Areas with no access to play include residents of Dallington, Wood’s Corner and rural areas in the west of the sub-area.

5.15 Figure 5.4 shows access to allotments in the sub-area. Access to allotments is limited to Battle and Sedlescombe. Residents outside of these settlements, fall outside the 1-kilometre catchment. Therefore, there is no access to allotments across most villages in the sub-area, particularly in the west.

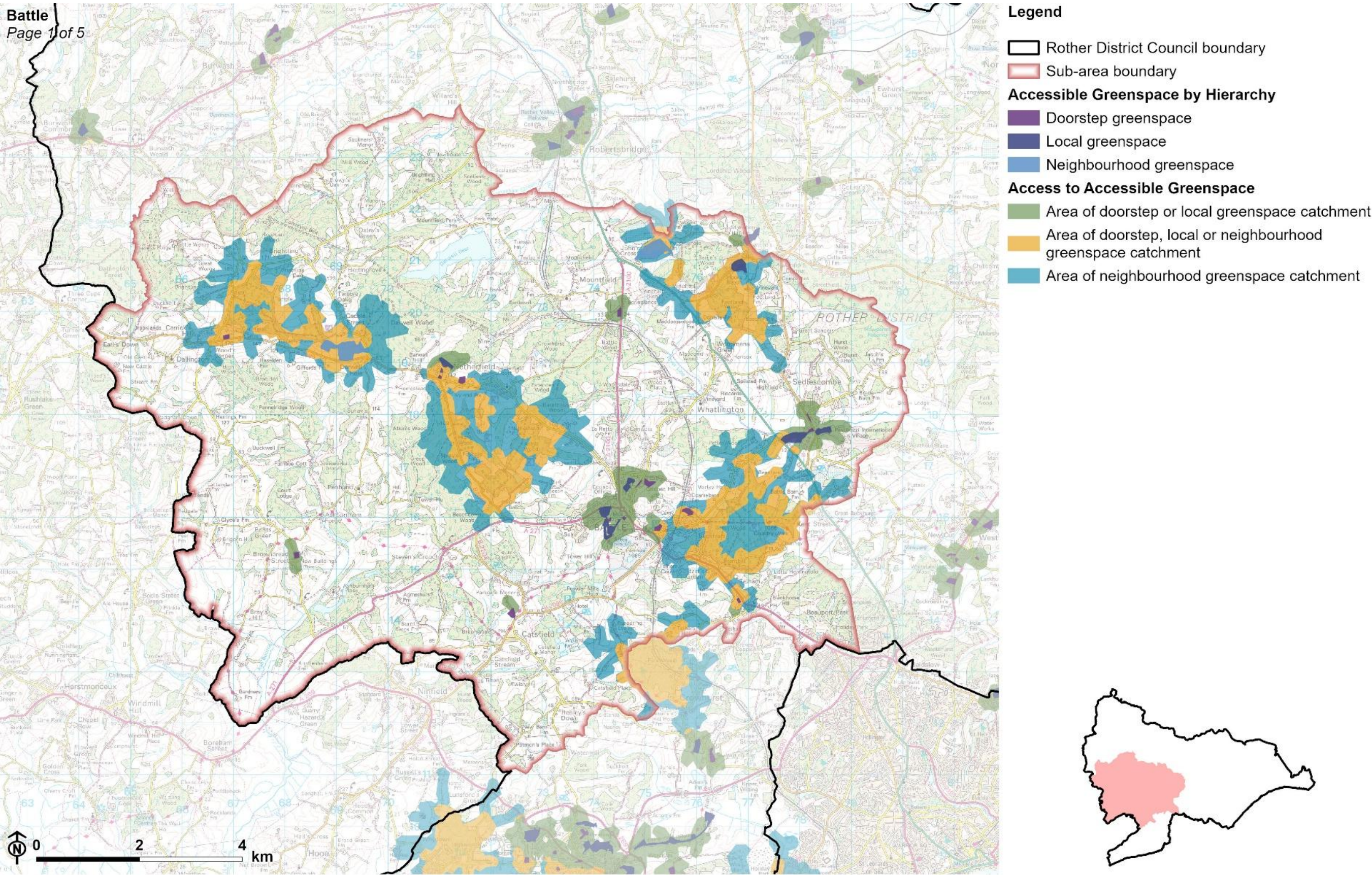
Recommendations

To address areas not meeting the Greenspace Close to Home Target a new neighbourhood accessible greenspace around Dallington would address deficiencies in access in the area. A new doorstep or local greenspace in Catsfield should also be prioritised to address poor access to greenspace across the village.

A new wider neighbourhood or district scale greenspace should also be considered in the west of the sub-area which would provide access to residents living in rural areas between settlements, currently with no access. The PRoW network will also play an important role in connecting smaller settlements with larger areas of open space and access to nature out of smaller settlements with limited or no provision to the wider countryside and it is therefore important that this is protected and enhanced.

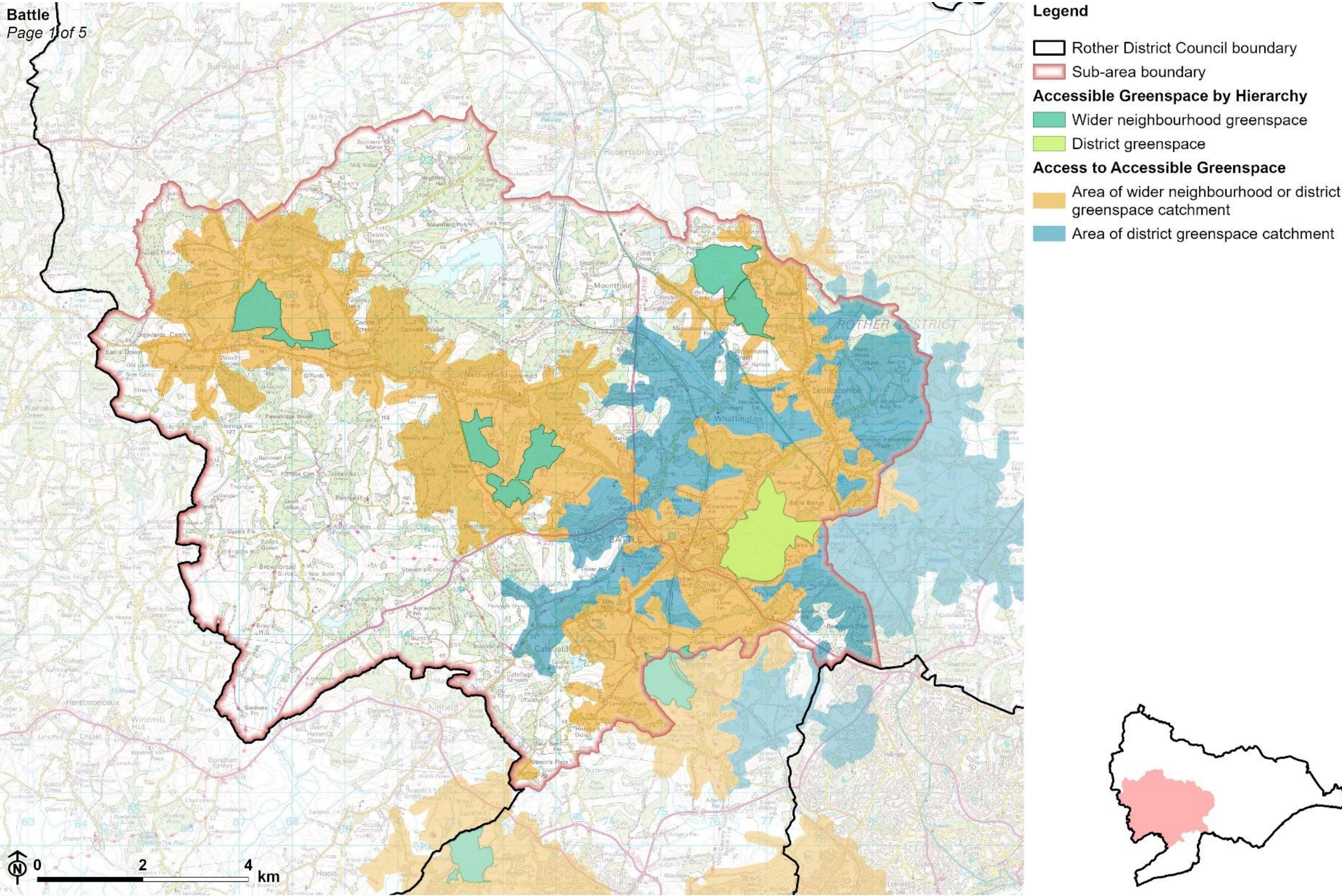
Consideration of adding community growing opportunities in existing open spaces would help address deficiencies across the sub-areas. Sites could include Netherfield Rd Recreation Ground and Solomans Lane Rec Ground.

Figure 5.1: Battle sub-area Accessible Greenspace Close to Home



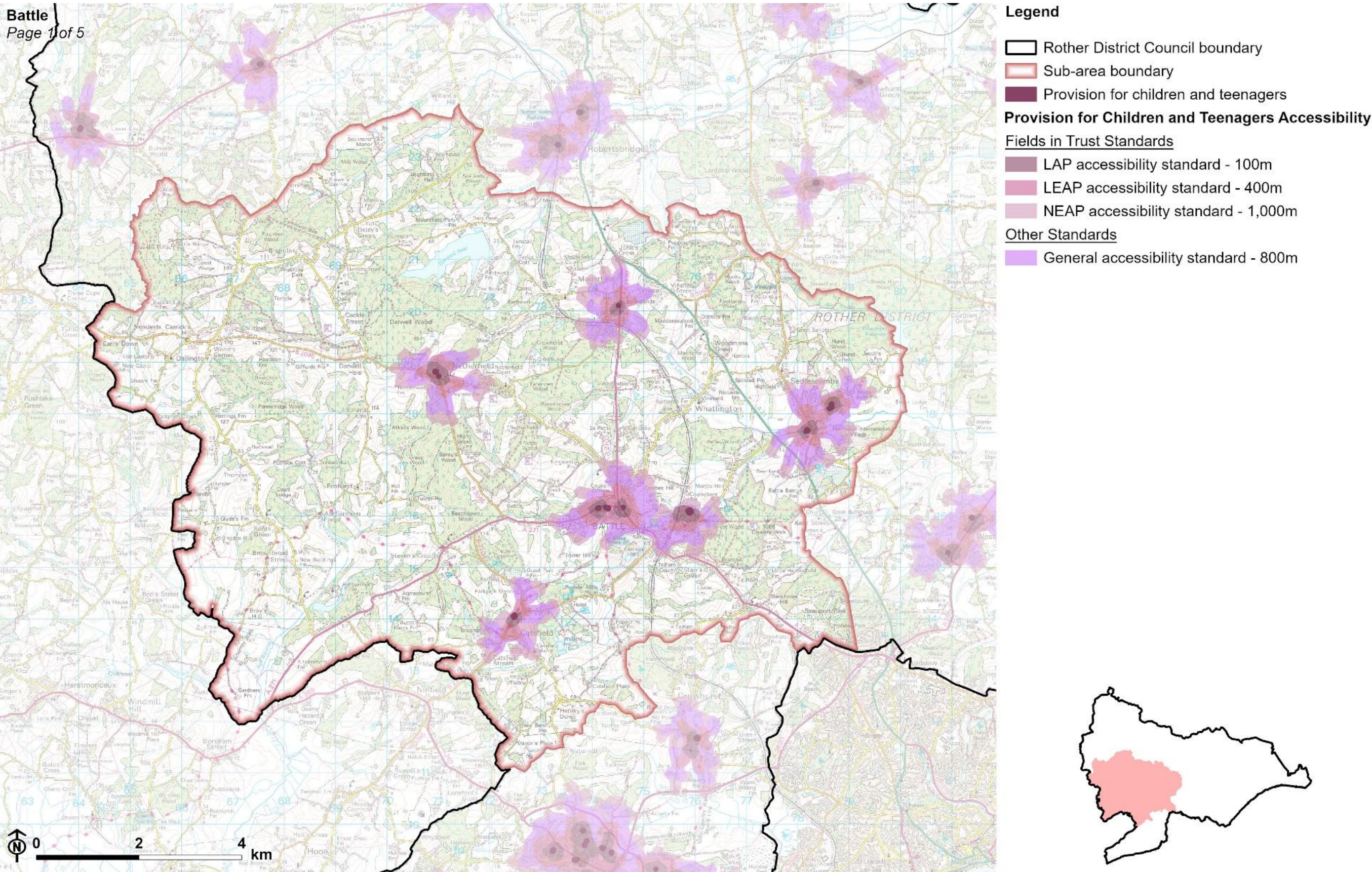
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Figure 5.2: Battle sub-area wider neighbourhood and district scale greenspace



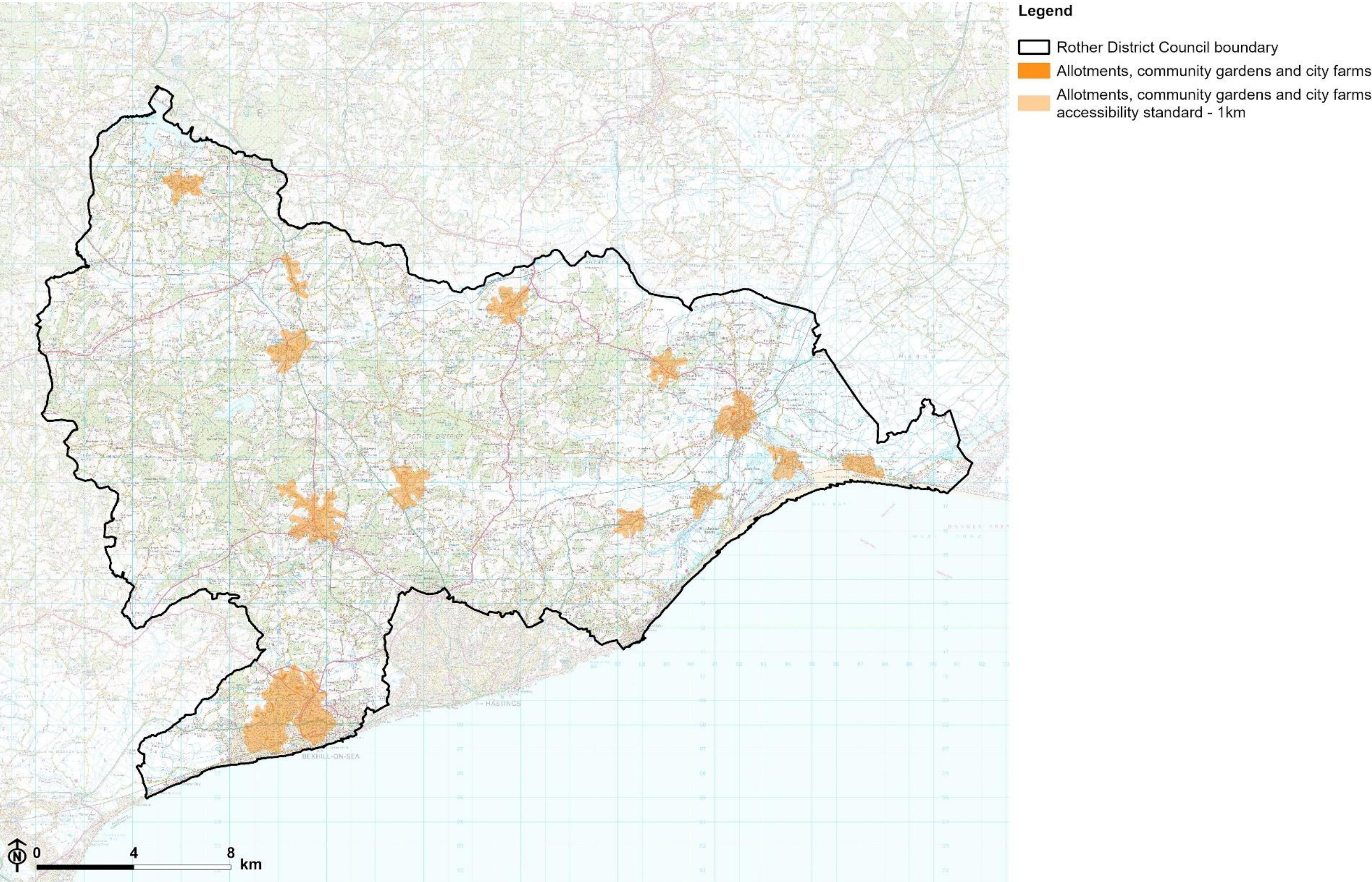
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Figure 5.3: Battle sub-area provision for children and teenagers



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Figure 5.4: District distribution of allotments, community gardens and city farms



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Bexhill sub-area

5.16 Figure 5.5 shows access to accessible greenspace close to home. The east and west of Bexhill show strong access to doorstep, local and neighbourhood accessible greenspace. However, areas falling outside of access buffers are located to the north-east and south of Bexhill station, showing only limited access to doorstep accessible greenspace only. Access to doorstep and local accessible greenspace also varies across the whole sub-area with a number of residential roads falling outside the access catchments.

5.17 Figure 5.6 shows access to wider neighbourhood and district scale accessible greenspace. There is generally good access to wider neighbourhood scale greenspace in the east and west of the sub-area with areas falling outside of the access catchment to the north and south of Bexhill station. There is no access to district scale greenspace in this sub-area.

5.18 Figure 5.7 shows access to hierarchies of provision for children and teenagers in the sub-area. There is strong access to NEAPs across most of the sub-area with only a small area to the south-west around Gillham Wood showing no access. Coverage of LAPs and LEAPs is more limited to a number of small areas scattered across the sub-area.

5.19 Figure 5.4 shows access to allotments in the sub area. Access to allotments is limited to the centre of the sub-area, with residents in the east and west of the sub-area falling outside of the catchment. This includes residential areas around Pebsham and Little Common.

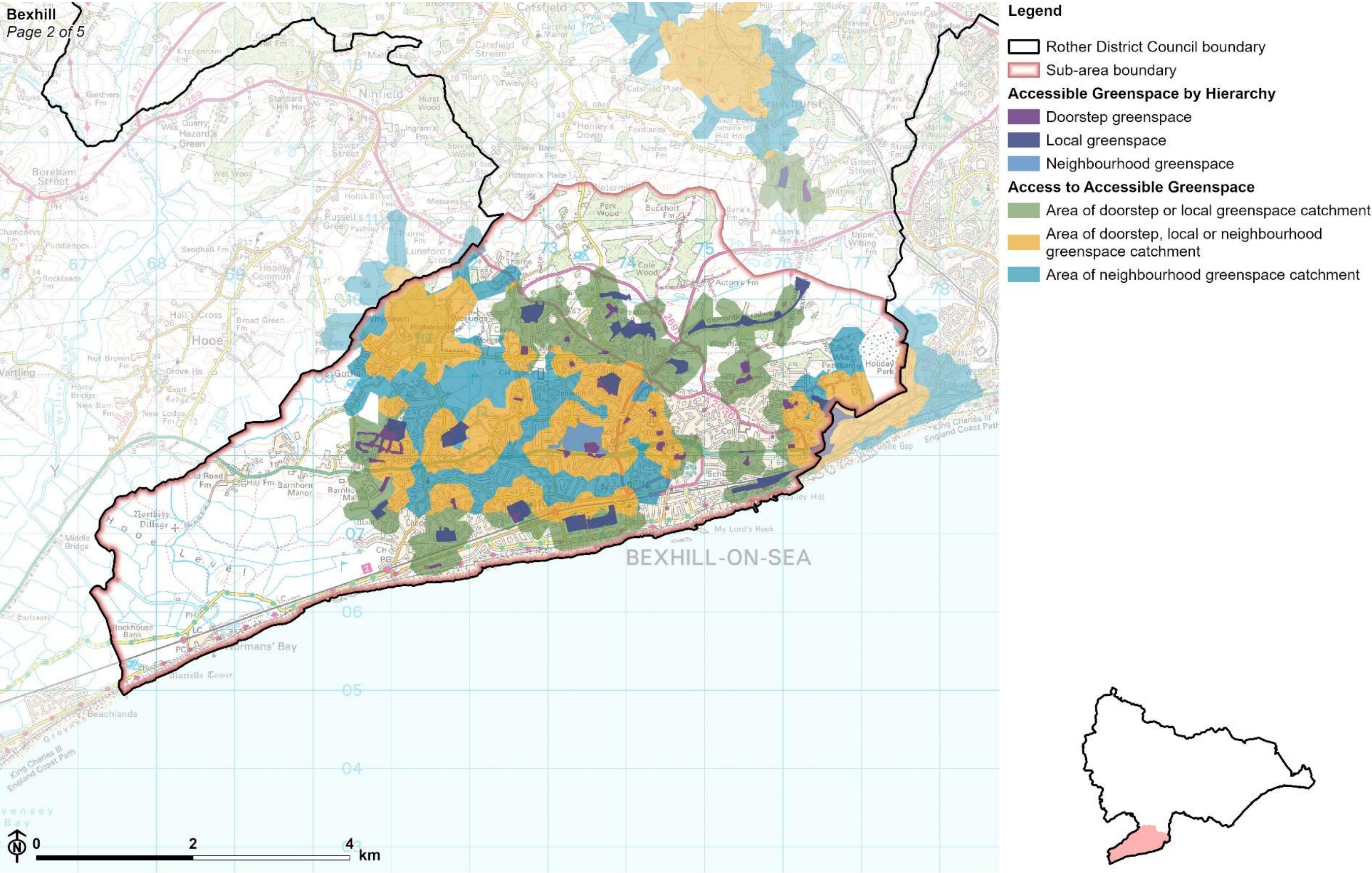
Recommendations

Consideration of increasing access within Combe Wood, currently restricted access, could help address deficiencies in access in the centre of the sub-area. As well as considering increasing the size of sites such as Saint James' Crescent.

Arrangements where public access could be permitted within certain hours within school and college playing fields across the sub-area, could also help provide more access to greenspace in the centre.

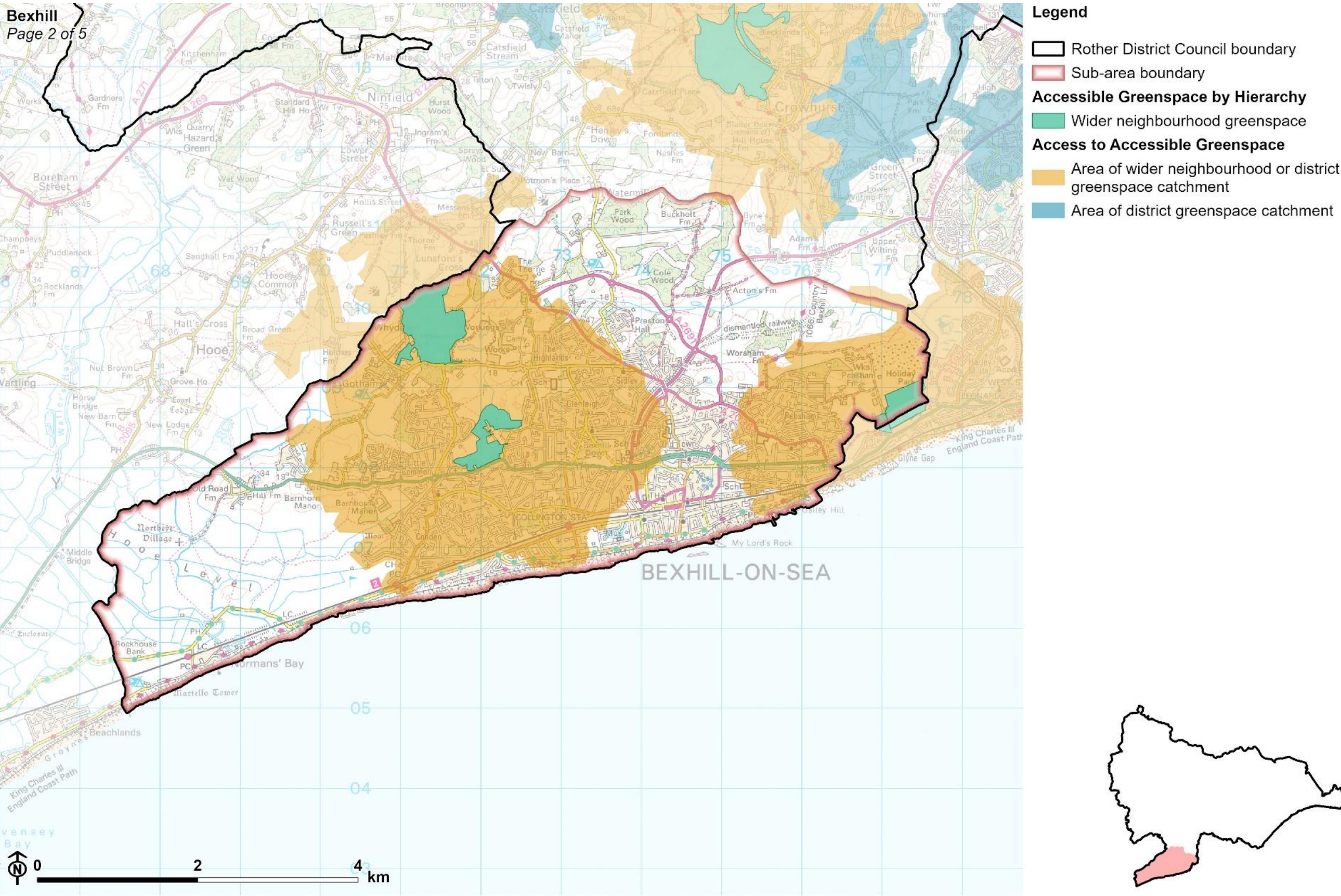
A new play space should be prioritised close to Gillham Wood to address deficiencies in access to play. Consideration of adding community food growing opportunities within existing open spaces such as Gracelands Drive AGS, Seabourne Road AGS or Foxglove Avenue AGS could help address deficiencies in access to allotments in the west and east of the sub-area.

Figure 5.5: Bexhill sub-area Accessible Greenspace Close to Home



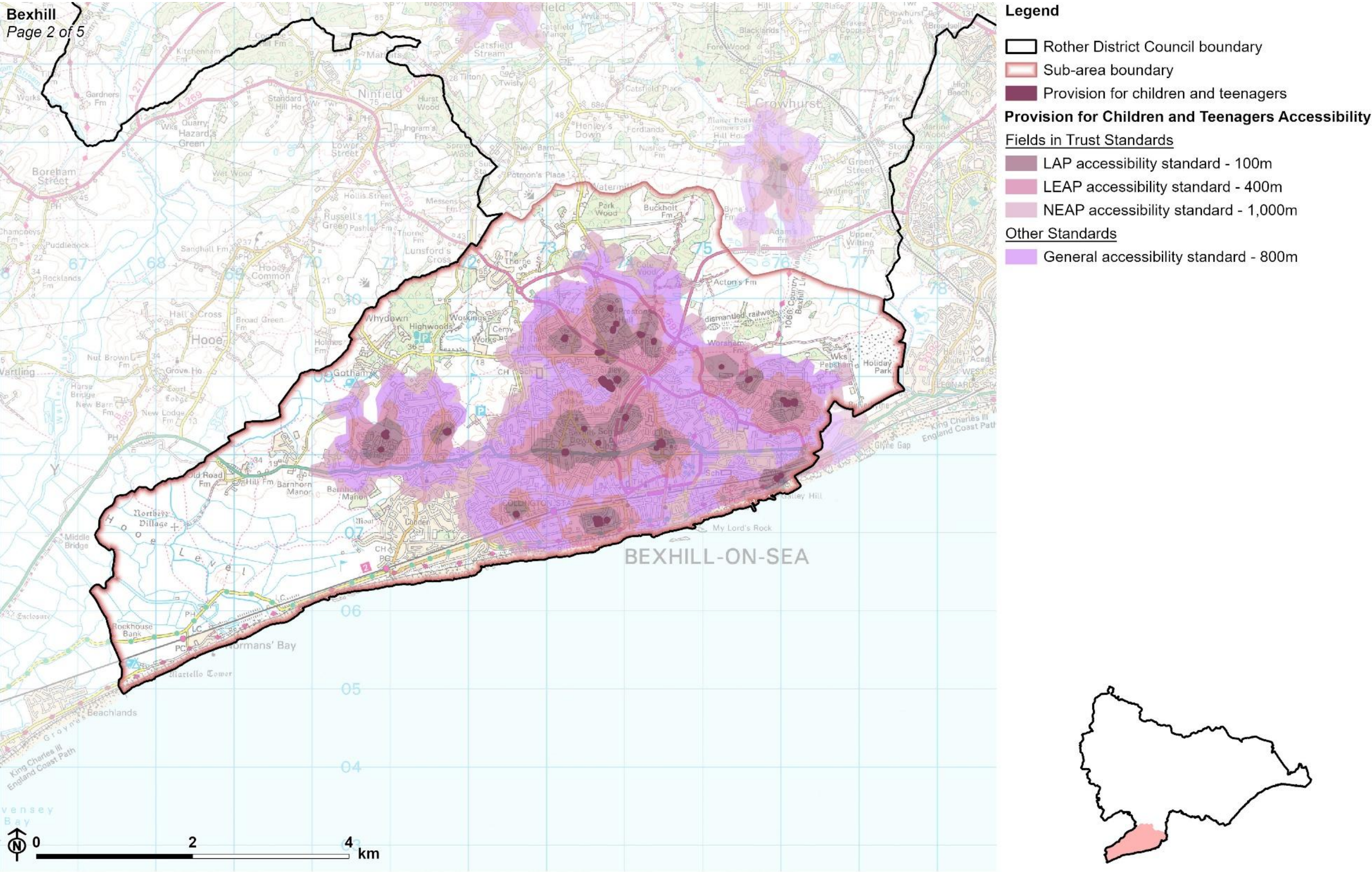
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Figure 5.6: Bexhill sub-area wider neighbourhood and district scale greenspace



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Figure 5.7: Bexhill sub-area provision for children and teenagers



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Northern sub-area

5.20 Figure 5.8 shows access to accessible greenspace close to home. Immediate 'Doorstep' and 'Local' access is strong across most of the villages in the sub-area including Burwash, Ticehurst, Hurst Green, Robertsbridge, Bodiam and Staplecross. Etchingham shows good access to doorstep and local accessible greenspace in the north of the village, with the south falling outside of the catchment. Access to neighbourhood scale greenspace is more varied and limited to Hurst Green and around Hawkhurst Road. Most villages fall outside of the neighbourhood scale catchment, not meeting the Close to Home target with only doorstep or local greenspace access.

5.21 Residents in rural areas falling outside access catchments for local, doorstep and neighbourhood scale greenspace include between Ticehurst and Burwash and Etchingham and Ewhurst Green. Residents within these areas will be required to travel further to access open space and do not meet the Greenspace Close to Home target. Villages or individual dwellings with limited or no access to any of the Greenspace Close to Home hierarchies will also rely heavily on the PRow network to provide access to nature across the wider countryside.

5.22 Figure 5.9 shows access to wider neighbourhood and district scale accessible greenspace. Access to wider neighbourhood scale greenspace is limited to Hurst Green, north of Etchingham and residential areas around Hawkhurst Road in the north of the sub-area. There is no access to district scale greenspace in this sub-area.

5.23 Figure 5.10 shows access to hierarchies of provision for children and teenagers in the sub-area. Access to NEAPs is strong across most villages in the sub-area, including Burwash, Ticehurst, Hurst Green, Robertsbridge, Bodiam, Staplecross, Ewhurst Green and Etchingham. Coverage of LAPs and LEAPs are limited to the centre of villages. However, residents living within rural areas between villages fall outside catchments and will be required to travel further for access to play.

5.24 Figure 5.4 shows access to allotments in the sub-area. Access to allotments is varied across the sub-area with residents of Ticehurst, Hurst Green and west of Robertsbridge falling within the 1-kilometre access catchment. All other settlements fall outside of the access catchment. Therefore, there is no access to allotments across most villages in the sub-area, particularly in the west and east of the sub-area.

Recommendations

Most villages have good access to doorstep and local greenspace, but access to neighbourhood scale greenspace is limited resulting in areas not meeting the Greenspace Close to Home target. Consideration should be given to the provision of neighbourhood-scale greenspace in Staplecross and Robertsbridge, supported by the existing well-connected public rights of way network, to help address deficiencies in access to recreational greenspace. However, given the rural character of the area and more significant deficiencies elsewhere in the district, this is not considered an immediate priority. The requirement for additional provision should be reviewed if future development results in population growth and increased demand for accessible greenspace.

Consideration of adding community growing food opportunities in sites such as Burwash Common and Bodiam Recreation Green would introduce new provision to allotments in the west and east of the sub-area respectively.

The PRoW network will also play an important role in connecting smaller settlements with larger areas of open space and access to nature out of smaller settlements with limited or no provision to the wider countryside and it is therefore important that this is protected and enhanced.

Figure 5.8: Northern sub-area Accessible Greenspace Close to Home

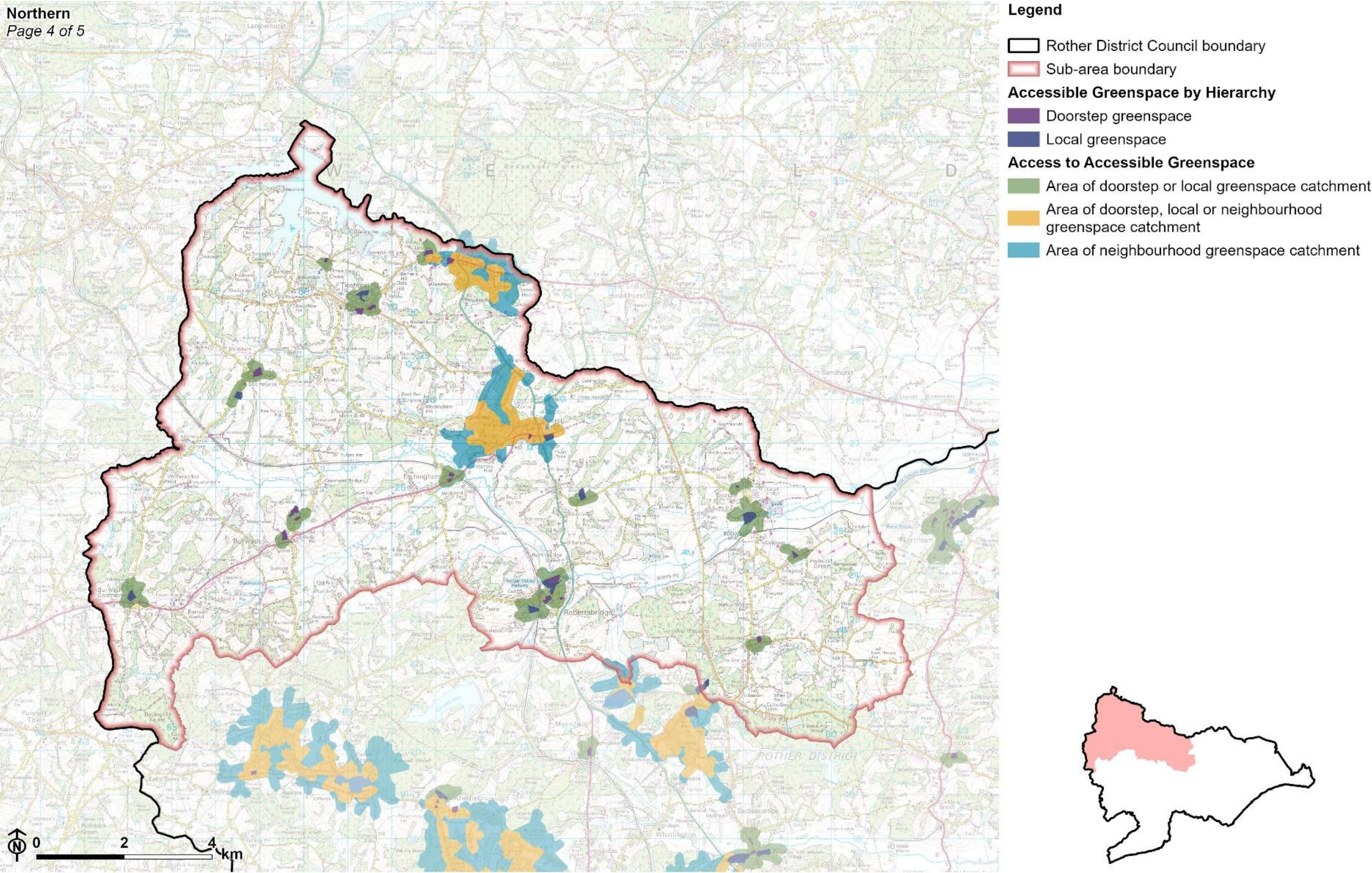
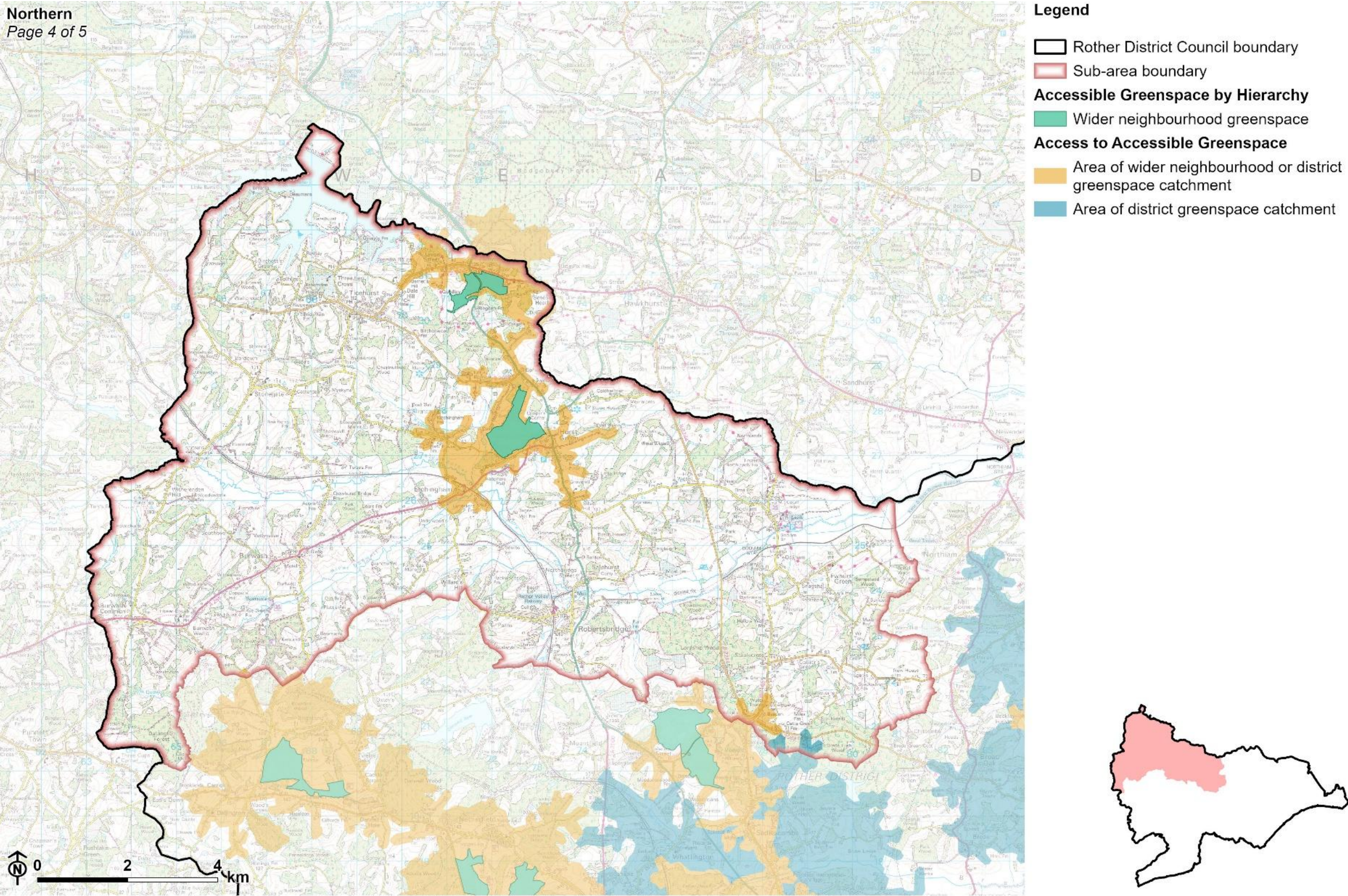
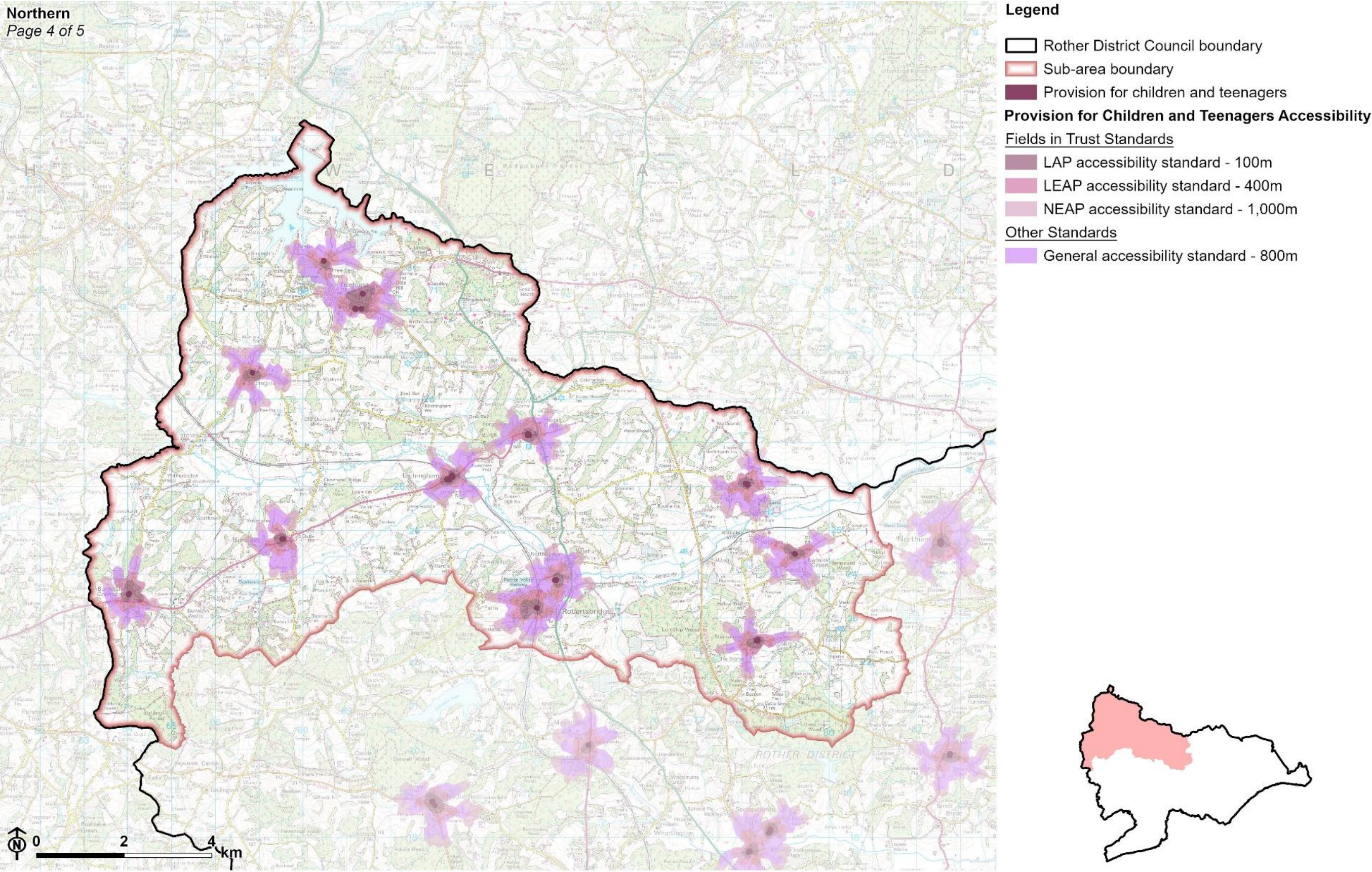


Figure 5.9: Northern sub-area wider neighbourhood and district scale greenspace



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Figure 5.10: Northern sub-area provision for children and teenagers



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Rye sub-area

5.25 Figure 5.11 shows access to accessible greenspace close to home. Access to doorstep and local accessible greenspace varies across the sub-area. Villages such as Peasmarch, Northiam and Iden showing good access. Whereas, the north of Winchelsea, east of Beckley and north of Broad Oak Bede fall outside the access catchments for doorstep and local scale greenspace, with the rest of the settlement falling within. Areas around Brede, Playden and Udimore show no access to any close to home accessible greenspace. Camber benefits from extensive publicly accessible beach, which provides a significant recreational resource and helps support the provision of accessible open space within the sub-area.

5.26 Access to neighbourhood scale greenspace is even more varied and limited to the centre of the sub-area around Beckley and to the south of Rye. Most villages fall outside of the neighbourhood scale catchment, not meeting the Greenspace Close to Home target, with only doorstep or local greenspace access.

5.27 Residents in rural areas falling outside access catchments for local, doorstep and neighbourhood scale greenspace include between Goatham Green and Rye and Northiam and Playden. Residents within these areas will be required to travel further to access open space and do not meet the Greenspace Close to Home target. Villages or individual dwellings with limited or no access to any of the Greenspace Close to Home hierarchies will also rely heavily on the PRoW network to provide access to nature across the wider countryside.

5.28 Figure 5.12 shows access to wider neighbourhood and district scale accessible greenspace. Access to wider neighbourhood scale greenspace is limited to Beckley, Rye and Winchelsea. There is good access to district scale greenspace with only Northiam, Camber, Iden and rural areas in the north of the sub-area falling outside the catchment.

5.29 Figure 5.13 shows access to play space in the sub-area. Access to NEAPs is strong across most villages in the sub-area, including Northiam, Broad Oak, Brede, Udimore, Winchelsea, Rye, Camber, Peasmarch and Iden. The exception being in the centre of Beckley and around Playden which fall outside access catchments. Residents in rural areas falling outside the play access catchments include between Goatham Green and Rye and Northiam and Playden. Residents within these areas will be required to travel further to access play spaces.

5.30 Figure 5.4 shows access to allotments in the sub-area. Access to allotments is varied across the sub-area with residents of Northiam, Peasmarch, Winchelsea, Rye and Camber falling within the 1-kilometre access catchment. All other settlements fall

outside of the access catchment. Therefore, there is no access to allotments across most villages in the west of the sub-area.

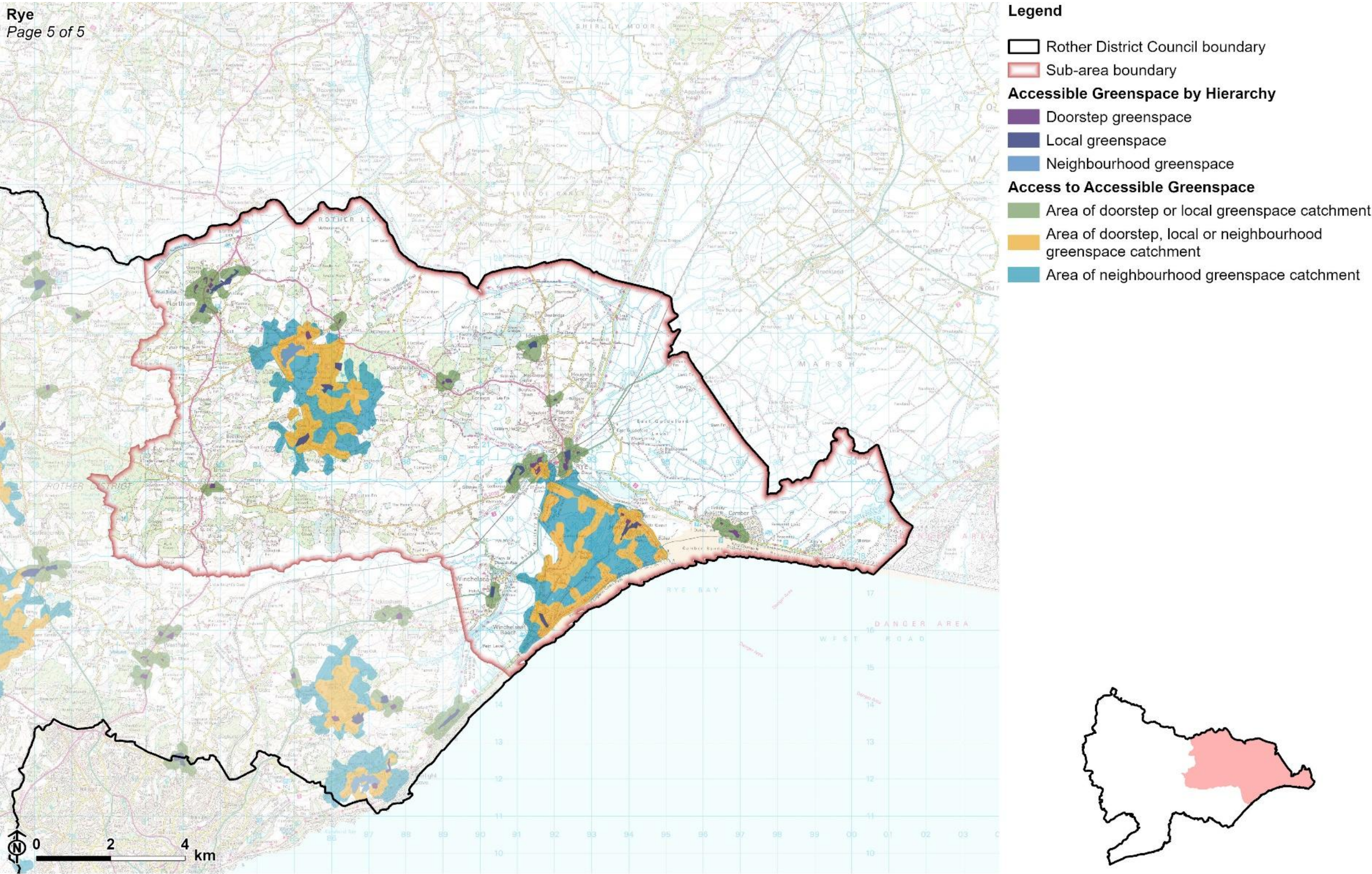
Recommendations

Consideration of a new neighbourhood accessible greenspace around Northiam, Udimore and Peasmarsch to address deficiencies in the area and increase the area meeting the Greenspace Close to Home target.

Consideration of adding a new play space to Beckley and Playden to address deficiencies in the area. Addition of community growing spaces in existing open space provision, such as Broad Oak Recreation Ground and Beckley Recreation Ground, would also help address the deficiencies in access to allotments and community growing spaces.

The PRoW network will also play an important role in connecting smaller settlements with larger areas of open space and access to nature out of smaller settlements with limited or no provision to the wider countryside and it is therefore important that this is protected and enhanced.

Figure 5.11: Rye sub-area Accessible Greenspace Close to Home



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Figure 5.12: Rye sub-area wider neighbourhood and district scale greenspace

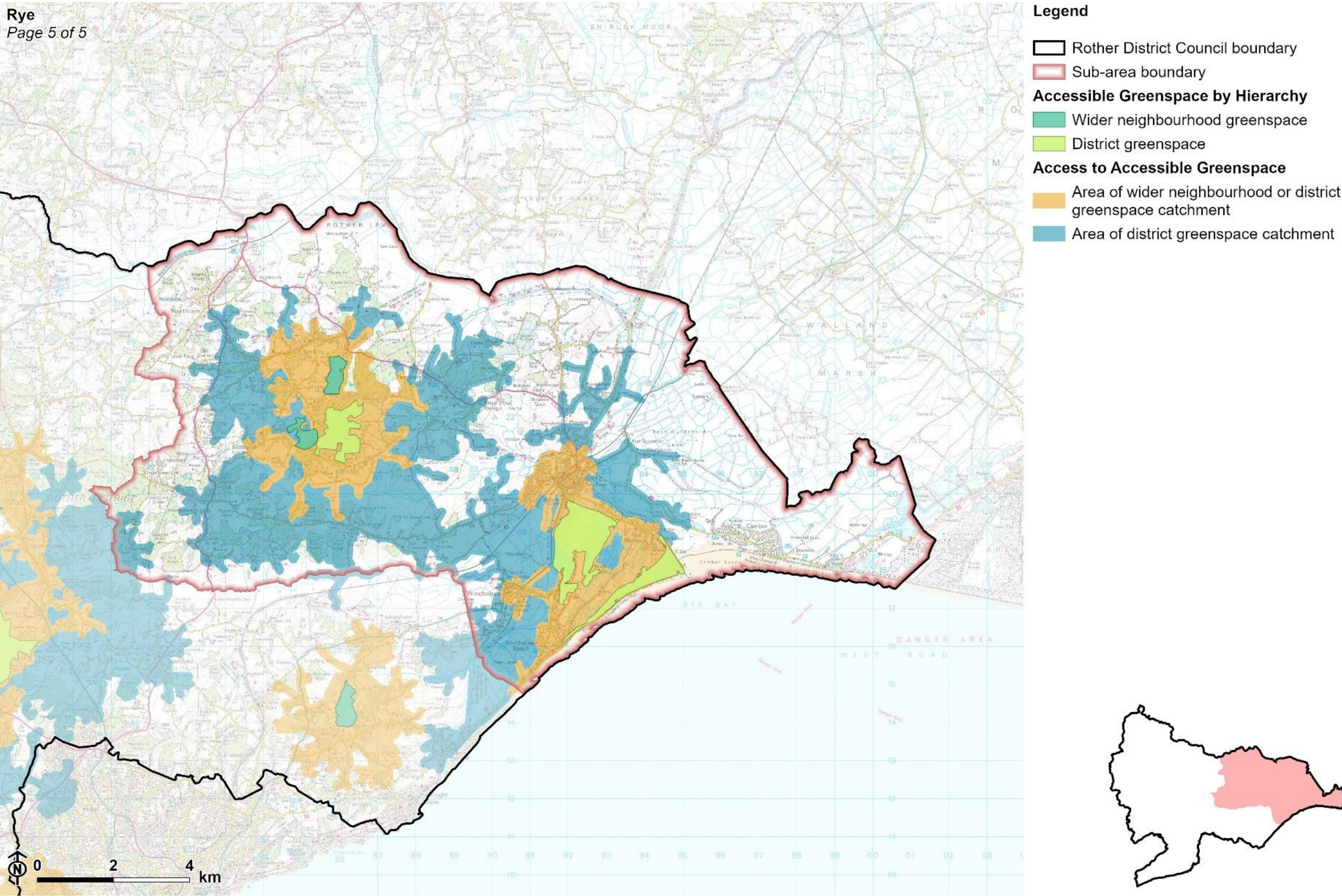
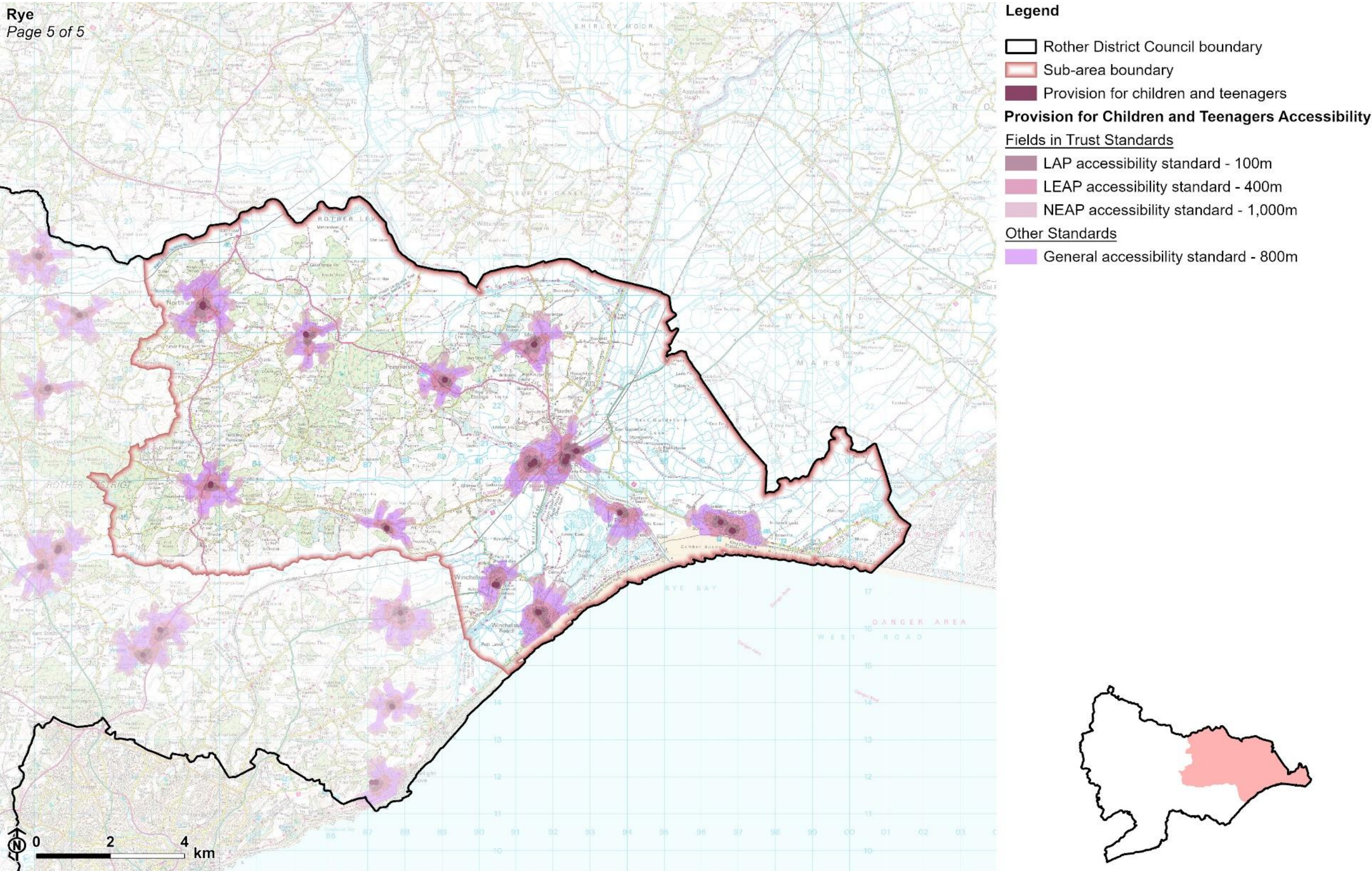


Figure 5.13: Rye sub-area provision for children and teenagers



Southern Rother and the Hastings Fringes sub-area

5.31 Figure 5.14 shows access to accessible greenspace close to home. Immediate 'Doorstep' and 'Local' access is strong across the towns of Crowhurst, Westfield, Fairlight Cove, Icklesham and Pett. Access to neighbourhood scale greenspace is also generally good. Villages with no access to any of the Greenspace Close to Home hierarchies include Three Oaks and Kent Street.

5.32 Large rural areas falling outside access catchments for local, doorstep and neighbourhood scale greenspace include between Westfield, Pett and Icklesham. Residents within these areas will be required to travel further to access open space and do not meet the Greenspace Close to Home target. Villages with limited or no access to any of the Greenspace Close to Home hierarchies will also rely heavily on the PRoW network to provide access to nature across the wider countryside.

5.33 Figure 5.15 shows access to wider neighbourhood and district scale accessible greenspace. There is generally good access to wider neighbourhood scale greenspace, with Crowhurst and villages in the east of the sub-area falling within the catchment. Access to district scale greenspace is limited to the west and far east of the catchment. Three Oaks, Pett, and Fairlight Cove all fall outside the catchment.

5.34 Figure 5.16 shows access to hierarchies of provision for children and teenagers in the sub-area. Access to play is varied across the sub area. Access to NEAPs is limited to the villages of Crowhurst, Westfield, Fairlight Cove, Pett and Icklesham. All residents outside of these areas fall outside the play access catchments, including to the north of Crowhurst.

5.35 Figure 5.4 shows access to allotments in the sub-area. Access to allotments is limited to residents of Icklesham only. All other settlements fall outside of the access catchment. Therefore, there is no access to allotments across most villages in the sub-area, particularly in the west.

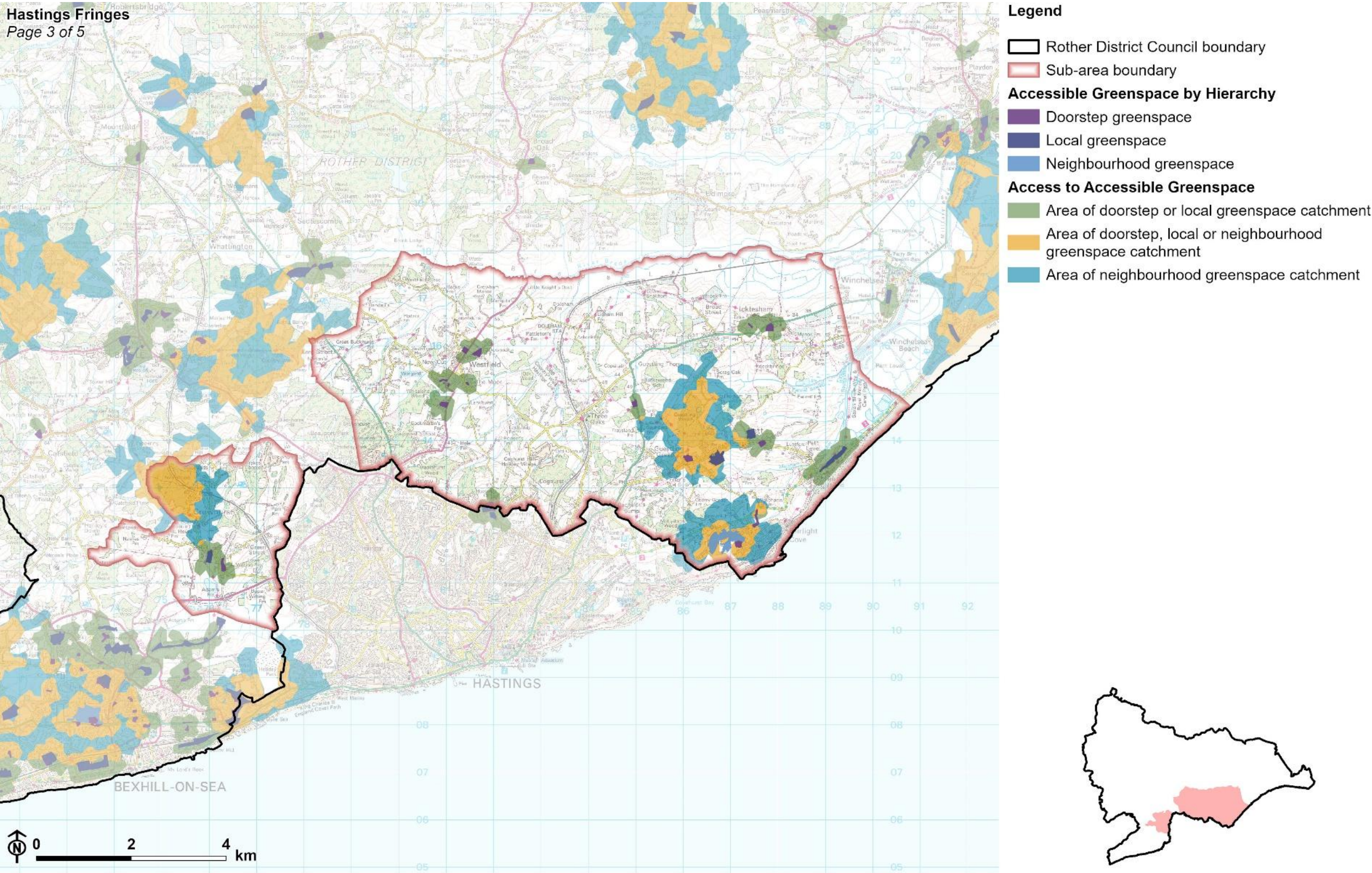
Recommendations

Addition of play equipment to Three Oaks Village Hall AGS and within Roughters Wood or Guestling Wood would help address deficiencies in play provision in these areas. Similarly, consideration of adding community food growing opportunities in sites such as Crowhurst Recreation Ground, Wood Field and Vicarage Lane AGS would help address deficiency in access to allotments.

The PRoW network will also play an important role in connecting smaller settlements with larger areas of open space and access to nature out of smaller

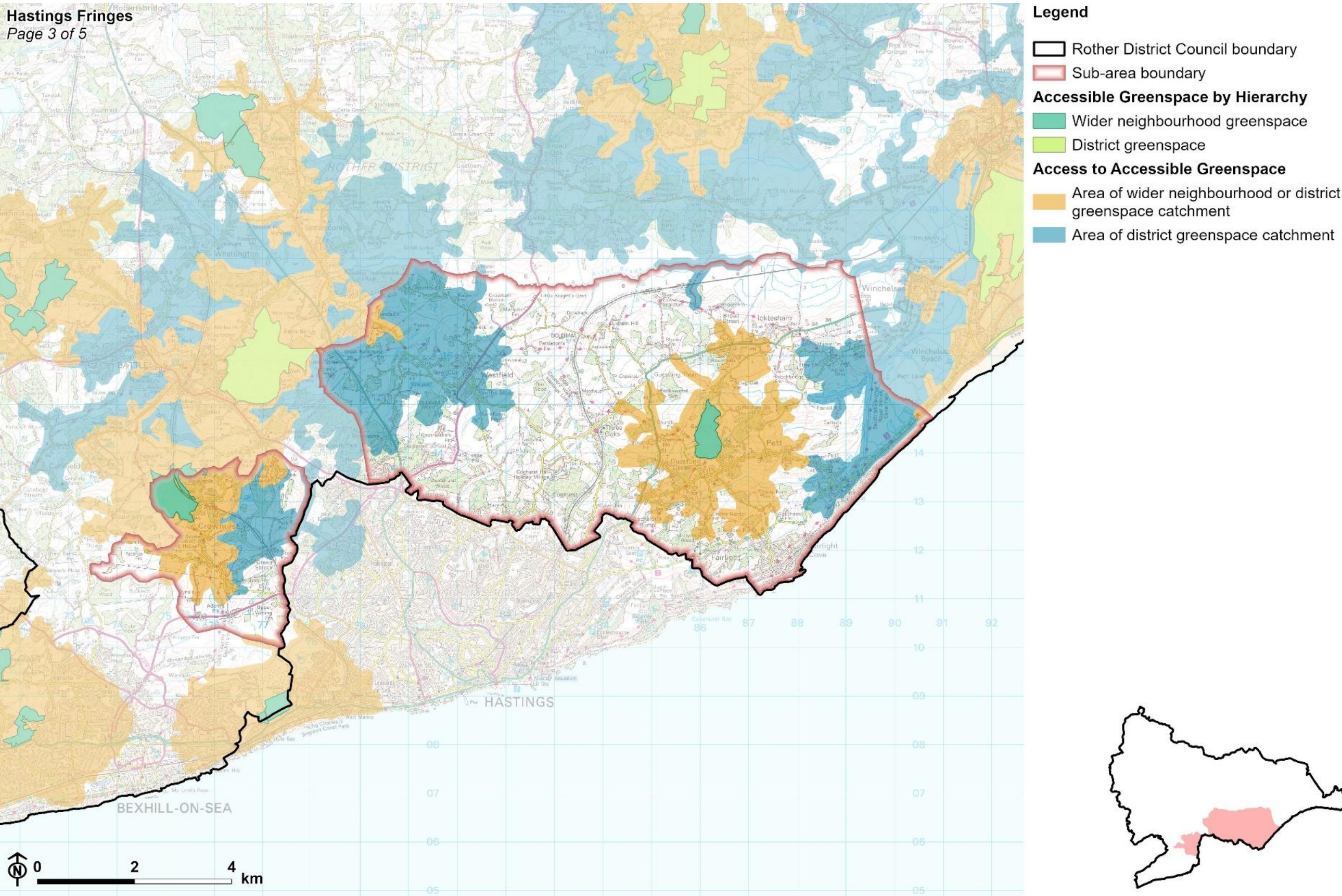
settlements with limited or no provision to the wider countryside and it is therefore important that this is protected and enhanced.

Figure 5.14: Southern Rother and the Hastings Fringes sub-area Accessible Greenspace Close to Home



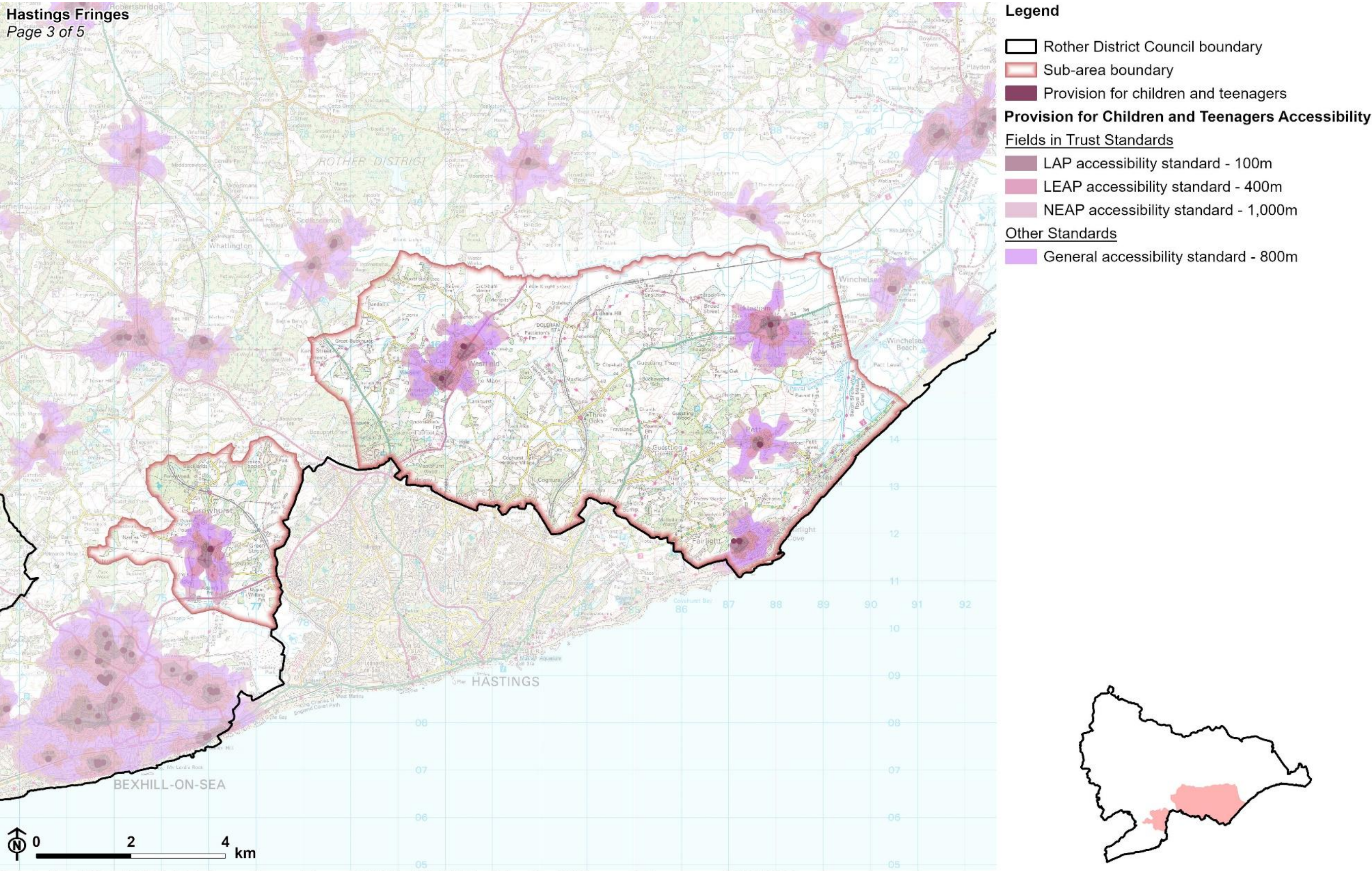
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Figure 5.15: Southern Rother and the Hastings Fringes sub-area wider neighbourhood and district scale greenspace



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Figure 5.16: Southern Rother and the Hastings Fringes sub-area provision for children and teenagers

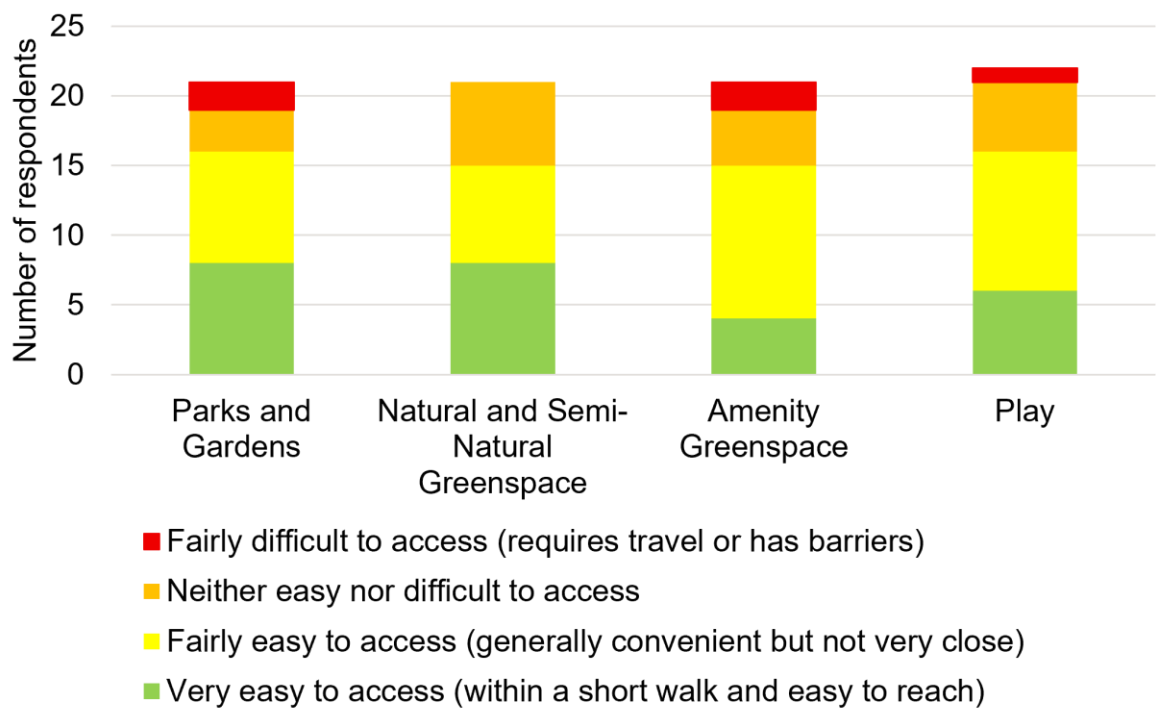


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Stakeholder consultation

5.36 The findings from the stakeholder consultation with local councils found that most respondents thought that access to accessible greenspaces and play were fairly easy (generally convenient but not very close) or very easy (within a short walk and easy to reach). Only two respondents felt that access to parks and gardens and amenity greenspace were fairly difficult and requires travel or has barrier and one respondent for play (see **Figure 5.17**).

Figure 5.17: Accessible greenspace and play accessibility



Proposed accessibility standards

5.37 It is considered that the accessibility standards derived from best practice guidance and used in the analysis of accessibility provided in this chapter are appropriate for use in Rother District.

5.38 These are based on the hierarchies of open space for accessible greenspaces with only an access catchment size being applied for allotments and for provision for children and teenagers. **Table 5.1** below shows the hierarchy criteria and equivalent access catchment applied.

Table 5.1: Proposed accessibility standards

Typology	Hierarchy	Criteria	Access Catchment Size
Accessible greenspace	Doorstep	At least 0.2ha	200m
Accessible greenspace	Local	At least 2ha	300m
Accessible greenspace	Neighbourhood	At least 10ha	1km
Accessible greenspace	Wider Neighbourhood	At least 20ha	2km
Accessible greenspace	District	At least 100ha	5km
Provision for children and teenagers	N/A	LAP	100m
Provision for children and teenagers	N/A	LEAP	400m
Provision for children and teenagers	N/A	Youth Space	700
Provision for children and teenagers	N/A	NEAP	1,000
Allotments	N/A	N/A	1km

5.39 As previously stated, provision for children and teenagers could not be analysed by individual typology because the necessary data was not available for this study. Should typology-specific data become available, the Council should review these standards against the various play and youth facility types to provide a more targeted understanding of local needs and inform future investment priorities.

5.40 These accessibility standards should be applied to major development with the following clarifications:

- New open space should be accessible to all;
- Any new major development should at a minimum have access to:
 - A neighbourhood accessible greenspace, if it is of sufficient size to deliver this scale of site; and
 - A local or doorstep accessible greenspace.
- Play provision should be sited within the development such that the whole development is within access to at least one type of provision for children and teenagers.

Major development

The NPPF States that “for housing, development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more” **[See reference 45]**.

Chapter 6

Quality Assessment and Standards

6.1 This chapter provides an overview of quality standards and best practice guidance. The chapter then presents the findings from the site audits that were undertaken to assess the quality and value of a sample of open spaces. An assessment of the audits is used to provide recommendations for improving the quality and value of open spaces.

6.2 Finally, the chapter provides recommended quality and value standards for accessible greenspace based on the findings of this current audit and previous open space studies.

Overview of quality and value standards

6.3 The quality standard sets out expectations for the condition and functionality of open spaces. It is often divided into value (the functionality of and facilities within an open space) and quality (the condition and maintenance of these features). A structured set of criteria and scoring is usually used to translate quality and value assessments into numerical scores to which a standard can be applied.

6.4 The Green Flag Award is a recognised benchmark standard for open space management in the UK and internationally. The Green Flag Award standard is based on 27 different criteria divided into eight sections, with criteria assessed and scored to provide an award from very poor to exceptional management.

Quality and value analysis

6.5 The Green Flag Award criteria were reviewed and developed so that they were suitable for Rother's context and were categorised as relating to either:

- **'Quality'** (aspects relating to management and the condition of features and facilities); or
- **'Value'** (the presence of various features and facilities, and value to the local community).

6.6 To provide an overview of the quality of accessible greenspace in the district, an audit list of 60 sites was proposed with an aim to have 20 sites within each of the three typologies identified by Natural England as accessible greenspace provision (parks and gardens, amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural greenspace).

6.7 After a review of the open spaces, it was found that a number of parks and gardens were not publicly accessible, so an equal balance of sites for each typology was not achievable. The audit list was agreed with Council officers to ensure the audit incorporates a range of open space sizes and covers a good geographic spread across the district.

6.8 A review of open spaces listed as outdoor sports facilities close to audited sites was also completed to amend the typology of those that were amenity greenspaces. This resulted in additional sites being audited. As a result, the following sites per typology were audited:

- Amenity greenspace: 32 sites.
- Natural and semi-natural greenspace: 26 sites.
- Parks and gardens: 5 sites.

6.9 A total of 79 open spaces were visited across the study area. A total of 15 sites were not able to be surveyed due to sites no longer being an open space or publicly accessible. Therefore, a total of 64 open spaces were surveyed.

6.10 The following assessment themes were applied to the site audit form (based on Green Flag Award criteria:

- **A Welcoming Place:** Welcoming, good and safe access, signage, equal access for all.
- **Healthy, Safe and Secure:** Safe equipment and facilities, personal security, dog fouling, appropriate provision of facilities, quality of facilities.
- **Clean and Well Maintained:** Litter and waste management, grounds maintenance & horticulture, building and infrastructure maintenance.
- **Sustainability:** Environmental sustainability, waste minimisation, arboriculture and woodland management.
- **Nature Conservation and Heritage:** Conservation of nature features, wild flora and fauna, conservation of landscape features, conservation of buildings and structures.
- **Community Involvement and Marketing:** Community involvement in management and development including outreach work and appropriate provision for the community. Marketing and promotion including provision of appropriate information and provision of appropriate educational interpretation/information.

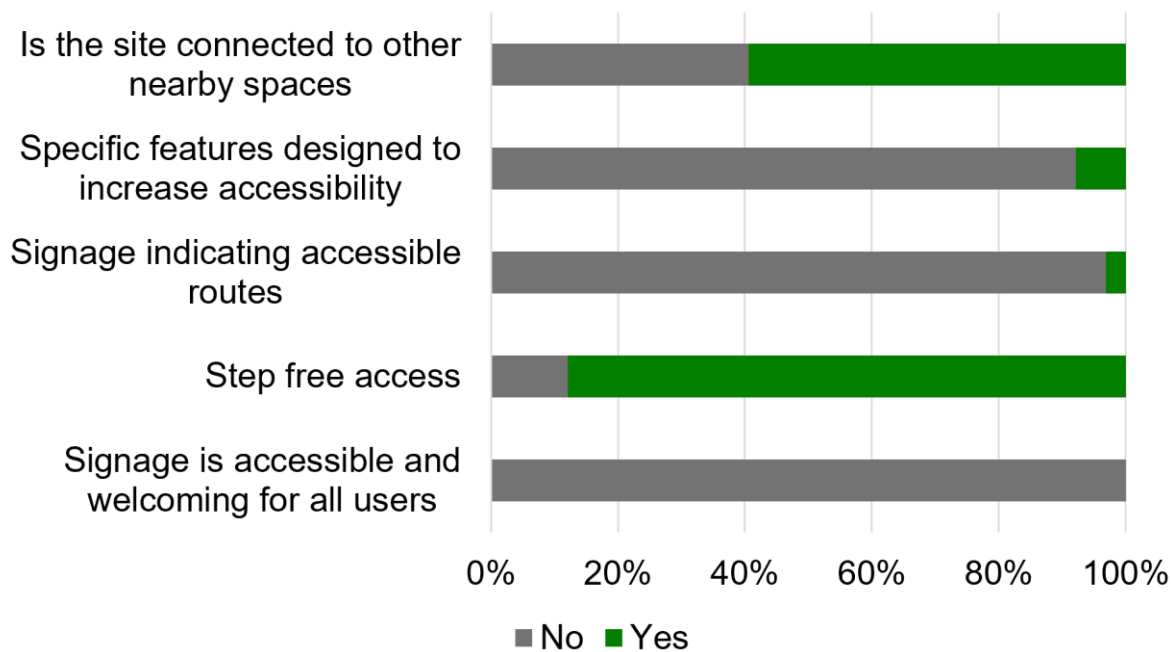
6.11 The following section provides a high-level analysis of the findings from the audits by audit theme. Areas of focus for future enhancement based on the findings have been set out. These include areas for capital investment, changes to management regimes and different ways of working with communities.

Theme 1: A Welcoming Place

6.12 Sites generally scored well for value scores within this theme (6.6 average out of 10), as the audit focused on open spaces that were accessible to the public. Value scores were based on site access, connection to other nearby open spaces and inclusivity criteria. As shown in **Figure 6.1**, 88% of audited sites allowed step-free access to the site and 59% were connected to other nearby open spaces.

6.13 However, all open spaces performed poorly on signage that is accessible and welcoming for all users (0%), signage indicating accessible routes (3%) and containing specific features designed to increased accessibility (8%). This was a contrasting finding to that identified in the stakeholder consultation. Of the 22 respondents from local councils asked about the quality of accessibility e.g. paths, entrances and inclusivity, 27% thought their local open spaces were ‘very good’ and 23% ‘good’. Whereas, only 14% thought it was ‘poor’ which aligns with the findings of the audits.

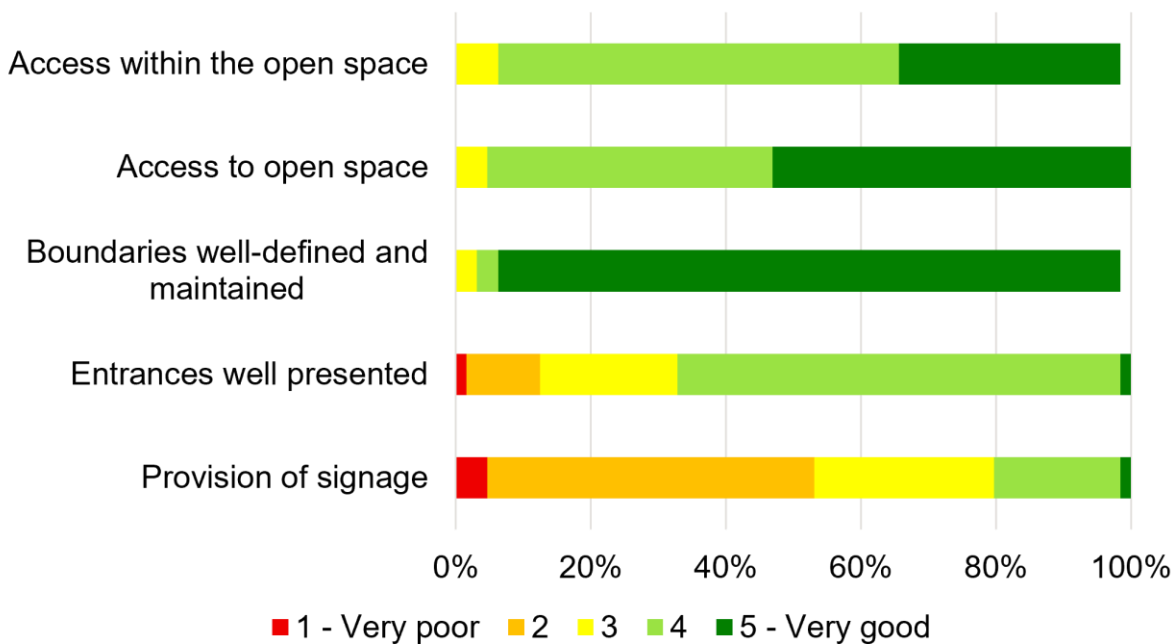
Figure 6.1: Value scores for Theme 1: A Welcoming Place



6.14 Parks and gardens had the highest average value score of 7 out of 10, compared to 6.5 out of 10 for amenity greenspace and 6.6 out of 10 for natural and semi-natural greenspace. This is to be expected, as parks and gardens are formal spaces that should provide good accessibility for local users, whereas natural and semi-natural greenspaces are more likely to not have signage or step free access.

6.15 Sites also scored well for the quality aspects of this theme, with many sites scoring 3 ‘fair’ or higher for each of the criteria (out of 5) (see **Figure 6.2**). Scores for the overall quality of maintained boundaries, access when travelling to open spaces and access within and through the open space were particularly high. The overall quality of provision of signage and of entrances scored lower than the other criteria (**Figure 6.2**).

Figure 6.2: Quality scores for Theme 1: A Welcoming Place



6.16 Parks and gardens scored the highest for quality criteria, with no sites scoring less than 3 ‘fair’ for any criteria. Whereas natural and semi-natural greenspace sites had a greater variation in quality scores. For example, 68% of natural and semi-natural greenspace sites scored 1 ‘very poor’ or 2 ‘poor’ for provision of signage and 28% of sites scored ‘poor’ for entrances well presented. However, it is not always expected for natural and semi-natural greenspaces to have signage or clear entrances, whereas these are features expected in formal parks and gardens.

Recommendations

Improvement to signage and presentation at entrances (particularly at amenity greenspaces and larger natural and semi-natural greenspaces). Additional features to promote access for all such as accessible picnic benches, signage about accessible routes and play equipment should also be considered in parks and gardens and larger amenity greenspaces and natural and semi-natural sites.

Theme 2: Healthy, Safe and Secure

6.17 Value scores for this theme are based on the number and type of features or facilities within the open spaces. The most common features are litter bins and seating. These were recorded at 74% and 63% of audited sites, respectively. Presence of all basic facilities within audited spaces are shown in **Table 6.1**.

Table 6.1: Presence of basic facilities within audited spaces (percentage of total sites)

Typology	Litter/ Dog Bins	Seating	Personal Rescue Equipment	Cycle Parking	Toilet	Café
Amenity greenspace	84%	74%	26%	10%	3%	0%
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	55%	35%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Parks and gardens	83%	100%	33%	50%	50%	17%

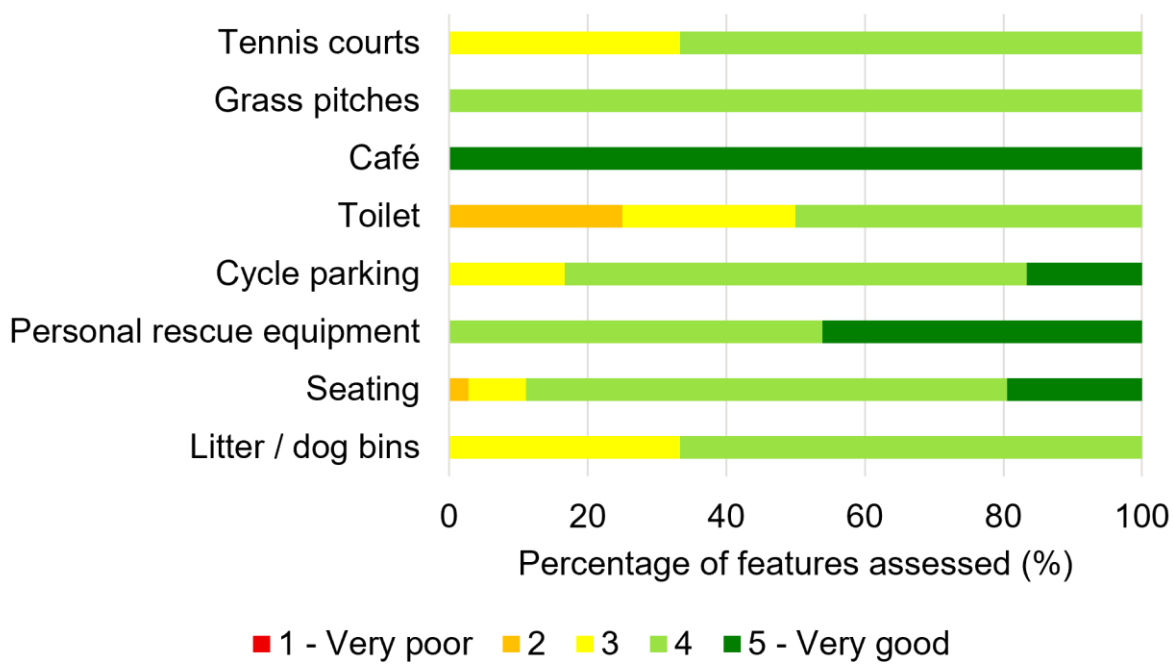
6.18 As expected, parks and gardens had the greatest percentage of sites containing basic facilities compared to other typologies, as these should be multi-functional open spaces. Whereas natural and semi-natural greenspaces would not be expected to provide facilities such as toilets, cafes or personal rescue equipment unless they were large open spaces.

6.19 Sports provision was limited to amenity greenspace and parks and gardens only. Only grass pitches and tennis courts were recorded during auditing. Grass pitches were only found within 21% of amenity greenspaces. Whereas tennis courts were found within both amenity greenspace sites (7%) and parks and gardens (25%).

6.20 Most of these features were in relatively good condition, with each feature scoring at least 3 ‘fair’ or more out of 5. The spread of these scores (as a percentage of the total number of sites where this feature was recorded) are shown in **Figure 6.3**.

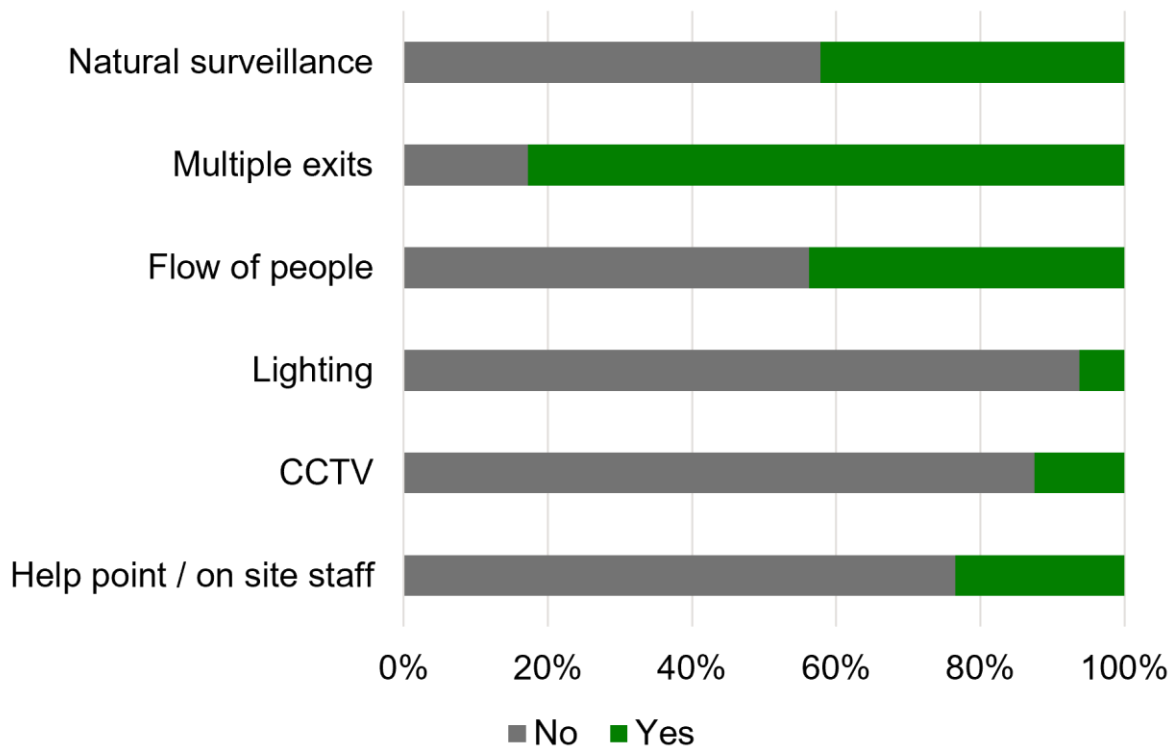
6.21 The audit findings generally align with the perception of local councils on quality of facilities across their local open spaces. The stakeholder consultation found that 4% thought quality of facilities were ‘very good’, 57% ‘good’, 22% ‘adequate’ and only one respondent thought the quality was ‘poor’.

Figure 6.3: Quality scores for Theme 2: Healthy, Safe and Secure



6.22 In terms of safety, sites scored very well for multiple exits, with fewer sites having a flow of people through the open space and natural surveillance as shown in **Figure 6.4**. Less than 25% of the sites audited had lighting, CCTV and a help point on site.

Figure 6.4: Value scores for Theme 2: Healthy, Safe and Secure



6.23 However, most sites (89%) were felt to feel safe to visit. All parks and gardens and 97% of amenity greenspaces audited were found to feel safe to visit, whereas there were slightly fewer natural and semi-natural greenspaces (76%). This was attributed to a number of greenspaces being very overgrown and not maintained, which gave a sense of isolation.

6.24 Safety and security also scored well in the stakeholder consultation with local councils. Of the 23 respondents, 30% thought safety and security of their local open spaces was ‘very good’, 52% ‘good’ and 18% ‘adequate’.

Recommendations

Greater investment in a wider range of sport features in amenity greenspaces and parks and gardens which encourage healthy lifestyles, could promote use of these spaces by a wider range of users. This was also identified by two respondents in the local council stakeholder consultation.

Entrances to natural and semi-natural greenspaces, main routes and PRow should not be overgrown, with regular maintenance to allow accessibility across

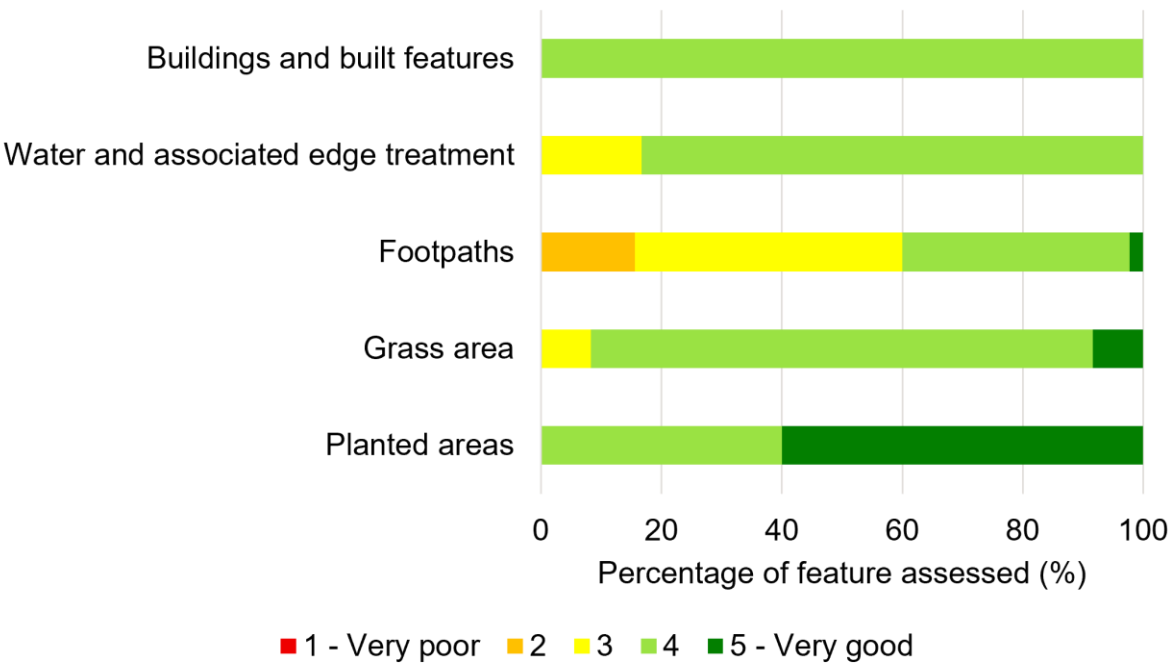
all open spaces. Consideration of adding seating to larger natural and semi-natural sites along main walking routes to also improve accessibility of spaces.

However, limited funds identified through the stakeholder consultation with local councils means that support from new developments will be essential in providing additional funding.

Theme 3: Clean and Well-maintained

6.25 This theme assesses the condition of basic features which need to be maintained within open spaces. Overall, features tended to score very high for this theme. Planted and grassed area, footpaths, water and associated edge treatment and buildings and built features on average scored high for their condition. Footpaths had the lowest average condition score, with 16% of footpath assessed as in ‘poor’ condition. Most footpaths in poor condition were located within natural and semi-natural greenspaces (87%), as these sites can include unsurfaced and unmarked paths. All feature condition scores are shown in **Figure 6.5**.

Figure 6.5: Quality scores for Theme 3: Well-maintained

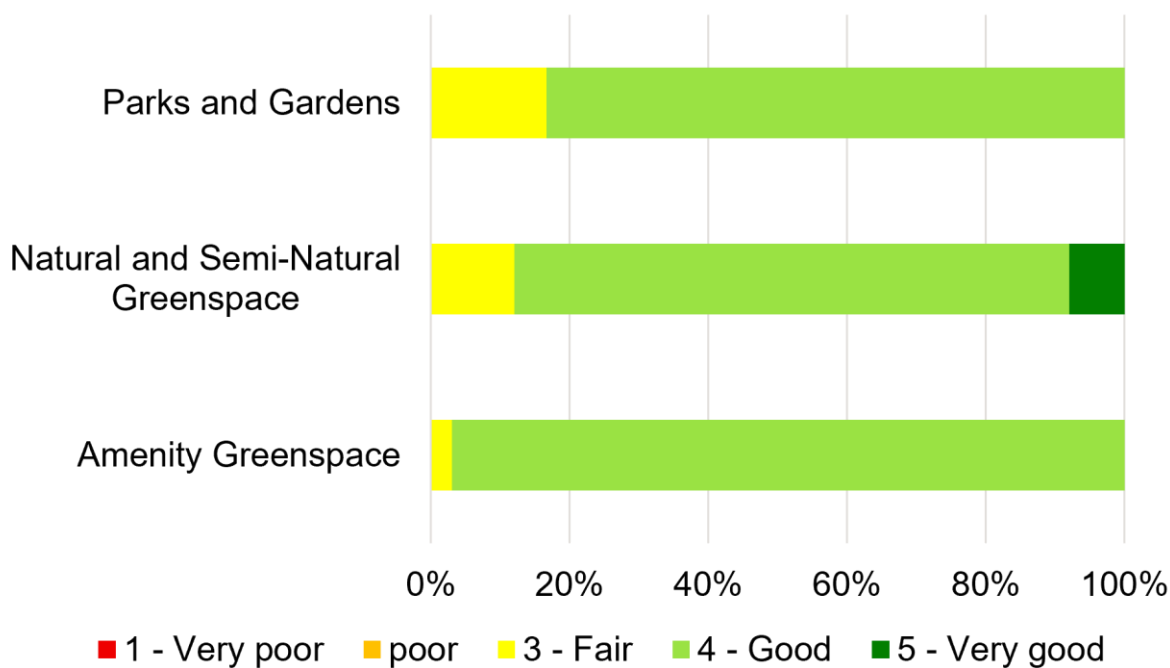


6.26 Most audited sites did not have evidence of extensive graffiti or vandalism. Of the 6% of sites showing evidence of graffiti, three of these were amenity greenspace and one natural and semi-natural greenspace. Only two natural and semi-natural

space sites were found to have evidence of vandalism. All sites scored at least 3 ‘fair’ for overall cleanliness and over three quarters of all typologies scored ‘good’ for overall cleanliness (**Figure 6.6**).

6.27 Cleanliness and maintenance were also perceived as being good by local councils. The stakeholder consultation found that 39% of respondents thought their local open space cleanliness and maintenance was ‘very good’ and 17% ‘good’. Only one respondent thought their local open space was ‘poor’ for cleanliness and maintenance.

Figure 6.6: Overall cleanliness scores for Theme 3: Well-maintained



6.28 Audited sites generally also scored well for value criteria, with few detracting features recorded on site. Of those recorded, these were primarily related to excessive noise pollution (30% of sites), but 8% of sites were also recorded to show lack of landscape management and less than 3% of sites showed evidence of motorcycle scrambling, erosion and fly tipping. No evidence was found of air and water pollution, intrusive buildings, excessive lighting or dog fouling.

6.29 Evidence of noise pollution was found for all three typologies, but amenity greenspace had the greatest proportion. This was attributed to sites that were along main roads in the centre of settlements and often lacked a hedge or trees along the boundary which can help buffer noise. Only natural and semi-natural greenspace sites showed evidence of lack of landscape management, with a few woodland sites that were overgrown with trees blocking main paths.

Recommendations

Consider tree and hedgerow planting alongside main roads for amenity greenspaces to reduce the impact of noise pollution. Ensure that regular checks are completed at natural and semi-natural sites to ensure paths are not blocked or provide a telephone number at entrances for visitors to report damage to paths.

Theme 4: Sustainability

6.30 There was little evidence of wider sustainability measures across the sites. Fewer than 2% of audited sites included evidence of the following features:

- Drought-tolerant planting;
- Recycling of waste and materials;
- Water conservation measures; and
- Sustainable energy.

6.31 Evidence of sites providing significant areas of shade and rain gardens, swales, detention basin or other SuDS/NFM features were more common and recorded at 36% and 19% of sites respectively. Orchards and edible planting were slightly less common and recorded at 6% of sites. However, woodland management was recorded at 61% of sites.

6.32 Most sites with evidence of sustainability measures were found within natural and semi-natural greenspaces, with the exception of orchards and edible planting which was only found in amenity greenspace or parks and gardens sites.

Recommendations

Within new open spaces coming forward as part of developments, design should incorporate sustainable features including sustainable urban drainage, water conservation measures and drought tolerant planting and shading. Options to retrofit these features into existing spaces should also be considered.

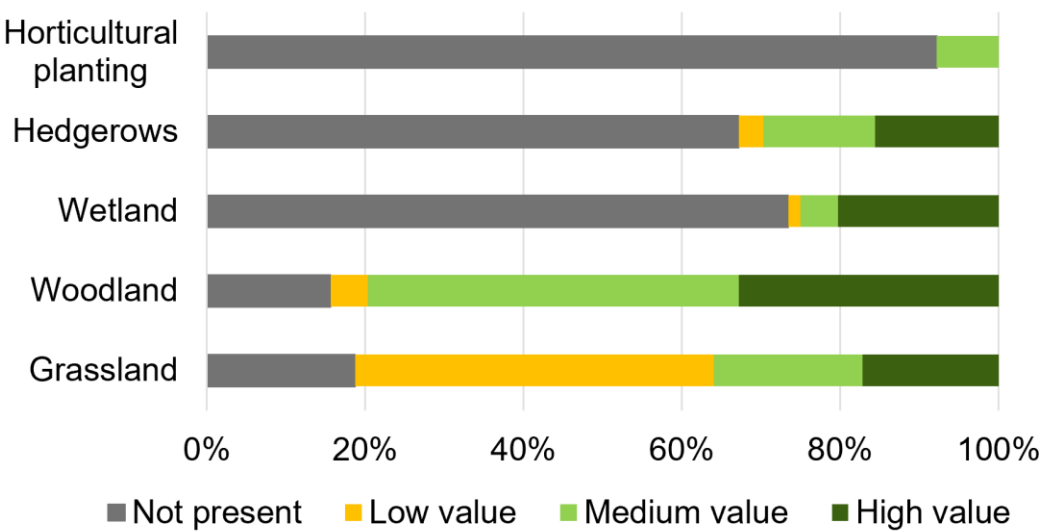
Explore opportunities for sorting of waste materials centrally once collected from parks and larger amenity greenspaces to filter out waste that can be recycled.

Theme 5: Nature Conservation and Heritage

6.33 Over 83% of sites were considered to be well connected to a wider network of green space and green infrastructure. This indicates the open space network in Rother is providing an element of connectivity for habitats across the borough. The most common habitat or landcover types were woodland (84% of audited sites) and grassland (81% of audited sites). The value of these habitats can be found in **Figure 6.7**. Most grasslands were found to be lower value habitats (amenity grassland), whereas woodland tended to be of medium value.

6.34 The stakeholder consultation with local councils across the district presented a slightly more positive perception of biodiversity and habitat quality. Over half of the 23 respondents, thought that biodiversity and habitat quality in local open spaces was ‘very good’ or ‘good’, 26% and 30% respectively. Whereas only 30% thought it was ‘adequate’ and 13% ‘poor’.

Figure 6.7: Value scores for Theme 5: Nature Conservation and Heritage



6.35 This theme also considers the inclusion of nature conservation features and the educational nature offer. Features were not generally found across the audited sites, but areas of grass left unmown were found at 51% of sites and new tree planting at 25%. Educational signage detailing species that can be found on site were recorded at only 16% of sites but were found within sites of all three typologies.

6.36 Heritage features were found at only two parks and gardens sites, and other historic features were found within one site of each typology audited.

Recommendations

Explore opportunities for interpretation signage which educates visitors on natural and cultural heritage features of interest within parks and natural and semi-natural greenspaces.

Consider opportunities to improve the value of habitats such as wildflower strips and meadows, less frequent mowing and gapping up hedgerows with mixed native species and ensuring a blend of native species when tree planting. However, limited funds identified through the stakeholder consultation with local councils means that support from new developments will be essential in providing additional funding.

Theme 6: Community Involvement and Marketing

6.37 Overall, community involvement scored poorly in terms of both quality and value. Most sites lacked features that promote community engagement and showed no evidence of active community groups. This does not necessarily mean that these sites do not have any community involvement, only that there is little onsite evidence of this that may allow other visitors to the open space to get involved. Of the sites that did have these features, amenity greenspace tended to be the most common. The most frequently recorded feature included a permanent noticeboard at 27% of audited sites, and only 3% of sites showed evidence of an active community group.

6.38 This theme also assessed the availability of community facilities surrounding open spaces. The majority of sites were not recorded to be adjacent to any community facilities. Schools were the most common nearby facilities, recorded adjacent to 7% of surveyed sites. Sport changing rooms and village halls were the next most common nearby facility but only recorded adjacent to 6% of sites.

6.39 There was little evidence of additional marketing and communication features within open spaces, such as performance spaces or public art. There were no public performance areas recorded and only 3% of sites had public art (one natural and semi-natural greenspace and one parks and gardens site).

Recommendations

Install noticeboards within parks and larger amenity greenspaces and natural or semi-natural open spaces to encourage sites to become community spaces and to act as a communication point to raise any issues relating to the open space.

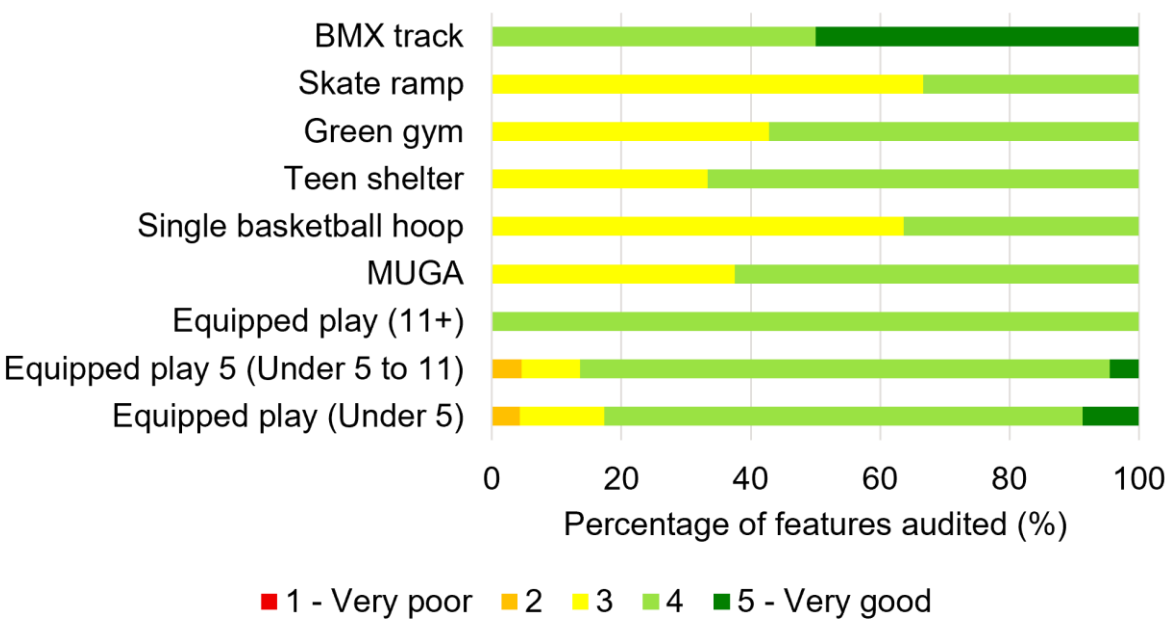
Noticeboards should include information on local events and activities, whether there is a Friends of Group or what other community groups are involved with the open space. Temporary notices should also be displayed to provide information on current or temporary management.

Engage with local schools and explore opportunities for use of open spaces for educational purposes. Support and promote Friends of Groups within open space and create opportunities to allow local people to input into the management of their local park or open space.

Play and youth facilities

6.40 Overall, equipped play sites scored relatively well (**Figure 5.8**), with equipped play (Under 5) and equipped play (Under 5 to 11) being the most common provision audited. Only two sites were found to have play equipment in ‘poor’ condition. Facilities and equipment were most common within amenity greenspace sites.

Figure 6.8: Quality scores for play and youth facilities



Recommendations

Regular maintenance checks for youth facilities should identify repair needs and prevent decline in condition.

Proposed quality standards

6.41 The results of the quality and value audits have been used to set quality and value standards for accessible greenspace typologies which are publicly accessible. This includes amenity greenspace, natural and semi-natural greenspace and parks and gardens.

6.42 The numeric scores are applied in relation to the audit form used to assess open spaces. The benchmark standard scores represent what is considered an acceptable open space within Rother for that typology and for each hierarchy. The benchmark scores have been based on findings from the audit, to help identify where there are open spaces which would be the priority to enhance.

6.43 To set the benchmark scores the average, minimum, maximum and median quality and value scores were analysed for each typology and hierarchy. Due to a small sample size, small doorstep and doorstep sites were combined, as well as neighbourhood and wider neighbourhood. An overview of the quality scores is presented in **Table 6.4** and value scores in **Table 6.5**.

6.44 As there was a wide range of scores for each typology across all hierarchies, the median score was used as an initial benchmark. Due to all sites generally scoring high for both quality and value, sites with scores below the median per hierarchy and typology were assessed. Once a site which was deemed as not meeting acceptable quality and value aspects for that typology and hierarchy, the benchmark score was set above that site's score.

6.45 As there was little difference between median and average scores for amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural greenspace sites across all hierarchies, a single benchmark standard was set. **Table 6.2** presents the quality and value benchmarks identified for each of these spaces.

Table 6.2: Quality and value benchmarks

Typology	Hierarchy	Quality Benchmark	Value Benchmark
Amenity greenspace	All	37	23
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	All	40	17
Parks and gardens	Small doorstep/Doorstep	51	18
Parks and gardens	Local/Neighbourhood/ Wider Neighbourhood	98	31

6.46 Quality and value scores for audited sites were high, which has led to high benchmarks. It is important to set high benchmarks to ensure the high standard of sites are maintained and expected within new open spaces.

Application of the standards

6.47 This section of the report applies the quality and value benchmarks to the audited open spaces in Rother. It identifies where open spaces are meeting the benchmark scores and identifies where investment should be made.

6.48 It should be noted that only a sample of amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural greenspaces were audited. A total of 63 open space benchmark results were analysed in Rother, as one standalone play space was reviewed against the play space benchmarks. **Table 6.3** presents the breakdown of the sites per typology and the percentage that met the quality and value benchmarks.

6.49 Overall, 51% of audited open spaces met both the quality and value benchmark. Audited sites were more likely to meet the quality benchmark than the value benchmark. Of the 14% of audited sites that did not meet either benchmark, the greatest proportion of these were natural and semi-natural greenspaces. All parks and gardens audited met both benchmarks. Natural and semi-natural greenspaces had the greatest variation in performance against benchmarks compared to other typologies.

6.50 However, the stakeholder consultation reported a consensus that most local open space was of high quality. Four respondents (17%) from various councils across the district thought the overall quality of open space within their local area was 'very high' and a further 13 (57%) thought it was 'high'. Only one respondent thought their local space quality was 'very low'.

Table 6.3: Rother audited open spaces performance against benchmarks

Typology	Number of Sites Surveyed	Percentage of Sites Meeting Benchmark – Higher Quality, Higher Value	Percentage of Sites Meeting Benchmark – Higher Quality, Lower Value	Percentage of Sites Meeting Benchmark – Lower Quality, Higher Value	Percentage of Sites Meeting Benchmark – Lower Quality, Lower Value
Amenity Greenspace	32	61%	26%	0%	13%
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	26	30%	15%	37%	19%
Parks and gardens	5	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total	63	51%	19%	16%	14%

6.51 The following sections provide a more in-depth analysis per typology, looking at how each hierarchy performed against the benchmarks. Suggested recommendations for priority investment are provided based on the benchmark performances. It should be noted that sites that meet both or one benchmark does not imply less management or maintenance is required. Instead, resources for improvements and enhancements should be focused on sites with lower scores whilst maintaining the high standard of management across the other open spaces.

6.52 All publicly accessible parks and gardens were audited, however it should be noted that only a sample of amenity greenspaces and natural and semi-natural greenspaces were audited. Therefore, recommendations for improvements can only be applicable to audited sites but should be seen as potential considerations to be reviewed for unaudited sites.

Amenity greenspace

6.53 A total of 32 amenity greenspaces were audited with 70% of audited sites being at the accessible greenspace doorstep level. Over 85% of all amenity greenspaces audited met the quality benchmark, with fewer sites meeting the value benchmark. Of the four sites audited that did not meet either benchmark, High Ford AGS had the lowest quality and value score.

6.54 This aligns with the findings of the stakeholder consultation with local councils as when asked about the effectiveness of management of amenity greenspaces in their local areas 50% thought it was somewhat effective and 14% effective. Only 2 respondents (9%) thought management was ineffective, with 27% neutral. This shows there is no major conflict between perception of management and quality of open spaces.

6.55 Across the sub-areas there was little difference in amenity greenspace performance against benchmarks. Sites that were not meeting either benchmark were found in the Rye, Northern and Southern Rother and Hastings Fringes sub-areas.

Summary of recommendations

High Fords AGS in southern rother and the hasting fringes sub-area should be prioritised for enhancements to improve the quality and value of the open space. The addition of small features such as a litter bin and seating can both increase the quality and value of the site.

Other sites which are a priority for enhancement include:

- Levetts Lane AGS (Bexhill sub-area);
- Shrub Lane AGS (Northern sub-area); and
- Goddens Gill Green (Rye sub-area).

Similar enhancements of adding seating to all sites and litter bins to Levetts Lane AGS and Goddens Gill Green would increase both quality and value scores.

Value aspects such inclusivity e.g. step free access, signage indicating accessible routes, and specific features designed to increase accessibility should be considered as a priority for all existing and new amenity greenspaces.

Natural and semi-natural greenspace

6.56 A total of 26 natural and semi-natural greenspaces were audited with over 70% of audited sites being at the accessible greenspace doorstep and local level. Seven of the audited sites (25%) were at the neighbourhood and wider neighbourhood level and one district-level accessible greenspace site was assessed. Over 65% of all natural and semi-natural greenspaces audited met the value benchmark, with fewer sites meeting the quality benchmark. Of the five sites audited that did not meet either benchmark, Shrub Wood had both the lowest quality and value score. Burgh Wood was the second largest open space audited and did not meet either the quality or value benchmark.

6.57 These findings are slightly conflicting to those found in the stakeholder consultation with local councils. When asked about the effectiveness of management for natural and semi-natural greenspaces in their area no respondent felt it was ineffective and 23%. The majority of respondents thought management was somewhat effective (55%) and 23% very effective. This highlights that sharing of the audit findings with local councils is important to identify sites that are not meeting the quality benchmark and require a review of current management. Across the sub-areas there was little difference in natural and semi-natural greenspace performance against benchmarks. Four of the sites not meeting either benchmark were found in the Northern sub-area and one site in Rye.

Summary of recommendations

Shrub Wood (Northern sub-area) should be prioritised for enhancements to improve the quality and value of the open space. Improvements to footpaths

across the open space would improve accessibility, including clearance of vegetation. The addition of small features such as a litter bin at the entrance and a seating area would also increase both the quality and value of the site.

Burgh Wood (Northern sub-area) should also be prioritised for improvements to the quality and value of the site as it is a large site providing a large access catchment to open space. Improvements should include increasing the inclusivity of the site including signage indicating accessible routes but also could include educational signage and interpretation. Due to the size of the site, the addition of seating would also improve the accessibility of the site.

Other sites which are a priority for enhancement include High Street NSN and Ticehurst Pond (Northern sub-area). Similar enhancements of adding seating and litter bins to both sites would increase both quality and value scores.

Quality aspects such as condition of footpaths, new tree planting, areas left unmown, tree planting and recycling of waste should be considered for all existing and new natural and semi-natural greenspaces.

Parks and gardens

6.58 All parks and gardens within the district were audited which totalled to five sites. All five sites met both the quality and value benchmark. Parks and gardens were located in three out of the five sub-areas including Battle, Bexhill and Rye.

6.59 Smaller sites such as Museum Gardens/Gun Gardens and Almonry Gardens equalled both the quality and value benchmark. Therefore, it is important that maintenance and management of these sites are not changed as a result of their performance.

6.60 These findings support those found in the stakeholder consultation with the majority of respondents agreeing that management of parks and gardens were somewhat effective (45%) and very effective (32%). No respondents felt that management was ineffective and 23% were neutral.

Summary of recommendations

Continued management and maintenance of all parks and gardens sites are essential to maintain the high quality and value scores for the open spaces.

Table 6.4: Proposed quality standards

Typology	Hierarchy	Number of Audited Sites	Minimum Quality Score	Maximum Quality Score	Average Quality Score	Median Quality Score	Proposed Quality Benchmark
Amenity greenspace	Small doorstep/Doorstep	25	26	77	51	45	37
Amenity greenspace	Local	7	37	76	61	52	37
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Small doorstep/Doorstep	9	19	68	40	40	40
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Local	9	13	45	33	36	40
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Neighbourhood/Wider Neighbourhood	7	27	67	45	38	40
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	District	1	62	62	62	62	40
Parks and gardens	Small doorstep/Doorstep	3	51	74	59	51	51
Parks and gardens	Local	2	98	103	101	98	98

Table 6.5: Proposed value standards

Typology	Hierarchy	Number of Audited Sites	Minimum Value Score	Maximum Value Score	Average Value Score	Median Value Score	Proposed Value Benchmark
Amenity greenspace	Small doorstep/Doorstep	25	10	31	23	23	23
Amenity greenspace	Local	7	19	31	24	24	23
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Small doorstep/Doorstep	9	14	22	16	16	17
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Local	9	14	22	19	19	17
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Neighbourhood/Wider Neighbourhood	7	14	31	20	20	17
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	District	1	23	23	23	23	17
Parks and gardens	Small doorstep/Doorstep	3	18	34	18	18	18
Parks and Gardens	Local	2	31	35	31	31	31

Chapter 7

Existing Green and Blue Infrastructure Network

7.1 The following two chapters focus on the GBI element of the study. The purpose of the GBI assessment was to understand and present the current GBI network and undertake a strength, weakness, opportunity and threats (SWOT) analysis to use as the basis of identifying opportunities to enhance the network.

7.2 This chapter provides an assessment of Rother District's existing GBI network and sets the context and baseline evidence for the strategic opportunities identified in **Chapter 8**.

GBI network assessment

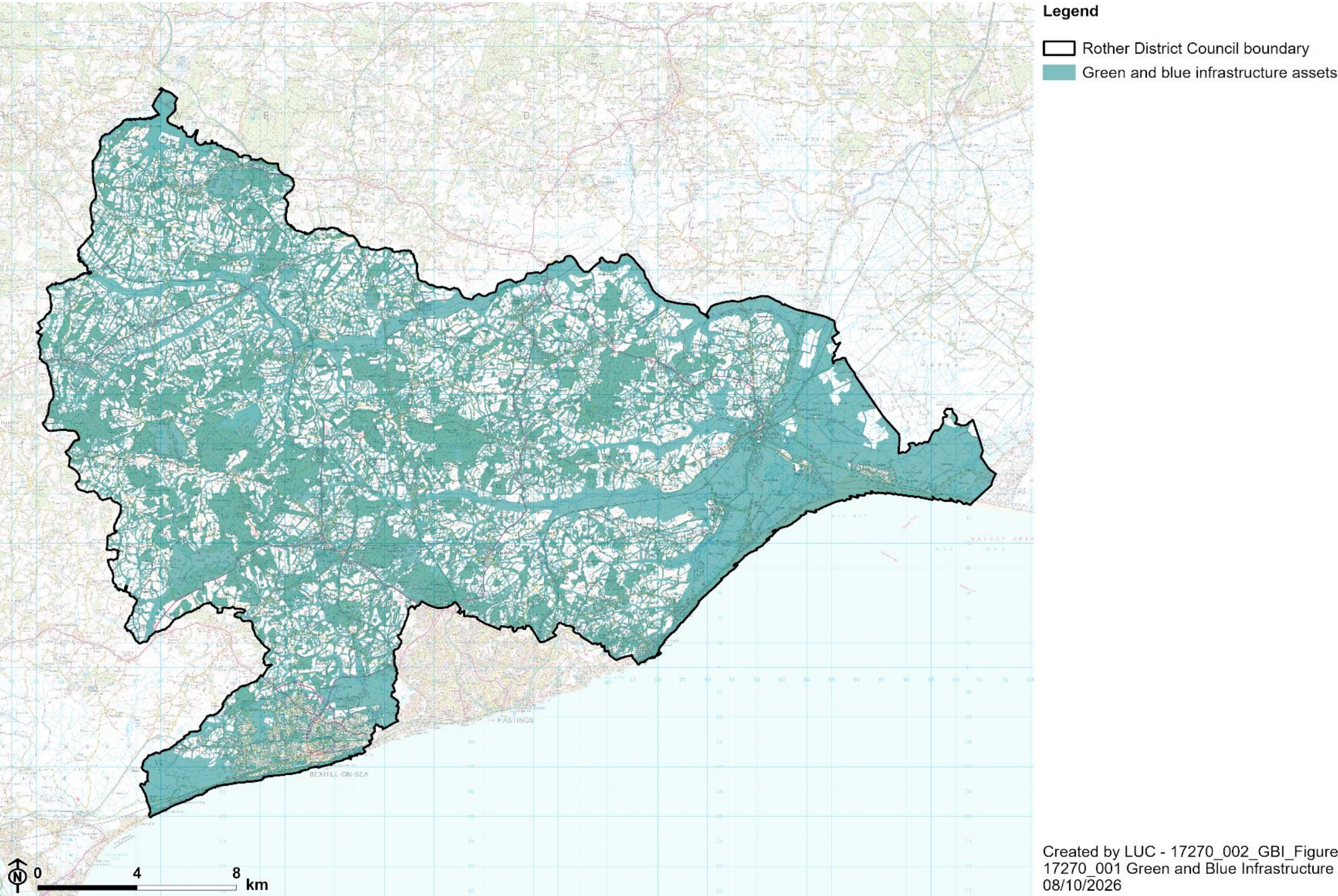
7.3 Natural England (NE) published their Green Infrastructure Framework in early 2023 which aims to support equitable access to greenspace across the country, with an overarching target for everyone being able to reach good quality greenspace in their local area. NE identify five key benefit principles of GBI:

- Nature rich, beautiful places;
- Active and healthy places;
- Thriving and prospering communities;
- Improved water management; and
- Resilient and climate positive places.

7.4 To establish a comprehensive baseline and be consistent with the GI Framework, a themed approach which reflects these principles has been used here. This baseline review is structured around the five benefit principles, with each outlined at the beginning of each section.

7.5 **Figure 7.1** shows the spread of the main GBI assets across the district using datasets laid out in **Appendix A** under Consolidating GBI typologies.

Figure 7.1: Green and Blue Infrastructure key assets



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Nature rich, beautiful places

7.6 GBI facilitates nature recovery across all landscapes, encompassing towns, cities and rural areas. It serves to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and habitats, geological features and soils, whilst fostering both cultural and individual connections with the natural environment.

7.7 The following datasets were reviewed:

- International and national designations (SAC, SPA, National Landscapes Ramsar and SSSIs);
- Local designations (Local Nature Reserves);
- Local wildlife sites;
- RDC open space dataset;
- LNRS datasets (Areas of particular importance for biodiversity (APIB));
- Natural England Ancient Woodland dataset;
- National Forest Inventory; and
- Forest Research Trees Outside Woodland dataset.

Current provision

7.8 There are three sites with international designations. These include Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) and RAMSAR, Dungeness SAC and Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and RAMSAR. The district also includes 21 SSSIs and one Local Nature Reserve Rye Harbour. The district also includes 60 Local Wildlife Sites. The High Weald National Landscape also forms a significant part of the wider landscape, covering 83% of the district. Location of natural heritage designations are presented in **Figure 2.4**.

7.9 Natural and semi-natural greenspaces make an important contribution to GBI provision, comprising 82% of publicly accessible open space across the district. Smaller open spaces such as amenity greenspaces, parks and gardens, cemeteries and outdoor sports facilities, make a further contribution to greenspace provision mainly within towns and villages. There are a number of allotments across the district but provision is limited to Bexhill-on-Sea, Battle, Sedlescombe, Robertsbridge, Silver Hill, Northiam, Ticehurst, Peasmarsh, Rye, Winchelsea, Icklesham and Camber only as presented in **Figure 5.4**.

7.10 The coastline stretching from Camber to Fairlight Cove also provides a significant contribution to GBI provision. The coastline includes the only sand dune system in East Sussex to the east of Camber Sands, with mudflats and salt marsh surrounding the mouth of the Rother. Rye Harbour includes ridges of shingle, salt lagoons, marsh, old gravel pits and reedbeds. Whereas from Winchelsea Beach down to Cliff End, the shore narrows with low-lying wet grazing fields, ditches and reeds just behind it. Past Cliff End the sandstone cliffs start with wooded valleys and clifftop grassland.

7.11 Rother District has an area of 8,055 hectares of ancient woodland which represents 15.54% of the total area of the district which is the highest percentage in the South East [See reference 46]. Tree canopy cover is relatively high across most of the district, including high cover across most roads through and between settlements. There are a number of large woodlands across the district with individual trees providing habitat connectivity along roads and hedgerows.

Active and healthy places

7.12 GBI promotes active lifestyles, community cohesion and engagement with nature, thereby contributing to improved physical health, mental health and wellbeing, and overall quality of life. It further serves to mitigate health-related risks, including urban heat stress, noise pollution, flood risk and diminished air quality.

7.13 The following datasets were reviewed and are mapped in **Figure 2.3**:

- National Cycle Network;
- King Charles III England Coast Path; and
- East Sussex County Council Rights of Way and Registered Common Land.

Current provision

7.14 The PRoW network and coastal paths provide key walking and cycling access within and between settlements and across the rural landscape. Collectively, they provide a fairly complete asset, including:

- East to west along the coast (Saxon Shore Way/England Coast Path/NCN2);
- North to south/inland across the Weald (High Weald Landscape Trail, Sussex Border Path); and
- A historic diagonal through the district's heart (1066 Country Walk).

7.15 National Cycle Route 2 (NCN2), the South Coast cycle route, runs through the district passing through Rye and Camber along to Bexhill-on-Sea.

7.16 Accessible greenspace in Rother District includes parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural greenspaces and amenity space. Other open space typologies include outdoor sports facilities, provision for children and teenagers, green and blue corridors, allotments and community gardens, beaches, cemeteries, disused churchyards and civic space. Accessible greenspace offers spaces for physical activity, an enhanced connection with nature and opportunities for social connection which can improve wellbeing. The district has over 1,700 hectares accessible greenspace that is freely accessible to the public and just under another 200 hectares of other open spaces.

Thriving and prospering communities

7.17 GBI helps build communities that prosper and benefit everyone. It creates high-quality environments that attract businesses and investment, generates green jobs, supports retail and high streets, and strengthens local economies, cultural heritage and regeneration efforts.

7.18 The following datasets were reviewed:

- Natural England's National Character Areas; and
- Registered Parks and Gardens.

Current provision

7.19 Rother District has a rich landscape and cultural heritage context, with the character of the landscape strongly influenced by its history. The district mainly falls within two of Natural England's National Character Areas (NCAs), with a small portion of a third:

- **NCA 122 – High Weald** covers the majority of the district, characterised by its ancient, deeply wooded, ridged landscape with small irregular fields, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes;
- **NCA 123 – Romney Marshes** covers the low-lying eastern part of the district, including the areas around Rye and Winchelsea, characterised by flat, open marshland, extensive drainage/irrigation networks, and internationally important wetland habitats; and

- **NCA 124 – Pevensey Levels** a small portion of the district (near the boundary with Wealden District) falls within this NCA, characterised by low-lying wetland meadows and grazing marsh.

7.20 There are a number of heritage designations across the district including seven registered parks and gardens and one historic battlefield.

7.21 Recreation and the visitor economy is another GBI asset helping to support thriving local economies. A recent Tourism and Visitor Accommodation Study (2026) highlights the district as a well-known tourism destination [\[See reference 47\]](#). The study reported that in 2022:

- 5.61 total tourism trips, 5.21 day trips;
- 1.67 million visitor nights;
- £202 million tourist expenditure during trips;
- £107.8 million overnight visitor expenditure; and
- 21.6% of the district's population is employed directly or indirectly as a result of tourism.

Improved water management

7.22 GBI reduces flood risk. It enhances water quality through natural filtration and supports the natural water cycle and sustainable drainage systems, at both local and catchment scales. This eases pressure on the water environment and associated infrastructure. It also delivers amenity, biodiversity, economic and other wider benefits.

7.23 The following datasets were reviewed:

- OS Maps Surface Water Lines and Surface Water Area; and
- RDC Local Plan 2011 SuDS dataset.

Current provision

7.24 The district has a number of blue assets contributing to GBI provision, with an extensive network of rivers and water courses across the district with the main River Rother passing through the district to the sea at Rye Bay. The main tributaries of the River Rother include the River Dudwell, Tillingham and Brede which have extensive areas of floodplain and riparian habitat but broken up with arable land and pasture.

Location of rivers and watercourses that form the blue network across the district are presented in **Figure 2.5**.

7.25 Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 would require new developments to include SuDS. In England, this has still not been commenced, despite planned dates of 2020 and 2024. Non-statutory National Standards for SuDS were published in June 2025. As of 2026, government has indicated a preference for strengthening planning policy over commencing Schedule 3, rather than treating it as a matter still to be decided. There is currently only one sustainable drainage system zone in the west of Bexhill-on-Sea adopted in 2019.

7.26 Areas of Rother District surrounding the River Brede, River Rother and River Tillingham and their tributaries are located within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Floodplain and coastal grazing marsh priority habitat is mapped along the majority of the River Rother and River Brede. Whereas, for the River Tillingham there are a number of areas adjacent to the river under arable management. Floodplains provide an important GBI asset, naturally managing flood waters by slowing water flow by storing water. The extensive areas of coastal shingle and sand dunes along the coastline also provide important natural flood management.

Resilient and climate positive places

7.27 GBI strengthens places' resilience and adaptability to climate change, helping meet net zero carbon and air quality goals. GBI design should consider future climate conditions, ensuring it remains effective and resilient over the long term.

7.28 The following datasets were reviewed:

- Natural England Ancient Woodland dataset;
- National Forest Inventory; and
- Forest Research Trees Outside Woodland dataset.

Current provision

7.29 Natural vegetation, including trees, hedgerows and species rich grasslands, as well as bogs and wetlands have an important role in carbon sequestration. The Council's Climate Strategy aims to make the district climate-resilient and reduce emissions to net zero by 2030.

7.30 Trees are particularly effective at sequestering carbon. Tree canopy cover across the district is high, including individual and groups of trees as well as areas of

woodland. Continuous woodland allows carbon stocks to build up within the soil, increasing the carbon sequestration potential of older woodlands. A large proportion of woodlands across the district are mapped as ancient and semi-natural woodland compared to replanted woodland.

7.31 The extensive areas of coastal shingle and sand dunes along the coastline act as natural buffers that absorb wave energy and store sediment to protect the land behind them from coastal erosion.

SWOT analysis

7.32 A SWOT analysis on Rother's GBI network has been used to build a clear, holistic picture of the district's green and blue assets before providing strategic GBI opportunities. It highlights strengths to build on (existing habitats, designations and partnerships), weaknesses to address (fragmentation, funding gaps, land ownership complexity), opportunities to pursue (BNG, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, climate funding, active travel links), and threats to plan for (sea-level rise, development pressure, coastal squeeze, funding volatility). Together these give a realistic, evidence-based baseline for prioritising where to invest, connect, and protect the network.

Strengths

- There are strong existing natural assets that provide a strong core GBI network. These include the Rother River catchment, High Weald National Landscape, high woodland cover and an extensive internationally and nationally designated network of sites.
- There are well established connectivity corridors which already link habitats and settlements, providing a strong base to extend from. These include rivers (Rother, Brede, Tillingham, Dudwell) and long-distance trails (Saxon Shore Way, High Weald Landscape Trail, Royal Military Canal Path).
- There is high habitat diversity across the district with a mosaic of priority habitats offering high ecological value and resilience if well connected. These include dune, shingle, saltmarsh, grazing marsh, reedbed, floodplains, coastal grasslands and ancient woodland.
- There are existing stewardships and partnerships with a stronghold in conservation management and promoting active travel providing institutional knowledge and delivery capacity to build on. These include Sussex Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency and councils already managing key sites.

Weaknesses

- There are areas of fragmented habitats and isolated PRoW routes (**Figure 2.3**), limiting ecological connectivity and a complete extensive active travel network. Fragmented habitats and interventions require catchment/landscape-scale opportunities to deliver benefits. Barriers include roads, development, agricultural land, private woodland or flood defences.
- There is a coastal squeeze conflict between many of the most valuable habitats and hard defences which undermines long-term GBI resilience. Important coastal habitats include dunes, saltmarsh and vegetated shingle.
- There are funding and resourcing gaps with maintenance and enhancement of habitats and footpaths, as they are resource-intensive and reliant on grants. Creation and restoration to enhance the network require ongoing long-term management and maintenance, not just capital investment.
- There are key corridors across a mix of private MoD, and conservation-body land. This makes a coordinate management or expansion harder to negotiate and deliver.
- There are competing objectives with different priorities, which will require trade-offs. Objectives include biodiversity, flood management, water resources, recreation and access.

Opportunities

- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and planning policy with new development now required to deliver measurable biodiversity gains, which can be directed strategically into GBI network expansion, rather than delivered on scattered small sites.
- There is an extensive list of GBI assets across Rother. This means that multi-benefits projects can be delivered to address themes such as nature recovery, flood management, water quality, climate resilience and access.
- There is funding focused on supporting climate adaptation and nature recovery available at a parcel, site and landscape scale. These include Landscape Recovery, Countryside Stewardship, Farming in Protected Landscapes and coastal realignment and catchment-scale water management schemes.
- There are new strategies that provide a formal mechanism to identify and prioritise GBI and open space, aligning council, landowner, communities and conservation body action. This includes East Sussex and Brighton & Hove LNRS.

- There is an opportunity to integrate sustainable urban drainage (SuDS) into new housing and infrastructure schemes, improving water and habitat management (**Figure 2.5**). This could include blue infrastructure such as ponds, swales and wetlands).
- There are key catchments and trails crossing into Kent, Wealden and Hastings, providing an opportunity for cross-boundary collaboration and larger-scale, multi-authority GBI planning with more strategic weight and funding potential.

Threats

- There is a high risk that climate change and sea-level rise could outpace planned adaptation. This could result in coastal and river channel erosion, flooding, saline intrusion and wildfires, particularly for low-lying coastal and estuarine habitats.
- The increasing pressure for housing and infrastructure could further fragment remaining corridors or increase recreational pressure on sensitive ecological and heritage sites.
- The threat of underfunding for long-term management could result in a poorly maintained GBI network. This could include habitat creation from BNG or fixed term grant schemes.
- Unmanaged invasive species or diseases lead to the spread and further damage to native species by travelling the well-connected habitat corridors. This could include the spread of ash dieback in wooded corridors.
- Conflicting ambitions for land use that does not support GBI, particularly across private ownership where the Council do not have leading authority. This could include agricultural intensification, flood defence requirements and development needs.
- Voluntary cooperation from private landowners and managers may not be received, leaving large gaps in areas available for enhancement opportunities.
- Reliance on national schemes (BNG, agri-environment funding, capital grants) exposes network enhancements to changes in government policy or budget cuts.
- Slow-decision making and duplication of efforts without strong programme coordination, with landscape-scale projects with a high number of partners and stakeholders.

Chapter 8

GBI Strategic Opportunities

8.1 This chapter continues the GBI element of the study presenting the strategic opportunities identified to enhance the network.

8.2 The analysis undertaken as part of this Study has identified a series of priority, strategic projects that will help strengthen Rother's GBI and open space network. These projects have been developed in response to the opportunities and needs identified in the previous chapters and are intended to inform future updates to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Together, they provide a framework for enhancing the district's natural assets, improving access to green and blue spaces, and supporting wider environmental and community objectives.

8.3 The projects focus on areas where new or improved open spaces, habitat creation, enhanced accessibility and stronger ecological connections would deliver the greatest benefit. Therefore, they highlight priority locations across Rother where targeted investment can help address existing deficiencies, support nature recovery, improve health and wellbeing, and increase resilience to the effects of climate change.

8.4 For each project a description of the opportunity is provided along with a justification for its selection. Potential delivery mechanisms and delivery partners are identified for each project to help guide implementation. A description of each of the delivery mechanisms is provided at the end of this chapter.

Schedule of GBI projects

8.5 Figure 8.1 presents a conceptual plan of the proposed GBI opportunities, identifying their location and key GBI assets targeted. This project list is not intended to be exhaustive, and RDC and other partners should remain responsive to other opportunities which come forward.

8.6 Tables 8.1 and 8.2 show the list of projects identified in order of proposed priority. The recommended GBI projects have been categorised according to their priority for delivery. **Essential** projects are required to support planned development and the wider spatial strategy, while **Desirable** projects would help deliver strategic objectives and strengthen the GBI network but are not necessary to facilitate significant development. The priority rankings are intended to guide future investment and implementation.

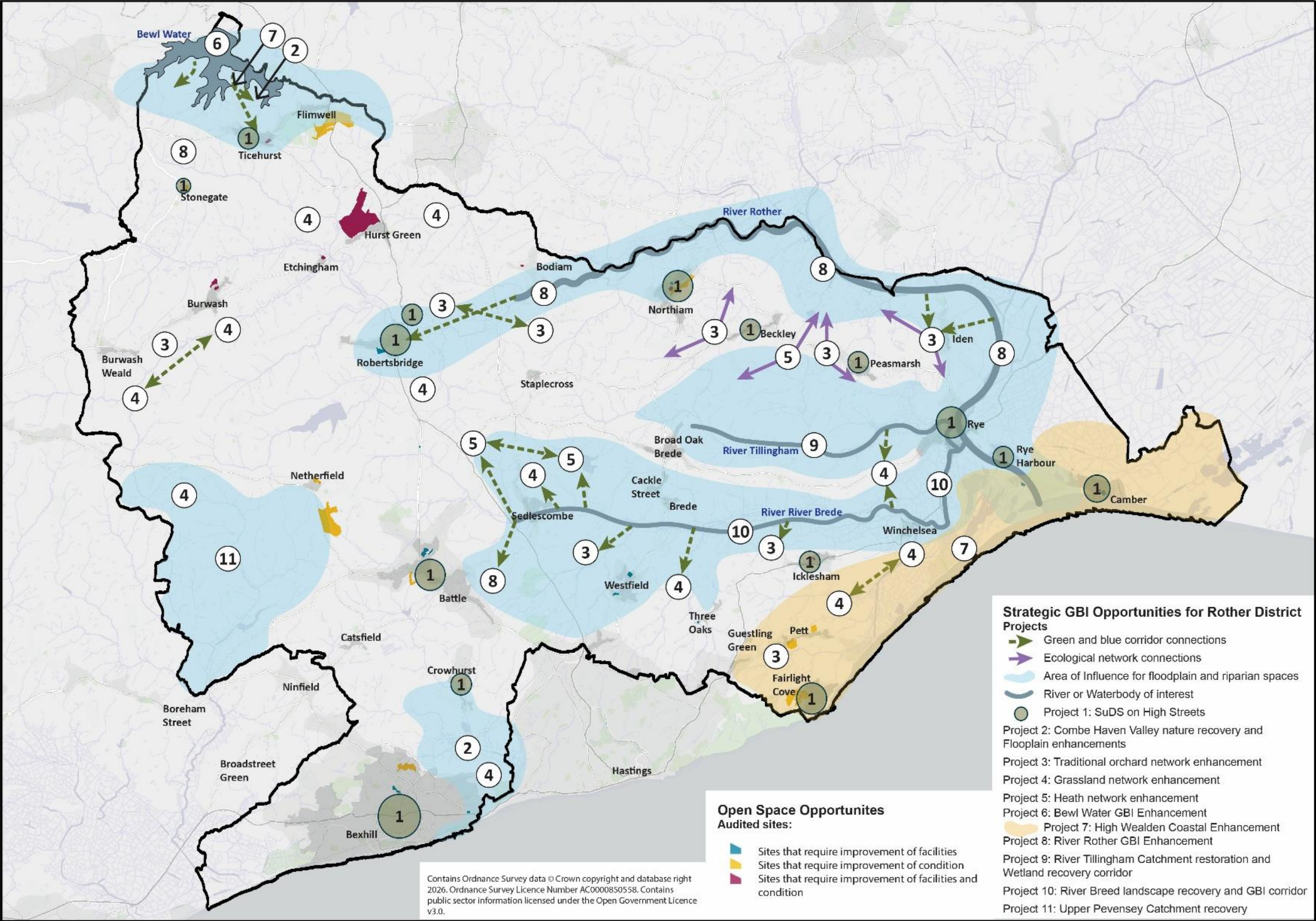
Table 8.1: Proposed Essential GBI projects for Rother District

Project No.	Project Name
1	SuDS on High Streets
2	Combe Haven Valley Nature Recovery and Floodplain Enhancements
3	Traditional Orchard Network Enhancement
4	Grassland Network Enhancement
5	Heath Network Enhancement
6	Bewl Water Enhancement

Table 8.2: Proposed Desirable GBI projects for Rother District

Project No.	Project Name
7	High Weald Coastal Enhancement
8	Enhancing the River Rother Corridor
9	River Tillingham Catchment Restoration and Wetland Recovery Corridor
10	River Brede Landscape Recovery and Blue-green Corridor
11	Upper Pevensey Catchment Recovery

Figure 8.1: Green and Blue Infrastructure strategic opportunities projects



Project 1: SuDS on High Streets

Opportunity and justification

8.7 Several settlements within Rother experience localised surface water flooding during periods of intense rainfall as **Figure 2.5** shows. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of heavy rainfall events, placing additional pressure on drainage infrastructure and increasing runoff into local watercourses.

8.8 Nature-based sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) provide an opportunity to slow, store and treat runoff close to its source, helping to reduce flood risk. They also improve water quality by filtering pollutants from runoff before they enter watercourses. They can increase urban biodiversity through the introduction of planting and habitat features and enhance the quality and attractiveness of public spaces.

8.9 This opportunity would promote the retro-fitting of SuDS into urban locations experiencing high levels of surface water flood risk in the district. Retrofitting SuDS within high streets and other urban areas would help address these localised flood risk issues whilst delivering wider environmental and social benefits. Particular areas of focus for the opportunity are highlighted on **Figure 8.1** and among other, includes:

- Battle High Street;
- Robertsbridge High Street;
- Little Common Road, Bexhill;
- Combe Valley Way, Bexhill;
- Forewood Lane, Crowhurst;
- Ticehurst Hight Street;
- Ewhurst Lane, Northaim; and
- Main Street, Peasmarsh.

8.10 Site assessment would be required to identify the best type of SuDS to use in each location, but options could include rain gardens, bioretention areas, swales, tree pits, kerbside planting, attenuation features and pocket wetlands to intercept, store, filter and slowly release surface water runoff. Measures would be designed to complement local character whilst delivering multiple environmental and community benefits.

8.11 This approach aligns with East Sussex LNRS measure R1.7, which promotes the creation of ponds, swales, wetlands and other interception features to prevent runoff from roads and highways entering watercourses. The opportunity would contribute towards the aims of Southern Water's Rother River Basin Catchment Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan by helping to attenuate surface water runoff, reduce pressure on drainage and wastewater infrastructure, improve water quality and support wider catchment resilience objectives.

Delivery partners

8.12 Delivery of the project will require close collaboration between organisations responsible for flood risk management, water quality, highways and place-making. Key partners could include

- East Sussex County Council as the local highway authority;
- Southern Water;
- South East Rivers Trust;
- Statutory bodies such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and Active Travel England; and
- Local authorities and parish/town councils.

Delivery mechanisms

8.13 Delivery is likely to be achieved through a combination of partnership working, planning-led contributions and external funding. SuDS could be secured through the following:

- GBI Policy;
- Section 106 agreements (S106);
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Section 278 Agreements (S278);
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Planning conditions;
- Grant funding; and
- Active Travel England funding.

Project 2: Combe Haven Valley Nature Recovery and Floodplain Enhancements

Opportunity and justification

8.14 The Combe Haven valley represents one of the most important ecological landscapes within eastern East Sussex. The valley contains a network of designated habitats including the Combe Haven Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), extensive areas of grazing marsh, woodland, wetland and river habitats, and forms a key ecological corridor between the High Weald and the coast.

8.15 The opportunity to strengthen ecological connectivity between Hastings and Bexhill, enhance the condition of floodplain habitats and create a resilient GBI network builds upon the success of the creation of Combe Valley Countryside Park, which had been an opportunity stated in the previous GI Study (2011).

8.16 Restoration techniques will be site specific and include:

- The restoration of fen reedbed habitat where the Bexhill disused railway (wildlife site) meets the Combe Haven SSSI; and
- Expansion of fen reedbeds along the settlement boundaries of Pebsham, as identified in the LNRS.

8.17 Techniques for the restoration and expansion of fen reedbeds should focus on re-establishing the nutrient-poor and pH-neutral conditions and could include re-excavating any overgrown ditches and restoring traditional management such as grazing and cutting where appropriate.

8.18 Delivery of the project will require collaboration between organisations involved in habitat restoration, floodplain management, public access and landscape-scale nature recovery. Key partners could include:

- Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Statutory organisations such as Natural England and the Environment Agency;
- South East Rivers Trust;
- Parish/town councils, community groups; and
- The Friends of Combe Valley.

Delivery mechanisms

8.19 Delivery is likely to be achieved through a combination of the following:

- GBI Policy;
- Section 106 agreements (S106);
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Planning conditions;
- Grant funding such as the Water Environment Improvement Fund;
- Payment for ecosystem services and green finance;
- Local authority funding; and
- Active Travel England funding.

Project 3: Traditional Orchard Network Enhancement

Opportunity and justification

8.20 Traditional orchards are among the most biodiverse and species-rich habitats in the UK and are recognised as a priority habitat due to their exceptionally high wildlife value. Due to its relatively mild climate and traditional orchard heritage, the Rother District is one of the best fruit-growing areas in the UK.

8.21 Traditional orchards across Rother should be protected, enhanced and expanded where there is the opportunity to connect fragmented orchard habitats shown in **Figure 8.1** including the following locations:

- Beckley, Clayhill and Mill Corner;
- Across Peasmarsh and Fackley Ash;
- Bewl Water;
- Burwash;
- Battle; and
- Sedlescombe.

8.22 Newly created orchards could be planted in near existing ecological networks (e.g. woodland edges) to booster biodiversity benefits or in urban locations to promote access to nature and spending time outdoors. Species to plant include Sussex apples (Saltcote Pippin, Crawley Beauty and Wadhurst Pippin), conference pears, Victoria plums and cherries.

8.23 This picks up on the GBI Network weakness analysis stating fragmentation of habitats. Traditional orchards as a priority habitat for enhancement due to their scarcity, high biodiversity value and contribution to landscape character across Rother. Although traditional orchards were once a defining feature of the district's agricultural landscape, many have been lost through changes in land use and agricultural practices, resulting in a fragmented network of remaining sites. New community orchards and orchard planting associated with open spaces could help address declining opportunities for local food growing, complementing existing allotment provision and providing wider benefits for health, wellbeing and access to nature.

Delivery partners

8.24 Delivery of the project would benefit from collaboration between strategic environmental organisations, local communities and private landowners. Key partners could include:

- High Weald National Landscape;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Natural England;
- Local authorities;
- Local landowners and farmers; and
- Parish/town councils.

Delivery mechanisms

8.25 Opportunities to secure new orchards and the enhancement of existing sites could be supported through:

- GBI policy;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;

- Community Infrastructure Levy;
- Planning conditions;
- Grant funding;
- Local authority funding; and
- Payment for ecosystem services or other green finance.

Project 4: Grassland Network Enhancement

Opportunity and justification

8.26 Species rich grasslands are the most threatened habitat in the High Weald National Landscape and nationally, over 97% of species rich grasslands have been lost in the past century. Within Rother district, existing patches of existing species rich grassland are limited in extent and highly fragmented.

8.27 Opportunities for grassland creation and enhancement as shown in **Figure 8.1** are scattered across the northwest of the district from Battle to Three Leg Cross. The East Sussex LNRS directs that species-rich grassland restoration should focus on those in and around protected sites (i.e. those within LWS and LNRs or adjacent to/between SSSIs).

8.28 Restoration techniques will be site specific but may include rotational extensive grazing throughout the year, grazing/cut and collect regimes sensitive to the flora, fauna and fungi of the site, control of invasive non-native species (INNS), use of local provenance/ locally harvested wildflower seed, green hay or Weald native plug plants and control and management of scrub. Species rich grassland creation and restoration could be complemented by creating and enhancing opportunities for wildlife within the farmed landscape including the introduction of species-rich and more structurally diverse grass buffer strips and plots in fields.

8.29 This picks up on the GBI Network weakness analysis stating fragmentation of habitats. Species rich grassland restoration offers multiple benefits including supporting for pollinators and wider biodiversity, healthier soils and reduced soil erosion, increased flood defence and enhancements to the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the landscape.

8.30 A recent example of species rich grassland restoration in the High Weald National landscape is the meadows markers project at Springham and Westdown farms which helped the two farms move over to regenerative farming methods.

Delivery partners

8.31 Delivery of the project will require collaboration between environmental organisations, land managers and local communities. Key partners could include:

- High Weald National Landscape;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Natural England;
- Local authorities;
- Local landowners and farmers; and
- Parish/town councils.

Delivery mechanisms

8.32 Delivery is likely to be achieved through the following:

- GBI policy;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Planning conditions;
- Agri-environment and environmental grant funding;
- Local authority funding; and
- Payment for ecosystem services or other green finance.

Project 5: Heath Network Enhancement

Opportunity and justification

8.33 Expanding, enhancing and better connecting lowland heathland and associated habitats is a priority of the East Sussex LNRS. Heathland is an internationally protected habitat which has declined dramatically. Britain has lost ~80% of lowland heathland since the early 1800s. Lowland heath provision is extremely low in Rother district.

8.34 Opportunities to increase lowland heath provision in Rother district as shown in **Figure 8.1** are located at Brede High Wood. Restoration would include removing nutrient-enriched top-soil, restoring suitable hydrology (e.g. damming ditches), controlling of scrub and invasive species, introducing appropriate seed mixes or allow for natural regeneration and maintaining some areas of open bare ground. Heathland creation and restoration could be supplemented with hibernacula (e.g. log piles, rubble heaps and earth mounds) to provide overwintering habitat for reptiles and amphibians (including adder, a UK priority species).

8.35 This picks up on the GBI Network weakness analysis stating fragmentation of habitats. The creation and enhancement of lowland heath habitat improve water quality and reduce flood risk. It would also support six LNRS priority species and two priority species assemblages including heath potter wasp (a national scarce species), Dartford Warbler (a globally near threatened species) and Tree Pipit (a UK red list species).

Delivery partners

8.36 Delivery of the project will require collaboration between organisations involved in habitat restoration, species conservation and landscape-scale land management. Key delivery partners could include:

- High Weald National Landscape;
- Statutory originations such as Natural England and the Environment Agency;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Local authorities; and
- Local landowners and farmers.

Delivery mechanisms

8.37 Delivery is likely to be achieved through a combination of partnership working, grant funding and planning-led contributions. Heathland restoration and creation could be supported through:

- GBI policy;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);

- Planning conditions;
- Environmental grant funding;
- Local authority funding; and
- Payment for ecosystem services or other green finance.

Project 6: Bewl Water Enhancement

Opportunity and justification

8.38 Bewl Water is one of Rother's most significant green infrastructure assets and a regionally important recreation destination. It provides valuable environmental, recreational and landscape benefits, supports access to nature, and contributes to the distinctive character of the High Weald. Enhancing the reservoir would strengthen its role in supporting nature, people and place, while contributing to climate resilience, health and wellbeing, and sustainable travel objectives.

8.39 The reservoir presents an opportunity to enhance one of Rother's most important green infrastructure assets and strengthen connections with Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest, surrounding woodlands, nearby settlements and the wider High Weald landscape. Improvements could include:

- Create and enhance wetland, reedbed and seasonally wet grassland habitats around the reservoir margins to the south of the reservoir;
- Increase flood storage and water retention by creating a network of riparian and wetland habitats along tributary watercourses feeding the reservoir;
- Improve the ecological condition of inflowing streams through natural flood management measures, including leaky dams, wetland scrapes and floodplain reconnection;
- Create woodland, wetland and species-rich grassland corridors linking Bewl Water with Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest and surrounding ancient woodland sites; and
- Improve the strategic walking network linking Bewl Water with Ticehurst, Durgates and neighbouring communities – Address missing links and barriers within the Public Rights of Way network and improve accessibility for a wider range of users, including those with limited mobility.

8.40 Bewl Water faces a range of pressures, including water level fluctuations, climate change, habitat fragmentation, recreational pressure and declining ecological

connectivity. Targeted enhancements would help improve habitat quality and connectivity, strengthen resilience to future environmental change, and support species movement across the landscape. Improved active travel links would also increase access to nature, reduce reliance on car travel and create stronger connections between surrounding communities and the countryside.

Delivery partners

8.41 Key delivery partners could include:

- Southern Water as owner and manager of Bewl Water;
- High Weald National Landscape;
- Statutory organisations such as the Environment Agency and Natural England;
- South East Rivers Trust;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Local landowners and farmers; and
- Parish/town councils.

Delivery mechanisms

8.42 Delivery of the project is likely to be achieved through the following mechanisms:

- GBI policy;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Planning conditions;
- Grant funding such as the Water Environment Improvement Fund;
- Local authority funding; and
- Active Travel England funding.

Project 7: High Weald Coastal Enhancement

Opportunity and justification

8.43 The Rother Coastline contains internationally important habitats that support nationally and internationally significant bird populations. The area forms a key part of the district's blue-green infrastructure network and is recognised as a strategic priority for nature recovery. Enhancing the habitats in this area would deliver benefits for biodiversity, landscape resilience and local communities.

8.44 Rye Harbour and the wider coastal plain presents a significant opportunity to restore and expand coastal, intertidal and wetland habitats at a landscape scale. There is a significant opportunity to deliver the priorities identified within the East Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy including the restoration and creation of naturally functioning shorelines (Code C1.1), the enhancement of existing saltmarsh and mudflat habitats (Code C1.2), through managed realignment, and the establishment of new coastal lagoons (Code C1.7).

8.45 This project would deliver a coordinated approach to:

- Restoring and expanding coastal, intertidal and wetland habitats across the Rye Harbour, Brede Estuary and adjoining coastal plain;
- Strengthen ecological connectivity between freshwater, estuarine and marine environments; and
- Create a connected source-to-sea nature recovery network linking the High Weald, Brede Valley and Rye Bay.

8.46 The coastal habitats between Hastings and Camber face increasing pressure from climate change, sea level rise, coastal squeeze, habitat fragmentation and changing land management practices. A coordinated programme of habitat restoration, managed realignment, grazing marsh enhancement and corridor creation would help address these challenges, increase resilience to future climate impacts and support long-term nature recovery.

Delivery partners

8.47 Delivery of the project will require collaboration between organisations involved in coastal management, habitat restoration, nature recovery and water management. Key partners could include:

- Sussex Wildlife Trust;

- Natural England and the Environment Agency;
- High Weald National Landscape;
- South East Rivers Trust;
- Local authorities;
- Parish/town councils; and
- landowners and farmers.

Delivery mechanisms

8.48 Delivery is likely to be achieved through a combination of partnership working, grant funding and strategic environmental investment using the following:

- GBI policy;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Planning conditions;
- Grant funding such as the Water Environment Improvement Fund;
- Nature recovery and climate adaptation grant funding;
- Local authority funding; and
- Payment for ecosystem services and other green finance.

Project 8: Enhancing the River Rother Corridor

Opportunity and justification

8.49 The River Rother is one of East Sussex's principal river corridors, linking a diverse range of habitats including woodland, wetlands, floodplain grazing marsh and coastal environments. The catchment plays an important role in supporting biodiversity, managing water resources and maintaining ecological connectivity. It is also a key component of the wider blue-green infrastructure network, providing benefits for nature, climate resilience and local communities.

8.50 Parts of the River Rother and its tributaries face pressures from floodplain disconnection, water quality issues, soil erosion, sedimentation and altered hydrological processes. Agricultural runoff, nutrient enrichment and the impacts of climate change present additional challenges across the catchment. Restoring floodplain and wetland habitats would help address these issues by improving water quality, increasing natural flood attenuation, supporting groundwater recharge and enhancing biodiversity.

8.51 The River Rother presents a significant opportunity to restore natural river processes and strengthen ecological connections between the High Weald and the internationally important wetlands and coastal habitats of Rye Bay. Working across the wider catchment, the project could deliver floodplain reconnection, riparian woodland creation, wetland restoration and natural flood management measures. These interventions would create a more coherent ecological corridor, improve habitat connectivity and support biodiversity across the district.

8.52 There is also the opportunity to deliver the priorities identified within the East Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy which promotes the re-naturalisation of rivers and reconnection of rivers to their floodplains through the restoration and expansion of wet grassland, marsh, fen and wet woodland habitats. These measures are intended to support biodiversity, improve groundwater recharge and increase natural flood attenuation. The project would also build upon the catchment-wide ambitions of the Rother and Romney Catchment Partnership, which seeks to restore natural processes, improve water quality, increase resilience to climate change and deliver nature-based solutions throughout the wider catchment.

8.53 The Environment Agency catchment data (2025) [\[See reference 35\]](#) shows the river's latest test results which reports the river as being of moderate ecological value. The East Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies rivers, streams and associated floodplains as priority areas for nature recovery (Code R1) and highlights the importance of landscape-scale initiatives that improve habitat connectivity and restore natural processes.

Delivery partners

8.54 Key partners could include:

- South East Rivers Trust;
- Southern Water;
- Rother and Romney Catchment Partnership;
- Environment Agency and Natural England;

- Sussex Wildlife Trust; and
- Local landowners and farmers.

Delivery mechanisms

8.55 Delivery is likely to be achieved through:

- GBI policy;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Planning conditions;
- Grant funding such as the Water Environment Improvement Fund;
- River restoration and nature recovery grant funding;
- Local authority funding; and
- Payment for ecosystem services and other green finance.

Project 9: River Tillingham Catchment Restoration and Wetland Recovery Corridor

Opportunity and justification

8.56 Like many lowland river catchments, the Tillingham has been affected by historic drainage and land management practices which have reduced the extent and connectivity of natural floodplain habitats. The loss and fragmentation of wetland, marsh and riparian habitats can reduce ecological resilience, limit species movement and increase vulnerability to climate change and changing hydrological conditions.

8.57 The River Tillingham Catchment Restoration and Wetland Recovery Corridor would deliver a landscape-scale programme of river restoration, wetland creation and habitat connectivity across the River Tillingham catchment. The project would focus on restoring natural river processes by:

- Reprofilling over steepened banks where appropriate, to create varied channel features including pools and marginal habitats;

- Creating backwaters and side channels to provide refuge during periods of drought or flooding; and
- To restore sediment transport processes and reduces channel incision.

8.58 Enhancement measures should reconnect the River Tillingham with its floodplain, creating extensive wetland and marsh habitats, improving water quality and establishing a continuous blue-green corridor linking the upper catchment with the internationally important coastal habitats of Rye Bay. Measures could include river restoration, floodplain wetland creation, reedbed and wet grassland expansion, riparian woodland planting, natural flood management interventions and habitat connectivity improvements that strengthen ecological resilience and support landscape-scale nature recovery across the catchment.

8.59 The initiative would establish a strategic blue-green infrastructure corridor extending from the upper catchment through the Tillingham Valley to the coastal and estuarine environments around Rye and the internationally important habitats of Rye Bay.

8.60 The East Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies rivers, streams and associated floodplains as priority areas for nature recovery (Code R1) and highlights the importance of landscape-scale initiatives that improve habitat connectivity and restore natural processes.

Delivery partners

8.61 Key partners could include:

- South East Rivers Trust;
- The Environment Agency and Natural England;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Local landowners and farmers; and
- Southern Water.

Delivery mechanisms

8.62 River restoration, wetland creation and floodplain enhancement could be supported through:

- GBI policy;

- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Planning conditions;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Water Environment Improvement Fund;
- Local authority funding; and
- Payment for ecosystem services and other green finance.

Project 10: River Brede Landscape Recovery and Blue-green Corridor

Opportunity and justification

8.63 The River Brede catchment is characterised by upland streams in steep wooded valleys and managed lowland marshes and is designated as a local wildlife site. The catchment currently experiences poor ecological condition reference, alongside challenges associated with water quality and historic pollutant loads. While ecological improvements are targeted within the shorter term, the recovery of chemical status is expected to take considerably longer due to the persistence of pollutants within the catchment and wider river system.

8.64 This baseline condition provides an opportunity for investment in enhancing and reconnecting habitats along the River Brede and its tributaries to support ecological recovery, strengthen biodiversity and improve the resilience of the wider landscape. interventions could include the following:

- Restoration and expansion of riparian woodland along sections of the River Brede and its tributaries to provide shade, stabilise banks and intercept sediment and nutrient run-off before it reaches the watercourse;
- Establish wider vegetated buffer strips adjacent to arable land and pasture to reduce sediment, phosphate and nitrate inputs from agricultural runoff;
- Create wetlands, scrapes and attenuation ponds within the floodplain to capture sediment, filter pollutants and provide habitat for wetland birds, amphibians and invertebrates;

- Deliver natural flood management measures within the wider catchment, such as leaky woody dams, offline storage areas and floodplain wetlands, to slow flows, reduce downstream flood risk and improve water quality;
- Enhance and reconnect areas of wet woodland, fen, reedbed and species-rich wet grassland associated with the river corridor to strengthen habitat networks and support nature recovery;
- Work with landowners to implement regenerative farming practices and soil management measures that reduce runoff, sediment loss and diffuse pollution entering the catchment; and
- Control invasive non-native species that affect riverbanks and riparian habitats, allowing native vegetation communities to recover.

8.65 The Environment Agency catchment data (2025) [\[See reference 35\]](#) shows the River's latest test results which reports the river as being of low ecological value. The East Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies rivers, streams and associated floodplains as priority areas for nature recovery (Code R1) and highlights the importance of landscape-scale initiatives that improve habitat connectivity and restore natural processes.

Delivery partners

8.66 Key partners could include:

- South East Rivers Trust;
- Environment Agency and Natural England;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Southern Water;
- Local landowners and farmers; and
- Parish/town councils.

Delivery mechanisms

8.67 Delivery is likely to be achieved through a combination of partnership working, grant funding and catchment-based environmental investment including:

- GBI policy;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;

- Section 106 agreements;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Planning conditions;
- Grant funding such as the Water Environment Improvement Fund;
- Local authority funding; and
- Payment for ecosystem services and other green finance.

Project 11: Upper Pevensey Catchment Recovery

Opportunity and justification

8.68 The Pevensey Levels is one of the most important wetland landscapes in southern England and a designated SSSI, SAC and Ramsar site. The streams and watercourses within north-western Rother form an important part of the wider Pevensey Levels catchment and water quality, hydrology and habitat condition within these upper catchment tributaries directly influence the condition of downstream habitats. The South East Rivers Trust identifies pollution, habitat loss, flooding and declining river health as key challenges across the Pevensey Levels catchment.

8.69 The project would seek to restore natural river processes, improve water quality, enhance habitat connectivity and strengthen the resilience of freshwater ecosystems across the upper catchment. Working at a landscape scale, the project would establish a connected network of riparian corridors, wetlands, floodplain habitats and nature-based solutions that support both local biodiversity and downstream ecological interests within the Pevensey Levels.

8.70 Enhancing the upper tributaries within Rother would provide an opportunity to reduce sediment and nutrient inputs, improve habitat condition, restore more natural hydrological processes and strengthen ecological links between the High Weald and the internationally important wetlands of the Pevensey Levels. Similar catchment-scale approaches are being promoted through the Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership and wider river restoration initiatives across East Sussex.

8.71 The Green and Blue Infrastructure network has been developed to reflect ecological processes and habitat networks that extend beyond administrative boundaries. While the internationally important habitats of the Pevensey Levels lie largely outside Rother District, the streams and tributaries within north-west Rother form part of the wider catchment and play an important role in maintaining downstream water quality, hydrology and ecological function. Improving river,

wetland and floodplain habitats within the upper catchment would therefore help support the condition and resilience of the Pevensey Levels' nationally and internationally designated habitats. The project reinforces Rother's role as a responsible upstream partner, ensuring that land and water management interventions within the district contribute positively to wider catchment recovery and nature restoration objectives across East Sussex.

Delivery partners

8.72 Key partners could include:

- South East Rivers Trust;
- Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership;
- Environment Agency;
- Natural England;
- local authorities;
- Local landowners and farmers; and
- Southern Water;

Delivery mechanisms

8.73 River restoration, wetland creation and habitat enhancement could be supported through:

- GBI policy;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Planning conditions;
- Section 106 agreements;
- Community Infrastructure Levy funding;
- Grant funding such as the Water Environment Improvement Fund; and
- Payment for ecosystem services and other green finance.

Delivery mechanisms

Delivery through planning

Open space standards and policy

8.74 Planning policy on open space should cover both the protection of existing open spaces and the delivery of new open space, in order to meet the needs of current and future residents. Integration of the open space standards outlined in this study into planning policy in the new Rother Local Plan should secure the delivery of new open space in major developments.

GBI policy

8.75 A strong strategic GBI policy in a Local Plan will assist in the delivery of high quality multi-functional GBI in new development. Recommendations for policy wording have been separately provided to RDC as part of this study.

Section 106 agreements (S106)

8.76 Section 106 (S106) agreements allow a planning authority to enter a negotiated agreement (or 'planning obligation') to mitigate the impact of a specific development to make it acceptable in planning terms. Where a development fails to meet local criteria, such as any GBI policy requirement or open space standards, S106 agreements could be used to secure financial support for local open space or GBI projects. It will be essential to have clear and transparent open space and GBI policy requirements so that the tests for S106 agreements can be met (that they are necessary, relevant to planning, and directly, fairly and reasonably related to the proposed development).

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

8.77 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a national statutory requirement introduced in 2024, requiring all development on a site greater than 0.2 hectares, that impacts an onsite priority habitat to deliver an uplift of at least 10% in biodiversity. BNG applies to development of less than 0.2ha if the development will have a negative impact on an on-site priority habitat'. BNG should be delivered on-site unless it can be evidenced that this is not possible, in which case off-site contributions may be accepted. On-site provision should enhance the GBI on a development site while off-

site BNG contributions will be an important source of funding for strategic GBI opportunities.

Section 278 Agreements (S278)

8.78 Section 278 Agreements (S278) are agreements for developers to fund or carry out works on the public highway linked to their development. This allows GBI, such as street trees and swales, to be integrated into highway works and contribute to improve connectivity of the GBI network. S278 agreements only apply where development affects public highways and tends to focus on transport/safety function rather than GBI quality.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

8.79 CIL is a locally based development tax which allows local authorities to fund infrastructure by charging on new development in their area. A CIL has been adopted by the Council with a charging schedule adopted in 2016 [\[See reference 48\]](#). Contributions are used to help fund the strategic infrastructure needed as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and Infrastructure Funding Statements. Including GBI projects within the IDP can enable the delivery of these using CIL contributions.

Planning conditions

8.80 Planning conditions are a straightforward approach to secure delivery of specific actions or off-site works, such as habitat enhancement. Planning conditions cannot require financial contributions and must meet the specific tests (necessity, relevant to planning and the development, enforceable, precise and reasonable).

Other delivery mechanisms

Partnership working

8.81 Partnership working involves collaboration between the local authority, developers, landowners, statutory bodies, community groups and voluntary organisations to jointly plan, fund and deliver GBI projects. This allows resources and expertise to be shared, enabling delivery of larger-scale, landscape GBI opportunities that would be difficult for any single organisation to achieve alone. Effective

partnership working can also help secure match-funding from other sources and ensure long-term stewardship of GBI assets once delivered.

Grant funding

8.82 Grant funding refers to monies awarded by government bodies, environmental agencies, charitable trusts and other private funding bodies to support the delivery of specific open space and GBI projects. Grant funding can be a valuable source of capital for projects such as tree planting, habitat creation and green space improvements, particularly where other delivery mechanisms are not available or sufficient. Examples of relevant grants most applicable to this study include:

- Environmental Land Management Schemes (Landscape Recovery, Countryside Stewardship and Sustainable Farming Incentive);
- Farming in Protected Landscapes;
- Water Environment Improvement Fund;
- National Lottery Heritage Fund; and
- Southern Water Farm Capital Grant Scheme.

Payment for ecosystem services and green finance

8.83 Payment for ecosystem services and green finance mechanisms enable landowners and managers to receive payment for the environmental benefits their land provides, such as carbon storage, water quality improvement, flood mitigation and biodiversity. These mechanisms, which may include private investment, green bonds or emerging natural capital markets, offer an alternative to traditional public funding routes and can help unlock long-term, sustainable investment in GBI. As these markets develop, they are likely to become an increasingly important source of funding for the maintenance and enhancement of the district's GBI network.

Local authority funding

8.84 Local authority funding refers to the Council's own capital and revenue budgets, which may be allocated to the delivery, management and maintenance of open space and GBI where it aligns with policies and plans priorities. This can include funding for open space improvements, tree planting programmes and ongoing maintenance of existing GBI assets. While local authority budgets are often constrained, this funding can play an important role in leveraging in additional

investment from other sources, or in delivering open space and GBI improvements where developer or grant funding is not available.

Active Travel England funding

8.85 Active travel funding refers to monies made available by government and regional bodies to support the delivery of walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure, such as the consolidated Active Travel Fund. Where active travel schemes are delivered alongside GBI, such as tree-lined routes, verges and swales, this funding can be used to integrate green infrastructure into the design and help create green corridors that encourage sustainable travel.

Chapter 9

Next Steps and Recommendations

9.1 This chapter presents a summary of the recommendations provided throughout the study as well as identifying key next steps to ensure their delivery.

9.2 The purpose of this study was to deliver an evidence base to support the preparation and implementation of the emerging Rother Local Plan (2025-2042). The recommendations outlined in this study are to assist in the design and delivery of objectives that support sustainable development, address health and social inequalities, conserve and enhance the built and natural heritage, build environmental and climate resilience and facilitate active travel.

Recommendations

9.3 This study has assessed existing open space provision and the GBI network across Rother District, identifying gaps and opportunities. A summary of the evidence-based recommendations to strengthen and enhance the network is presented below. The purpose of these recommendations is to support the integration of open space and GBI and open space into future planning policies and development. They include measures that can be delivered as part of new development and secured through the planning process, as well as those requiring wider partnership working and other delivery mechanisms.

Open space recommendations

9.4 After reviewing the recommendations from the application of the quantity, accessibility and quality and value standards, the following strategic delivery recommendations have been proposed to maintain and improve the existing and future open space network across Rother:

1. Increase the range of functions provided by accessible greenspace:

- Overall provision of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population is good, but the amount of provision classified as parks and gardens could be increased to ensure greenspaces provide a wider range of services and functions. Natural and semi-natural greenspaces adjacent to or within settlements with limited or no parks and gardens could be enhanced with features typically associated with parks and gardens, including seating, play equipment, accessible routes and

picnic facilities. Sites such as Knowle Wood, Bexhill Down, Broad Oak Park and Rye Harbour NSN could be considered for enhancements.

2. Address spatial gaps in accessible greenspace:

- Prioritise the creation of new accessible greenspaces in areas that do not meet the Greenspace Close to Home target. This should include a new neighbourhood accessible greenspace around Dallington, a new doorstep or local greenspace in Catsfield, and consideration of a wider neighbourhood or district scale greenspace in the west of the sub-area to improve access for residents in rural areas between settlements. New neighbourhood accessible greenspace should also be considered around Northiam, Udimore and Peasmarsch, and between Staplecross and Robertsbridge in the east.

3. Improve access to existing greenspaces and the wider countryside:

- Protect and enhance the PRow network to improve connections between smaller settlements, larger areas of open space and the wider countryside. Consider increasing public access to sites where access is currently restricted, including Combe Wood (Battle sub-area) and Halfhouse Wood (Bexhill sub-area), and explore opportunities to increase the size of sites such as Saint James' Crescent (Bexhill sub-area). Arrangements allowing public access to school and college playing fields at certain times could also provide additional accessible greenspace, particularly in areas with limited provision.

4. Prioritise new provision for children and teenagers:

- Direct new play provision towards areas where deficiencies in access to facilities have been identified. Priority should include a new play space close to Gillham Wood, provision in Beckley and Playden, and additional play facilities at Three Oaks Village Hall AGS, Roughters Wood and Guestling Wood (southern rye and the Hastings fringes). Where new or enhanced greenspaces are created, the inclusion of play equipment should be considered to improve provision for children and teenagers.

5. Support allotments and community growing spaces:

- Incorporate community food-growing opportunities within existing and new greenspaces, particularly in areas where there is evidence of high demand or deficiencies in access to allotments. Potential locations include Gracelands Drive AGS (Bexhill sub-area), Seabourne Road AGS (Bexhill sub-area), Foxglove Avenue AGS (Bexhill sub-area), Crowhurst Recreation Ground (southern rye and the Hastings fringes sub-area), Wood Field (southern rye and the Hastings fringes sub-area), Vicarage Lane AGS (southern rye and the

Hastings fringes sub-area), Burwash Common (northern sub-area), Bodiam Recreation Green (northern sub-area), Brede Oak Recreation Ground (Rye sub-area) and Beckley Recreation Ground (Rye).

6. Improve accessibility, facilities and quality of existing open spaces:

- Improve signage and the presentation of entrances, particularly at amenity greenspaces and larger natural and semi-natural greenspaces. Additional features such as accessible picnic benches, information on accessible routes, seating and play equipment should be considered to support access for all. Entrances, main routes and PRow should be regularly maintained to prevent overgrowth and ensure paths remain accessible. Regular checks should also identify blocked or damaged paths, with clear reporting arrangements for visitors.

7. Enhance biodiversity and climate resilience:

- New and enhanced open spaces should incorporate measures to improve climate resilience, biodiversity and habitat value. This could include sustainable drainage, water conservation measures, drought-tolerant planting and shading within new developments, alongside opportunities to retrofit these features into existing spaces. Habitat value should be increased through measures such as wildflower strips and meadows, less frequent mowing, gapping up hedgerows with mixed native species and the use of a blend of native species in tree planting. Tree and hedgerow planting alongside main roads should also be considered to reduce the impact of noise pollution.

8. Secure investment through new development and community involvement:

- Recognise the limited funding available to local parish and town councils and ensure that support from new development is used to help fund improvements to existing and new open spaces. Development contributions should support enhancements to accessibility, play, community growing, biodiversity, climate resilience and ongoing maintenance. Friends of Groups and local communities should also be supported to provide opportunities for residents to contribute to the management and stewardship of their local open spaces.

9. Ensure ongoing management and maintenance:

- Maintain regular inspections and maintenance of open spaces, with particular attention to youth facilities, paths, entrances, vegetation and other key features. Regular checks should identify repair requirements and prevent decline in the condition and accessibility of facilities. Ongoing management should also

ensure that improvements to quality, biodiversity, accessibility and community use are sustained over the long term.

10. Enhance recreation and community use of open spaces:

- Increase the range of recreation features within amenity greenspaces and parks and gardens to encourage healthy lifestyles and attract a wider range of users. Noticeboards should be installed within parks and gardens and larger amenity greenspaces and natural and semi-natural sites to provide information on local events, activities, Friends of Groups and community involvement, and to communicate temporary management arrangements. Opportunities should also be explored for educational use of open spaces by local schools and for greater community involvement in their management.

GBI recommendations

9.5 Drawing on the evidence base, strategic opportunities for GBI and planning tools presented in this study it is recommended that RDC use these to enhance the GBI network in the following ways:

- Integrate a strong GBI policy within the new Rother Local Plan which sets out clear expectations for the integration of multi-functional GBI in new development and its long term management and maintenance.
- Include the requirement for the submission of a GBI Plan with all major development applications. Encourage the use of the GBI plan checklist provided in **Appendix B** by both developers and development management planners.
- Draw on the GBI evidence base and strategic open space and GBI opportunities when preparing site specific requirements as part of site allocation policies or during pre-application discussions.
- Work with partners to undertake further development and delivery of the strategic GBI opportunities which are unlikely to be able to be wholly delivered through planning contributions.

Next steps

9.6 This chapter has presented a summary of open space and GBI recommendations to ensure both are embedded into future policies, objectives and the emerging Local Plan. Potential next steps include:

- Open space standards set out in this strategy should be applied to new developments to ensure that future population growth is complemented by

additional provision of open space. New developments that cannot provide new open space, the main mechanism by which financial contributions to open space provision can be secured within the planning process is through Section 106 agreements.

- Finalise strategic GBI and open space policy wording in emerging Local Plan to ensure both GBI and open space are meaningfully embedded into the wider planning process.
- Liaise with other in-house teams to ensure GBI and open space mainstreaming across wider policy areas.
- Work with partners to undertake further feasibility work and prepare delivery plans for each of the priority GBI projects identified.

Appendix A

Methodology

A.1 This appendix sets out the methodology for the study. The methodology for the assessment of open space reflects the requirements within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In the absence of any subsequent guidance on the methodology for undertaking open space assessments, the structure of the study follows the guidance set out in the PPG17 guide to undertaking open space assessments, which identifies 5 key stages. In addition, the approach recognises good practice guidance, including Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework Accessible Greenspace Standards.

Establishing local GBI typologies and baseline evidence

Identifying local need and strategic context

A.2 A desk assessment was undertaken to understand the local need and strategic context of open space and GBI across Rother. The assessment was split into two tasks. The first half of the desk-based assessment included a review of national, regional and local policy, aimed at understanding the wider strategic priorities and policy drivers which influence the approach to management and provision of open space and GBI.

A.3 The second stage assessed local needs based on the demographic, social, health and environmental context. This was based on national and locally held spatial data which has been mapped to understand the potential spatial priorities and needs.

A.4 To provide further information a stakeholder consultation was delivered using an online survey using Microsoft Forms. The purpose of the survey was to assess if the perception of stakeholders is that the district currently exhibits a deficiency in open space. The survey also captured inputs on the management, quality and primary usage of open spaces from technical officers, statutory bodies and parish and town councils. The online survey received 23 responses representing the following authorities and areas:

- Battle;
- Battle Town Council;

- Bewl Water;
- Bexhill;
- Bexhill Town Council;
- Brede Parish Council;
- Burwash Parish Council;
- Ewhurst;
- Fairlight Parish Council;
- Hurst Green Parish Council;
- Icklesham Parish Council;
- Iden Parish Council;
- Rother District Council;
- Rye;
- Rye Town Council;
- Sedlescombe Parish Council; and
- Westfield Parish Council.

Auditing local provision

A.5 In order to update the dataset the following steps were undertaken:

- Agreeing a final list of typologies and checking all sites for consistency against the final typology list and descriptions;
- Identifying new open spaces that have been created since the previous open space assessment or which were previously missed (due to different approaches to typologies); and
- Removing open spaces that have been lost since the previous open space assessment.

A.6 To capture any potential new open spaces, the data set was combined with existing national datasets and a review of aerial imagery. National datasets include:

- OS Mastermap;
- Country Parks;

- Local Nature Reserves; and
- Open access land (CRoW).

A.7 The final dataset provided a consistent dataset across the borough. For each open space the following information was provided:

- ID number;
- Site name/location;
- Typology;
- Size (in hectares);
- Hierarchy; and
- Access level.

A.8 A list of 60 sites were then chosen with an aim to have 20 sites within each of the three typologies identified by Natural England as accessible greenspace provision (parks and gardens, amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural greenspace). After a review of the open spaces, it was found that a number of parks and gardens were not publicly accessible, so an equal balance of sites for each typology was not audited.

A.9 The audit list was agreed with the Council to ensure the audit incorporates a range of open space sizes and covers a good geographic spread across the district. A review of open spaces listed as outdoor sports facilities close to audited sites was also completed to amend the typology of those that were amenity greenspaces. This resulted in additional sites being audited. As a result, the following sites per typology were audited:

- Amenity greenspace: 32 sites.
- Natural and semi-natural greenspace: 26 sites.
- Parks and gardens: 5 sites.

A.10 A total of 79 open spaces were visited across the study area. A total of 15 sites were not able to be surveyed due to sites no longer being an open space or publicly accessible. Therefore, a total of 64 open spaces were surveyed. Site audits were undertaken between 16th and 19th June 2026.

A.11 For each site visit, the typology and boundaries were assessed and updated as necessary. The quality and value of each site was then assessed based on a standard audit form structured around the Green Flag Award criteria [See reference 49]. A copy of the audit form used and scoring guidance is attached in **Appendix C**.

Consolidating GBI typologies

A.12 Following completion of the preceding tasks, a list of operational typologies relevant to Rother District which align with national guidance contained within the Natural England GI framework were compiled. Each type of existing GBI asset was mapped and categorised into functional, user friendly groupings.

Open space standards

Quantity, quality and accessibility analysis

A.13 To provide supporting information on how to set the standards a quantity, quality and accessibility analysis was undertaken. An analysis was undertaken for the three accessible greenspace typologies: amenity greenspace, natural and semi-natural greenspace and parks and gardens, as well as allotments and provision for children and teenagers.

A.14 The quantity analysis reviewed existing provision of freely accessible open space across the district and quantity per 1,000 population. ONS Census 2021 data was used to provide future population projections up the end of the Local Plan period 2042. Current provision could then be analysed against future projections and with recommended standards outlined by the NEGIF, FiT and National Allotment Society.

A.15 The accessibility analysis has been modelled for actual walking routes, rather than straight-line distances, to map what areas are covered by the various size-proximity catchments. Accessibility standards were tested for accessible greenspace, provision for children and teenagers and allotments using recognised best practice FiT, NEGIF and National Allotment Society standards. Different access standards were tested for different hierarchies of accessible greenspace and provision for children and teenagers.

A.16 The results of the open space audits were used to calculate a quality and value score for each open space. An analysis of each assessment theme was also undertaken to identify specific recommendations for management improvements.

Setting standards

A.17 Standards have been set to guide open space management and provision within the district. The following standards have been considered:

- Quantity: The amount open space per person.

- Accessibility: How far residents have to travel to reach open spaces.
- Quality: The condition of different types of open space.
- Value: The functionality and importance of different types of open space to local people.

A.18 Standards have been set based on established guidance and best practice, including Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework, Fields in Trust and the Green Flag Award, as well as consideration of the local needs, previous standards in the 2009 study and future population projections.

A.19 Quantity standards are set as the area of open space required (in hectares) per 1,000 of the population. Different quantity standards have been set for amenity greenspace, natural and semi-natural greenspace, parks and gardens, allotments and provision for children and teenagers. Quantity standards have been applied per population using the Census 2021 population data. Future quantity standards have been applied for 2042 to align with the Local Plan period.

A.20 Accessibility standards are set as a series of size-proximity standards. These recommend the maximum distance which should be travelled for different minimum sizes (hierarchies) of open space. Accessibility standards have been set for different hierarchies and typologies of accessible greenspace, with a single standard for allotments and provision for children and teenagers. To under spatial variation better, the district has been split into five sub-areas for the accessibility analysis. The access standards have been modelled against the open space data to map what areas are covered by the various size-proximity catchments. The catchments have been modelled using a network analysis, rather than as straight-line distance. This used the road and footpath network to identify the actual walking distances to open spaces.

A.21 Quality and value standards have been set by setting a 'benchmark score' for both quality and value for different hierarchies and typologies of open space, to match the accessibility standards. These benchmarks have been based on the score that a 'good' open space of that typology or hierarchy can expect to achieve, as well as being influenced by the average scores coming out of the audits. This allows the benchmarks to help identify the weakest sites within the district to help with the process of prioritising sites to improve.

A.22 Quality and value benchmarks are applied by assigning all audited sites a score:

- +/- is used for sites that score above the benchmark for both quality and value;

- +/- is used for sites that score above the quality benchmark, but below the value benchmark;
- -/+ is used for sites that score below the quality benchmark, but above the value benchmark; and
- -/- is used for sites that score below the benchmark for both quality and value.

A.23 The findings from applying the standards and the local needs have been brought together to provide high level recommendations for the provision and management of open spaces.

Spatial analysis: Deficiency and connectivity mapping

Gap analysis and open space deficiency mapping

A.24 The proposed standards were applied to the baseline data and ‘areas of deficiency’ maps were produced for quantity, quality and accessibility at both the district-wide scale and for the five subareas identified in the Draft Local Plan. The deficiency data was then used to inform the gap analysis. Future provision based on projected population growth was also calculated in order to understand what the future open space needs may be and the impact of future growth.

A.25 All relevant assets were brought together in GIS to produce a high level district-wide strategic GBI connectivity map with the aim of supporting robust plan-making. The data and its associated symbology were carefully considered and displayed at a strategic level to support the identification of core assets, existing corridors and opportunities for enhancement. GBI opportunities were then mapped as corridors or zones and can be used to promote enhancement of the GBI network.

Policy recommendations

A.26 Based on the results of the preceding task and the process outlined in Natural England’s ‘Process Journey for Local Planning Authorities’, it was considered how bespoke standards can be integrated into draft policy wording. The process also involved a critique of existing policy text. Recommendations for policy wording which requires an open space assessment to support relevant planning applications was presented to enhance the robustness of the proposed quality standard.

A.27 In addition to bespoke standards, recommendations were outlined that encourage conversations between management planners and developers at different stages of the planning process.

A.28 A developer checklist has been prepared to ensure all parties are clear on GBI and open space requirements.

Appendix B

Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Plan Checklist

B.1 All major development proposals in Rother District are required to submit a GBI Plan with their planning application. This can either be provided as a stand-alone plan or as part of the design and access statement.

B.2 The following checklist provides a concise set of questions related to GBI provision within new development and set out what should be included within a GBI plan. These can act as a guide for both developers and decision-makers, acting as a key reference point to ensure that GBI is considered from the earliest stages of the design process.

B.3 It is recommended that developers complete and submit a copy of this checklist with their planning application stating whether each requirement has been met and providing further information or justification where necessary.

Table B.1: GBI Plan Checklist

Criteria	Yes / No / Not Applicable	Justification / Additional Information
Understanding the site and surrounding context		
Has the Rother GBI Study been reviewed to identify any specific opportunities in the vicinity of the development?		
Has the East Sussex Environment Strategy been reviewed to identify strategic opportunities development proposals can contribute to, including cross-boundary links with neighbouring authorities?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate that appropriate site surveys been carried out to gain a comprehensive understanding of existing GBI on site, its condition and multifunctional benefits?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate if the development proposal results in the loss or fragmentation of the GBI network?		
Does the GBI Plan evidence how the project team has directly engaged with local stakeholders regarding GBI proposals, including the Council as Local Planning Authority and the local community?		
Does the GBI Plan consider if the development masterplan is landscape-led, meaning it is context-driven and informed by an understanding of the surrounding landscape character and main GBI features within and around the site?		
Does the development proposal provide a variety GBI types, scales and features that together deliver a range of benefits?		

Criteria	Yes / No / Not Applicable	Justification / Additional Information
Nature rich and beautiful		
Does the GBI plan evidence how the development will strengthen habitat connectivity opportunities within the site and wider area, with specific reference to those identified in the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Local Nature Recovery Strategy ?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how the site layout and design have been oriented to maximise opportunities for strengthening and enhancement of nearby nature networks and improving habitat connectivity?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how GBI proposals follow the mitigation hierarchy approach to the protection and creation of habitat and species? Does the development deliver Biodiversity Net Gain in line with policy requirements?		
Active and healthy		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how the development proposal integrates effectively into the wider active travel network, including pedestrian and cycling links, to ensure that people of all ages and abilities can access important daily destinations without a private car?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how proposals for walking, wheeling and cycling links have been made attractive and have been designed to integrate GBI features of all scales?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how GBI proposals have been designed to help protect amenity and help mitigate against noise and air pollution?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how development proposals have been designed to meet the needs of Rother's population, ensuring GBI proposals are inclusive, accessible and inviting for people of all ages?		

Criteria	Yes / No / Not Applicable	Justification / Additional Information
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how the scheme has considered the provision of designated local food growing spaces, including community orchards and allotments? Have they been designed with consideration of aspect, shelter, drainage and soil provision?		
Does the GBI Plan explore how opportunities to provide interpretation and educational features with GBI proposals been considered?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how play areas within the development proposal are designed to be multi-functional, inclusive, nature-based, provide stimulating environments and be directly linked to other open spaces and GBI assets?		
Thriving and prosperous		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how GBI proposals contribute to the delivery of high-quality design and an attractive environment with a distinct sense of place?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how the development proposal is responsive to local landscape and/or townscape character, effectively incorporating GBI features?		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how the development proposal seeks opportunities to incorporate, enhance access and improve understanding of cultural heritage features, making positive contributions to their setting with appropriate GBI proposals?		
Improved water management		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how opportunities to improve water quality and natural flood management on the development site and in the wider catchment been integrated? Do the proposed measures contribute to the relevant Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Water Framework Directive objectives for each watercourse and water body?		

Criteria	Yes / No / Not Applicable	Justification / Additional Information
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) have been designed in accordance with the National Standards for SuDS ?		
Resilient and climate positive		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how the development proposal delivers multi-functional GBI which successfully maximises benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation, including carbon sequestration, food risk alleviation and urban heating?		
Management and maintenance		
Does the GBI Plan set out how GBI proposals are managed, maintained and monitored for a period of at least 30 years?		
Has a secure and proportionate funding mechanism been identified to support the long-term management and maintenance of GBI assets for their intended lifetime?		
Does the GBI Plan clearly identify the organisation(s) responsible for the long-term management, maintenance and monitoring of GBI assets?		
Open Space Standards		
Does the GBI Plan demonstrate how the development proposal meets the relevant open space standards for quantity, accessibility and quality, in accordance with the requirements of the Rother GBI Study and Local Plan policy?		

Appendix C

Site Audit Form



Open Space Audit

Desk based assessment

+3 Number indicates the increase or decrease in score.

Value scores are highlighted in yellow

Quality scores are highlighted in green

Completed by:

Site ID:

Site Name:

Grid reference:

Ownership (council, private, other):

Area (ha):

Category of open space:

0. Designations

0.1 National

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----|
| 0.1a Listed building | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.1b Scheduled Monument | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.1c Site of Special Scientific Interest | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.1d Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.1e Special Area of Conservation | ☐ | +2 |
| 0.1f Special Protection Area | ☐ | +2 |
| 0.1g Ramsar | ☐ | +2 |
| 0.1h Green Belt | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.1i National Nature Reserve | ☐ | +3 |

0.2 Regional

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|----|
| 0.2a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation/Local Wildlife Site | ☐ | +2 |
| 0.2b Regionally Important Geological Site | ☐ | +2 |
| 0.2c Biodiversity Opportunity Areas | ☐ | +2 |

0.3 Access

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----|
| 0.3a National/Regional Trails | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.3b Sustrans Routes | ☐ | +3 |

0.4 Local - Statutory

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----|
| 0.4a Conservation Area | ☐ | +1 |
| 0.4b Local Nature Reserve | ☐ | +1 |
| 0.4c Locally Important Geological Site | ☐ | +1 |

0.5 Other

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----|
| 0.5a Within a Flood Risk Zone | ☐ | +1 |
| 0.5b Ancient Woodland | ☐ | +1 |
| 0.5c Tree Preservation Order | ☐ | +1 |
| 0.5d Has the site achieved a Green Flag Award? | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.5e Has the site achieved a Green Flag Community Award? | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.5f Has the site achieved a Green Heritage Award? | ☐ | +3 |
| 0.5g Contain Priority Habitat? | ☐ | +1 |



Open Space Audit

Site based assessment

Site ID:

Site Name:

Category of open space:

Audit date and time:

Time spent surveying:

Survey site access (e.g. access to whole site/ access to part of site/ no access to site):

Is the site still an open space? If not, please describe below:

1. Welcoming place

1.1 Site access

1.1a Please tick which option applies from the following list:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----|
| Freely accessible to public | ☐ | +5 |
| Freely accessible to public: opening hours | ☐ | +4 |
| Restricted access: members/tenants only | ☐ | +3 |
| Restricted access: other (please state) | ☐ | +2 |
| Freely accessible to public: de-facto access | ☐ | +1 |
| No Public access | ☐ | |

1.1b Are there any areas which are fenced from public access?

☐

Comment:

1.2 Access and entrances

1.2a Is the site connected other nearby open spaces (including through walking and cycling routes)

☐

+1

Please score each of the following - use the guidance note to help where necessary:

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------|
| 1.2b To what extent are the entrances well presented? | ☐ | +1-5 |
| 1.2c To what extent are the boundaries well defined and maintained | ☐ | +1-5 |
| 1.2d What is the overall quality of access and accesses within and through the open space? | ☐ | +1-5 |
| 1.2e What is the overall quality of access and accesses for people travelling to the open space? | ☐ | +1-5 |
| 1.2f What is the overall provision of welcoming signage? | ☐ | +1-5 |

1.3 Inclusivity

Is there evidence of any of the following:

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|----|
| 1.3a Signage is accessible and welcoming for all users) | ☐ | +1 |
| 1.3b Step free access | ☐ | +1 |
| 1.3c Signage indicating accessible routes / footpaths | ☐ | +1 |
| 1.3d Specific features designed to increase accessibility e.g. picnic benches with space for a wheelchair, passing points along footpaths) | ☐ | +1 |

2. Health, safety and security

2.1 Community safety/sense of security

Please tick those which apply:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----|
| 2.1a Is there natural surveillance into the site from surrounding properties or high streets? | ☐ | +1 |
| 2.1b Multiple entrance / exits | ☐ | +1 |
| 2.1c Is there a flow of people through the green space (to achieve self surveillance)? | ☐ | +1 |
| 2.1d Is lighting provided? | ☐ | +1 |
| 2.1e Is there CCTV? | ☐ | +1 |
| 2.1f Is there a marked help point or onsite staff? | ☐ | +1 |
| 2.1g Overall, does the open space feel safe to visit? | ☐ | +1 |

2.2 Basic amenities

Please tick and score those that are on site - use the guidance note to help where necessary.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| 2.2a Litter +/- dog bin | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.2b Seating | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.2c Personal rescue equipment | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.2d Cycle parking | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.2e Toilets | ☐ | +3 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.2f Cafe | ☐ | +3 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.2g Other | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |

2.3 Active recreation/ sport provision

Please tick and score those which apply:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|------------|
| 2.3a Grass pitches | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.3b Artificial pitches (e.g. Astro turf) | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.3c Tennis courts | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.3d Walking/ jogging | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.3e Water activities (other than play areas) | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.3f Bowls | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| 2.3g Other | ☐ | +1 |
| Condition | ☐ | NA or +1-5 |
| <i>If any of the above are ticked</i> | | +1 |

2.4 Play and young people provision

Please tick and score those which apply:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|----|
| 2.4a Equipped play (under 5) | ☐ | +1 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|----|

Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4b Equipped play (5-11)	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4c Equipped play (11+)	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4d MUGA	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4e Single basketball hoop	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4f Teen shelter or social seating	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4g Green gym	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4h Skate ramp	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4i BMX track	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
2.4j Other	☐	+1
Condition	☐	NA or +1-5
<i>If any of the above are ticked</i>	☐	+1

3. Clean and well maintained

3.1 Cleanliness

3.1a Is graffiti evident?	☐	0 or -1-2
3.1b Is vandalism evident?	☐	1 or -1-2
3.1c Overall cleanliness?	☐	+1-5

3.2 Maintenance

What is the condition of the following features?

3.2a Overall condition of planted areas	☐	NA or +1-5
3.2b Overall condition of grass areas	☐	NA or +1-5
3.2c Overall condition of footpaths	☐	NA or +1-5
3.2d Overall condition of water and associated edge treatment	☐	NA or +1-5
3.2e Overall condition of buildings and built features	☐	NA or +1-5

3.3 Overall attractiveness

3.3a Does the green space contribute to the setting of the immediate local area?	☐	+1
3.3b Is the open space visually attractive?	☐	+1
What threats / disturbances / issues are detracting from the site?		
3.3c Noise pollution	☐	-2
3.3d Air and water pollution	☐	-3
3.3e Intrusive buildings	☐	-2
3.3f Erosion	☐	-2
3.3g Lack of landscape management / maintenance	☐	-2
3.3h Invasive non-native species	☐	-2
3.3i Motorcycle scrambling and mini-bikes	☐	-2
3.3j Flytipping	☐	-3
3.3k Flooding	☐	-3
3.3l Excessive lighting	☐	-2

- 3.3m** Dog fouling ☐ -2
- 3.3n** Other ☐ -2
- Please state:

4. Sustainability

4.1 Planting

Tick which of the following are present

- 4.1a** Drought tolerant planting ☐ +1
- 4.1b** Significant areas of shade ☐ +1
- 4.1c** Orchards / edible planting ☐ +1
- 4.1d** Green or brown roofs ☐ +1
- 4.1e** Rain gardens, swales, detention basin or other SuDS / NFM features ☐ +1

4.2 Planting

Tick which of the following are present

- 4.2a** Water conservation measures ☐ +1
- 4.2b** Recycling of waste and materials ☐ +1
- 4.2c** Sustainable energy (e.g. solar/wind/electric car charging) ☐ +1
- 4.2d** Woodland management ☐ +1

4.3 Buffer

Does the green space act as a buffer for/ absorb noise or air pollution from

- 4.3a** Nearby traffic ☐ +1
- 4.3b** Nearby industry ☐ +1
- 4.3c** Other ☐ +1
- Please state:

5. Nature conservation and heritage

5.1 Vegetation

Tick which of the following are present

- 5.1a** Grassland ☐ NA or +1-3
- 5.1b** Woodland ☐ NA or +1-3
- 5.1c** Wetland ☐ NA or +1-3
- 5.1d** Hedgerows ☐ NA or +1-3
- 5.1e** Horticultural planting ☐ NA or +1-3
- 5.1f** Is there evidence of invasive non-native plant species? ☐ 0 or -1-3
- 5.1g** Does the green space form part of a wider network of green spaces and green infrastructure (e.g. street trees, verges, rivers, wider countryside?) ☐ 0 or +1-2

5.2 Management

Tick which of the following are present

- 5.2a** Animal homes e.g. Bird boxes / bat boxes / bug hotels etc. ☐ +1
- 5.2b** Infrastructure to facilitate wildlife watching e.g. bird hide ☐ +1
- 5.2c** Educational signage detailing species that can be found on the site ☐ +1
- Which of the following management practices are applied
- 5.2d** Areas of grass left unmown ☐ +1
- 5.2e** New tree planting ☐ +1

- 5.2f** Dead wood habitat piles left ☐ +1
- 5.2g** Other evidence of management for nature conservation ☐ +1

5.3 Heritage

Tick which of the following are present

- 5.3a** Heritage Park features ☐ +1
- 5.3b** Designed parkland landscape ☐ +1
- 5.3c** Any other historic features ☐ +1

6. Community involvement, marketing and culture

6.1 Community involvement

- 6.1a** Is there evidence of an active community group? ☐ +3
- Are the following notices displayed:
- 6.1b** Is there a permanent public noticeboard on site? ☐ +1
- 6.1c** If so, are up to date notices displayed? ☐ +1
- 6.1d** Is a programme of cultural or other community activities displayed? ☐ +1
- 6.1e** Are there any temporary notices on site informing users about current developments? ☐ +1
- 6.1f** If so, are they up to date? ☐ +1

6.2 Education

Is the site supporting education:

- 6.2a** Is the site providing educational interest through interpretation or evidence of specific educational activities ☐ +1
- 6.2b** Is there a built facility on site which is being used by the local community for education? ☐ +1
- 6.2c** Is there evidence that a natural feature on site is being used by the local community for education? ☐ +1
- 6.2d** Is there a school, immediately adjacent to the green space? ☐ +1

6.3 Marketing

Are any of the following social and cultural facilities located on or adjacent to green space? Tick those which apply.

- 6.3a** Community centre ☐ +1
- 6.3b** Youth centre ☐ +1
- 6.3c** Arts or cultural venue ☐ +1
- 6.3d** Village hall ☐ +1
- 6.3e** Village shop ☐ +1
- 6.3f** Sports changing rooms ☐ +1
- 6.3g** Indoor sport hall/ leisure centre ☐ +1
- 6.3h** Village shop / convenience store ☐ +1
- 6.3i** Other ☐ +1
- Please state:

6.4 Arts and culture

Please tick if yes to each question below

- 6.4a** Is there a dedicated outdoor performance area within the green space? ☐ +1
- 6.4b** Does the green space contain public art? ☐ +1
- 6.4c** Does the green space feature any recognisable landmark features of local importance? ☐ +1

7. Summary

7.1 Informal recreation

Is there evidence the green space is being used for informal recreation? Please tick those which apply.

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------|
| 7.1a Walking | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1b Dog walking | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1c Informal children's play (not play equipment) | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1d Young people hanging out | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1e Sitting/ relaxing | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1f Desire lines (unplanned worn routes) | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1g Skateboarding (not formal skate park) | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1h Cycling (not formal BMX track) | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1i Food growing | ☐ | +1 |
| 7.1j Other | ☐ | +1 |
| Please state: | | |
| 7.1k Overall provision for informal recreation? | ☐ | +1-3 |

8. Potential themes for enhancement

8.1 Benefits / services

- 8.1a** Please indicate which benefits/ services should be prioritised for future management or enhancement.

9. Comments

9.1 Further information

- 9.1a** Please add any further information on open space e.g. details of primary or secondary uses/ purposes or any significant issues/ opportunities which should be highlighted in addition to those

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