

5. Natural and semi natural open space

Introduction and definition

- 5.1 This type of open space includes woodlands, urban forestry, scrubland, grasslands (e.g. downlands, commons, meadows), wetlands, nature reserves and wastelands. Natural and semi natural open spaces play an important role in wildlife conservation and biodiversity as well as providing opportunities for informal recreation.
- 5.2 Natural and semi natural open space can frequently be found within other open space types, particularly in parks within Manchester. This serves to highlight the overlap between typologies as well as the multi functionality of open spaces.
- 5.3 While most natural and semi natural open spaces are a haven for wildlife, there are two sites designated as sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) (Cotteril Clough and Rochdale Canal) and 36 Sites of Biological Importance (SBI). This indicates that despite the urban nature of Manchester City, there are many high quality natural environments.
- 5.4 In addition, six sites in Manchester have been designated as Local Nature Reserves (LNR), specifically:
- Blackley Forest
 - Chorlton Ees and Ivy Green
 - Chorlton Water Park
 - Clayton Vale
 - Boggart Hole Clough
 - Highfield Country Park.
- 5.5 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are for both people and wildlife. They are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally. They offer people special opportunities to study or learn about nature or simply to enjoy it and are therefore equally important for both conservation and recreation.
- 5.6 In order to maximise the value of natural and semi natural open spaces it is essential that a balance between recreational use, biodiversity and conservation is achieved.
- 5.7 This section outlines the strategic context and key consultation findings relating to natural and semi natural open space in Manchester, and the recommended local standards. These local standards are then applied in order to understand local issues and priorities.

Local context

- 5.8 The key issues for natural and semi natural open spaces arising from a review of strategic documents are set out overleaf in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 – Strategic context – local

Document Reviewed	Summary of key strategic drivers	Key issues influencing the provision of natural and semi natural open space
<p>Manchester Biodiversity Strategy (2005)</p>	<p>The main aim of the strategy is conservation, protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the City for current and future generations. The six key objectives are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to create a full species and habitat audit to establish a baseline of biodiversity in the City • to use a best practice approach when managing for biodiversity • promote biodiversity in Manchester • promote biodiversity through environmental education • integrate biodiversity into the wider sustainable development agenda. <p>The strategy identifies some sites of biological importance, including Boggart Hole Clough, Clayton Vale, Chorlton Water Park, and Brookdale Clough.</p> <p>This strategy highlights the value of Local Nature Reserves (LNR's) in the protection of wildlife habitats and natural features. It is recommended that cities such as Manchester should provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessible natural green space less than 300m (in a straight line) from home • at least one accessible 20 ha site within 2km of home • one accessible 100 ha site within 5km of home • one accessible 500 ha site within 10km of home • statutory LNR's provided at a minimum level of 1ha per thousand population. 	<p>The strategy promotes the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across the City and highlights the need for environmental management and the integration of biodiversity into the sustainable development agenda.</p> <p>This study will take account of the priorities of the biodiversity strategy when considering the recreational uses of natural and semi natural open space.</p>

SECTION 5 – NATURAL AND SEMI NATURAL OPEN SPACE

Document Reviewed	Summary of key strategic drivers	Key issues influencing the provision of natural and semi natural open space
	<p>The linkages between local people and natural open space are deemed as a key benefit of environmental improvements. By increasing the use of sites and encouraging active involvement from local residents, there will be a greater appreciation of the City's natural resource.</p> <p>Incorporating biodiversity into the City's regeneration process is identified as central to reshaping communities and their environment.</p> <p>The effective provision of natural open space is crucial to the delivery of these objectives.</p>	
Manchester City Council Tree Strategy (2006) and tree audit	<p>The strategy suggests that LNRs serve as a way of protecting wildlife habitats and natural features and increasing the public's awareness of their local environment.</p> <p>It outlines the value of trees and sets out where these assets currently exist</p>	This study will provide evidence to support the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. Increased tree cover has significant environmental benefits, as well as being an alternative means of creating an impression of a green area.
The Manchester Community Strategy 2002-2012	<p>Managing the biodiversity of green spaces in Manchester is outlined in this strategy as a key driver in ensuring sustainable communities. By improving the quality of the local environment, it is highlighted that issues such as pollution and health problems can be improved.</p> <p>Another objective of this strategy is to increase the use of the natural environment by local residents through improved site security and enhanced community safety.</p>	The study will provide evidence to support the delivery of the key priorities of the community strategy.
Manchester Leisure Greenspace Management Strategy 2003	<p>This strategic framework provides a summary of existing habitat management objectives, including site specific and general woodland management planning.</p> <p>This strategy seeks to address the inconsistencies in the management of biodiversity in Manchester by undertaking a systematic approach to site management and the continuous improvement of parks and open spaces Citywide.</p>	This study will contribute to the evidence base for the development of a new Manchester Leisure Green Space Strategy and will facilitate informed decision-making.

- 5.9 These strategic documents reinforce the role of natural and semi natural open space in the local community and the importance of providing high quality, easily accessible natural and semi natural open space. The importance of balancing conservation with recreation is also emphasised, as well as the role of trees in adapting to climate change and promoting conservation across Manchester.

Consultation – assessing local needs

- 5.10 Consultation undertaken as part of the study highlights several issues with regard to natural and semi natural open space, including:
- natural and semi natural open space is one of the most frequently visited open spaces in Manchester, with 36% of respondents to the household survey indicating that they use natural open space at least once a week
 - only 2% of children indicated that they visit woods more frequently than any other type of open space. Most children use the open spaces that are closest to their home
 - the need to protect natural open space from urban development was a key theme of workshops and drop in sessions. As well as highlighting the value that natural open spaces have for recreation, many residents emphasised the value of these sites in terms of conservation and the habitats that they offer. This issue was also raised frequently during stakeholder presentations and links with the biodiversity strategy were perceived to be of paramount importance
 - both the household survey responses and qualitative consultations suggest that enhancing the quality of natural and semi natural open space in Manchester is as important as increasing the quantity of this type of open space.

Quantity of existing provision

- 5.11 The quantity of natural and semi natural open space across Manchester is summarised in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 – Provision of natural and semi natural open space across Manchester

Area	Current provision	Number of sites	Smallest site (hectares)	Largest site (Hectares)	Current provision per 1000 (hectares)
City Centre	0.21	1	-	0.21	0.02
East	130.46	30	0.22	52.96	1.80
Central	7.19	8	0.14	2.51	0.1
South	197.27	22	0.07	56.10	1.46
North	344.83	55	0.01	55.46	3.85
Wythenshawe	179.53	34	0.22	32.67	2.55
Overall	859.28	150	0.01	56.10	1.90

- 5.12 The key issues emerging from Table 5.2 and consultations relating to the quantity of provision of natural and semi natural open space across the City are:
- analysis of the quantity of natural and semi natural open space illustrates a significant disparity in the level of provision across the City
 - while provision in the North and Wythenshawe areas exceeds 2 hectares per 1000, the level of natural open space much lower in the central area (0.1ha per 1000). Provision is also significantly lower in the south than in other areas of the City. There are only eight sites in the central area compared to 55 in the north and 34 in Wythenshawe
 - findings from the household survey indicate that the quantity of natural and semi natural open space is perceived to be insufficient (70%). Only 27% of respondents Citywide view the quantity of natural open space as sufficient
 - there was a strong emphasis on the need to protect natural open spaces expressed throughout the consultation. There was a strong perception that many sites have been recently lost to development and the potential of natural open spaces was highlighted as one of the main threats to the character of Manchester during the CN4M workshop
 - the provision of natural and semi natural open space per 1000 population is low in the City Centre (0.02ha). Household survey findings indicate that there is a high level of dissatisfaction in this area of the City
 - 82% of residents in the Central area are dissatisfied with the quantity of natural open space, the highest of all areas. This area contains the second lowest amount of natural space (after the City Centre)
 - the greatest current provision and provision per 1000 population is found in the North. Within this area, 38% of respondents to the household survey feel that the provision of natural open space is sufficient – the highest levels of satisfaction in all areas.

Setting provision standards – quantity

- 5.13 The recommended local quantity standard for natural and semi natural open space has been derived from the local needs consultation and audit of provision and is summarised overleaf. Full justification for the local standard is provided within Appendix F. The standard is set at the existing level of provision.

Quantity Standard (see Appendices E and F – standards and justification, worksheet and calculator)

Existing level of provision	Recommended standard
1.90 hectares per 1000	1.90 hectares per 1000
Justification	

Current provision across Manchester is equivalent to 1.90 hectares per 1000 population.

The value placed on natural and semi natural open space is clear, both in terms of the recreational resource these spaces offer and also in light of the role that natural areas play in biodiversity and conservation. While there is an overall dissatisfaction with the provision of natural and semi natural open space in the City, the quality of sites was deemed to be more important by residents attending drop in sessions and workshops. This is also reflected by the lack of correlation between existing provision and user perceptions, suggesting that the quality of sites may be influencing the perception of quantity.

In light of this, it is suggested that the local standard is set at the existing level of provision and that emphasis is placed on improving the quality of existing sites from both a recreational and conservation perspective. Emphasis should also be placed on increasing the awareness of existing sites and maximising their value to residents.

While the standard is set at the existing level of provision, new natural and semi natural open space will be required in some areas. The urban characteristics of the City mean that the creation of new areas is challenging and alternative solutions may be required. This may include the enhancement of linkages between open spaces and the promotion and development of natural resources such as river corridors.

The recommended standard takes into account the differences in the current level of provision between the analysis areas, and also the differences in expectations living in these areas.

The Council should continue to consider incorporating natural areas within other typologies (eg Local Parks) as a key mechanism for achieving the local standard (where there is a localised surplus of that typology). This standard should be considered a minimum level of provision and should not be applied to the City Centre area.

Current provision - quality

- 5.14 The quality of existing natural and semi natural open space across the City was assessed through site visits and is summarised in Table 5.3. Full details of all the scores achieved can be found in Appendix C. Each site was measured against a site assessment matrix (Appendix D).
- 5.15 It is important to note that site assessments are conducted as a snapshot and are therefore reflective of the quality of the site on one specific day. These site visits consider only the recreational elements of the site, although the wider benefits that sites offer particularly in terms of biodiversity are also recorded.
- 5.16 The quality scores are weighted according to the findings of the local consultation. Those elements that were highlighted through consultation as being particularly important determinants of quality have been weighted higher to ensure that they have a greater influence on the overall quality score achieved.
- 5.17 In particular, the quality and variety of vegetation was perceived to be particularly important for natural and semi natural open spaces. This weighting approach is particularly important for natural and semi natural open space, where lower level maintenance may be expected in order to maintain the natural characteristics of sites. The full rationale behind this approach is set out in Appendix G. Security and safety was also perceived to be important if natural open spaces are to be inviting and welcoming to users.
- 5.18 Each site assessed achieves a quality score which is then calculated as a percentage. Table 5.3 below outlines the range of quality scores of sites, the average

quality score of a site and the lowest and highest quality sites on both a City wide and regeneration area level.

Table 5.3 – Quality of natural and semi natural open space across Manchester

Area	Range of quality Scores (%)	Average quality scores (%)	Lowest quality sites	Highest quality sites
City Centre	-	60	-	Hunts Bank
East	30 – 80	58	Glencastle Road	Stockport Branch Canal
Central	36 - 85	53	Devonshire Street NSN	Mill Green Street
South	40 – 100	64	Ventnor Avenue NSN	Chorlton Water Park
North	20 – 88	58	Middleton Road	Blackley Forest Nature Reserve
Wythenshawe	28 – 77	59	Fairywell Open Space	Shandon Avenue
Overall	20 - 100	59	Middleton Road	Chorlton Water Park

5.19 The key issues emerging from Table 5.3 and the consultation relating to the quality of natural and semi natural open space include:

- the majority of respondents to the household survey feel that the quality of natural open space is either average (36%) or good (26%). However, 20% of residents feel that the quality of natural open space is poor
- the quality ratings given by residents are similar across all six geographical areas, with the most common response in each area being that the quality of natural open space is average. Site assessments reinforce the average quality of this type of open space, with the average quality score of a site being 59%
- the greatest level of satisfaction is found in the South where 31% feel that the quality of the sites is good. Site assessments support this perception with the quality of natural and semi natural open space being highest in this area of the City
- in contrast to an extent with the household survey, the underlying theme from workshops and drop-in sessions relate to a desire for increased emphasis on the quality and value of existing sites, rather than on the development of new sites. It was felt that the quality of sites is particularly important if use of natural open spaces is to increase. Ensuring that spaces were welcoming and inviting to encourage a general perception of safety was highlighted as being important

- local nature reserves (LNRs) across Manchester were highlighted as examples of good practice, with attendees at workshops indicating that these sites provided important opportunities for local residents to experience nature.

Setting provision standards – quality

- 5.20 The recommended local quality standard for natural and semi natural open space is summarised below. This standard sets out the essential elements of a high quality natural open space in terms of recreational provision. These findings are derived from the key themes of local consultations. Full justification and consultation relating to the quality of provision is provided within Appendix G.

Quality standard (see Appendix G)

Recommended standard – NATURAL AND SEMI NATURAL OPEN SPACE	
Local consultation, national guidance and best practice suggest that the following features are essential and desirable to local residents:	
Essential	Desirable
Nature Features	Clean/Litter Free
Flowers/Trees	Good Access
Footpaths	Litter Bins
Detailed analysis of the local consultation suggests that with regards to natural and semi natural areas, the relative importance of the key components is as follows:	
Component of quality	Weighting
Security and Safety	2
Cleanliness and maintenance	3
Vegetation	1
Ancillary accommodation	4

- 5.21 When opening up access to natural and semi natural open spaces and improving their quality in terms of the visitor experience, it is also essential to consider the role of the site in terms of the provision of habitats and the species that live in the site. It is important to ensure that changes are not detrimental to the diversity of the site.

Setting provision standards – accessibility

- 5.22 The local accessibility standard is set in the form of a distance threshold and is derived directly from the findings of the local consultations. It considers the distance that residents are willing to travel to access different types of facilities as well as the mode of transport that they would anticipate using.
- 5.23 Analysis of the consultation on the accessibility of natural and semi natural open spaces across the City indicates that:
- findings from the household survey reveal that 65% of current users walk to access a natural or semi natural open space. Travel times of current users are split over three timeframes: 0-5 minutes (28%), 5-10 minutes (19%) and 11-15 minutes (28%). This suggests that proximity to the home plays a key part in determining which open spaces residents visit frequently

- consistent with current user patterns, the majority of respondents to the household survey would expect to walk to access a natural open space (54%) – this suggests that residents expect local natural spaces, despite living in a city environment
 - within the City Centre, 33% of residents would expect to drive to a natural or semi natural open space, indicating that there is an acknowledgement that this type of open space might not be provided in the City Centre. At drop in sessions in the City Centre, several visitors indicated that they had travelled into the City along natural linear routes, including green corridors, cycle paths and towpaths. This suggests that while natural open space may be absent in the City Centre, there are opportunities to ensure that residents still have access to this type of experience
 - workshops revealed an ongoing concern that not enough was being done to advertise the benefits of natural spaces and the opportunities that are linked to these sites, particularly in relation to biodiversity. Ensuring continued access to these sites was deemed to be very important.
- 5.24 The recommended local accessibility standard for natural and semi natural open space is summarised below. Full justification for the local standard is provided in Appendix H. In light of the emphasis on localised provision and the current patterns of travel, the standard promotes local provision of natural and semi natural open space. Due to the dense urban nature of the City Centre area, a separate standard has been set for this area which promotes access by public transport (and green linkages).
- 5.25 Standards set by Natural England suggest that all residents should be within 300m of a natural open space. While the nature of Manchester restricts opportunities to achieve this and the standard has therefore been set above this level, the recommended accessibility standard should be considered as a minimum level of provision. These aspirational targets are also a key component of the biodiversity strategy.

Accessibility standard (see Appendix H)

Recommended standard	
15 MINUTE WALK TIME (720 METRES)	
15 MINUTE DRIVE TIME – CITY CENTRE	
Justification	
<p>The local consultation serves to highlight the split in opinion regarding whether natural and semi natural sites should be accessed on foot or in the car (24% of respondents would travel by car, whilst 54% of people stated that they would travel on foot). To a certain extent, this will relate to the varying size and function of spaces within each locality. Indeed, some natural spaces within the area are visited by tourists and residents from outside the City who have travelled significant distances to reach specific sites.</p> <p>A drive time standard would produce a significantly larger distance threshold than a walk time standard. PPG17 states that higher thresholds may be appropriate if there is no realistic possibility of sufficient new provision to allow lower thresholds to be achievable, but can result in levels of provision that are too low and may not meet some local needs. In the context of the local consultation findings regarding the quantity of provision (51% think that there is not enough as opposed to only 4% who think there is more than enough), and given the importance of facilitating everyday contact with nature, a standard based on a walk time</p>	

is recommended as this will help to deliver a greater number of localised natural and semi natural spaces. This also recognises the standards produced by Natural England, which promote local access to natural open space. It is therefore recommended that a walk time standard is adopted.

An assessment of the opinions of residents demonstrates that people are willing to walk up to 15 minutes (third quartile and average) to reach semi natural open space. Given the characteristics of Manchester and the consequential challenges of providing natural and semi natural open space, along with the importance of balancing quantity, quality and accessibility, a 15 minute walk time standard is recommended.

City Centre

Based on local consultation and the limited quantity of natural and semi natural provision in the City Centre, a higher threshold is recommended due to the difficulties in delivering new provision. A 15 minute drive time is deemed appropriate based on local consultation (33% of residents would expect to travel by car).

- 5.26 The application of this standard will need to be considered in the clear context of the wider value and role of natural and semi natural open space sites. While access to the public is important, in some instances public access can conflict with the biodiversity and habitat benefits that these sites offer. This should be a particularly important consideration during the application of standards phase.

Applying provision standards

- 5.27 The application of the recommended quality, quantity and accessibility standards is essential to understand the existing distribution of open space, sport and recreation facilities, identify the key issues and highlight areas where provision is insufficient to meet local need.
- 5.28 The application of the local quantity standard for each area is set out in Table 5.4. The table illustrates the application of the standard against the current provision in each area of the City and also highlights the quantity of population growth that could be sustained before provision falls below the minimum standard (where applicable).
- 5.29 Due to the nature of the City Centre the quantity standards have not been applied in this area.

Table 5.4 – Application of quantity standard

Area	Current balanced against local standard (1.90 hectares per 1000 population)	Additional population growth that could be sustained
East	-7.11	Below minimum
Central	-134.86	Below minimum
South	-58.83	Below minimum
North	174.55	91,866
Wythenshawe	45.67	24,035
Overall		Currently meets standard

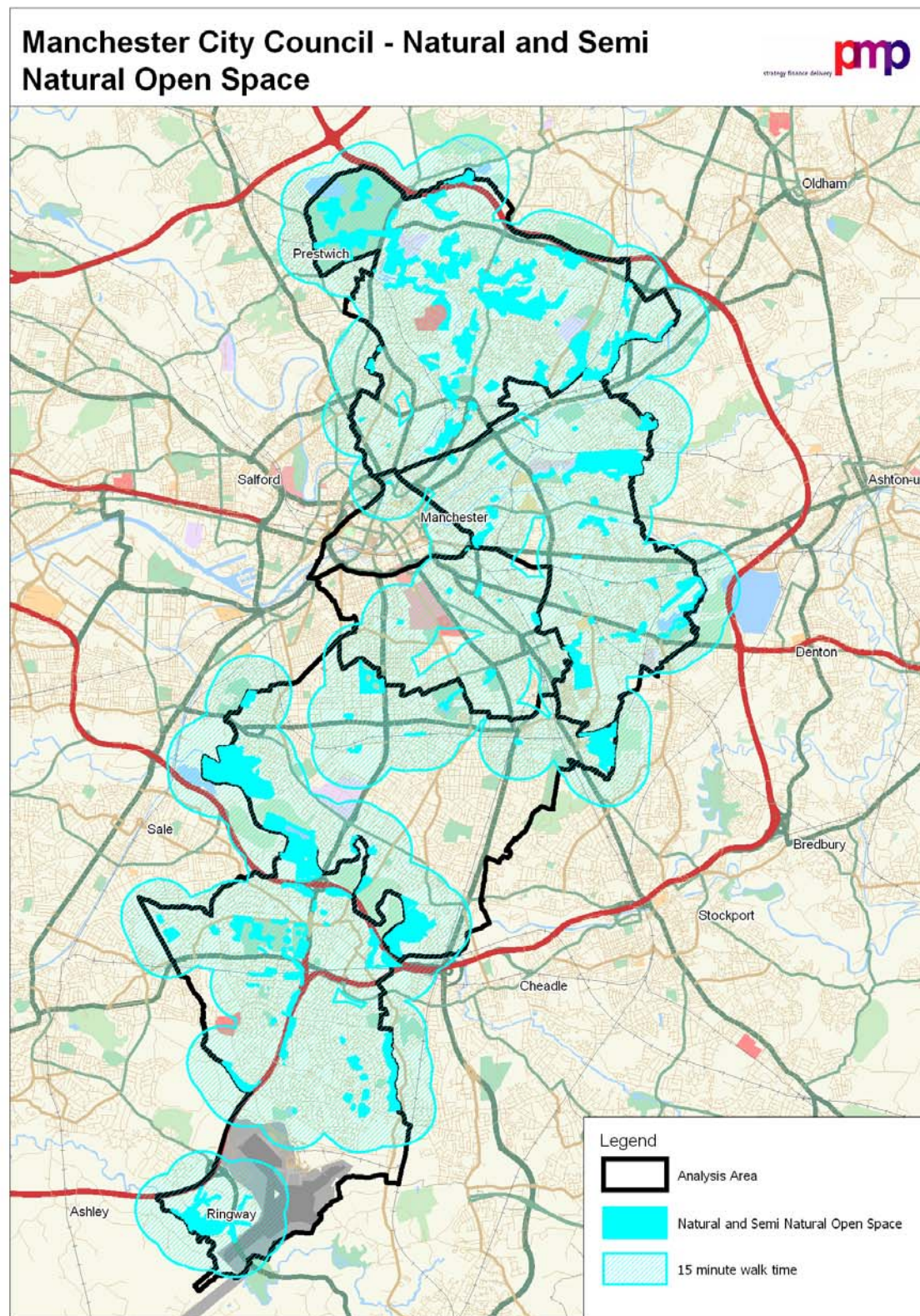
5.30 The application of standards results in the following issues:

- overall, the standard is set at the existing level of provision and the current provision is therefore sufficient to meet minimum standards
- as highlighted previously, there is a significant disparity between the levels of natural open space across the City and only the North Manchester and Wythenshawe areas therefore have sufficient provision to meet the minimum standard
- the greatest shortfall of natural and semi natural open space is found within the Central area (134.86 hectares) – this area contains significantly less natural open spaces than other areas of the City
- when considering the impact that future population growth will have on the demand for natural and semi natural open space, North Manchester will have adequate provision to meet an additional population growth of 91,866 people. Wythenshawe (24,035) can accommodate smaller population increases before provision is insufficient to meet demand.

5.31 The application of the local accessibility standards for natural and semi natural open space is set out in Maps 5.1 and 5.2 overleaf.

5.32 Map 5.1 demonstrates the application of the walk time catchment while Map 5.2 evaluates the proportion of residents who are within the appropriate drivetime of at least one natural and semi natural open space.

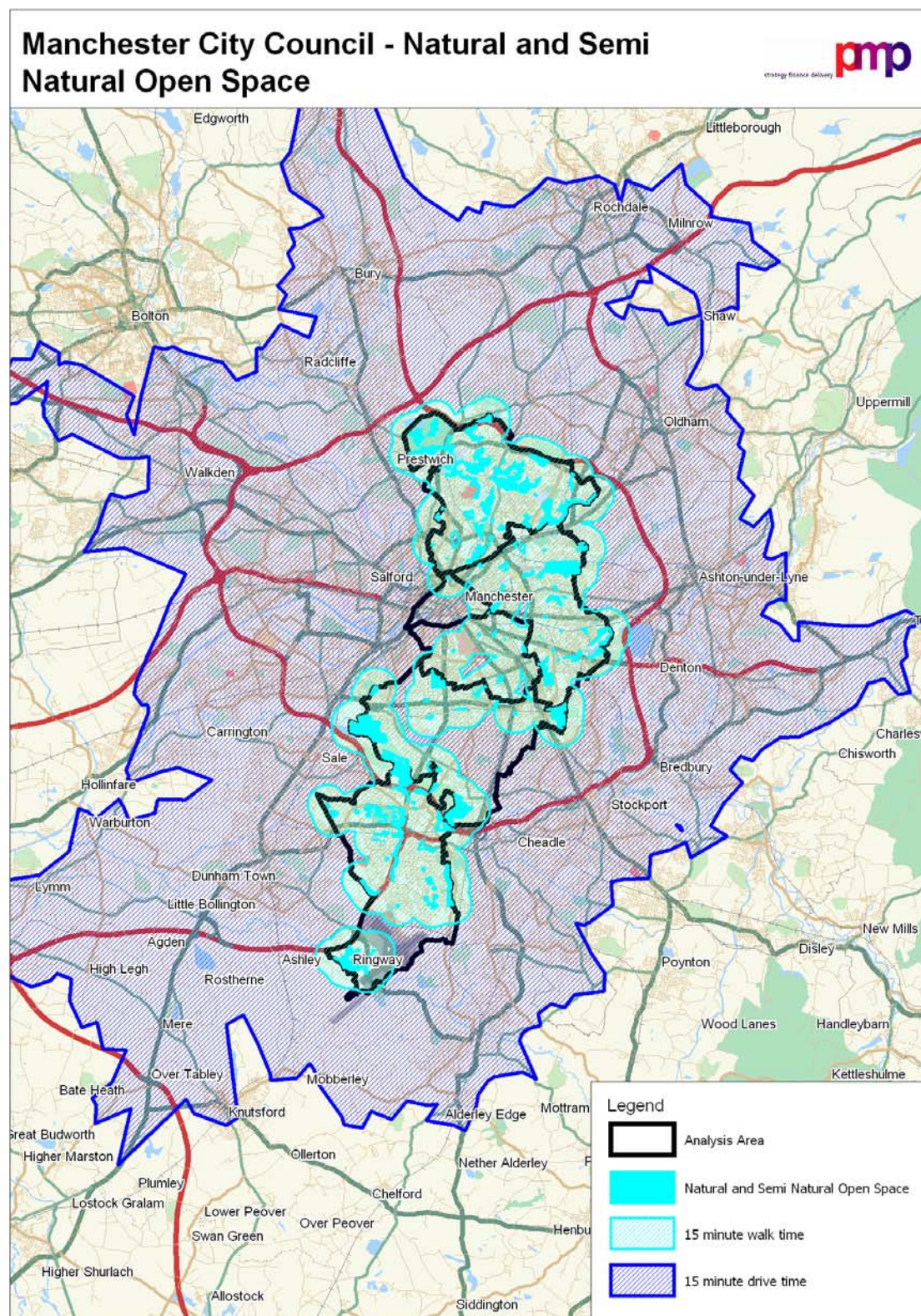
Map 5.1 - Provision of natural and semi natural open space in Manchester



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NORTH

Map 5.2 – Provision of natural and semi natural open space in Manchester (walk time and drive time)



5.33 Maps 5.1 and 5.2 indicate the following:

- despite an uneven distribution of natural and semi natural open spaces in quantitative terms, geographically sites are well dispersed across the City. Nearly all residents in the City have access to a natural or semi natural open space within the recommended 15 minute walk time
- however, areas of deficiency are evident in the east of South Manchester and in the south of the City Centre
- all residents have access to a natural or semi natural open space within a 15 minute drive time.

Future priorities for the provision of natural and semi natural open space across Manchester

5.34 The remainder of this section summarises the key priorities for natural and semi natural open space and then highlights specific issues for each area of the City which arise as a result of the application of the local standards.

5.35 Specifically, the key priorities consider:

- the quality of natural and semi natural open spaces
- improving access to sites
- the protection of existing sites.

5.36 The key priorities have been derived from the main themes arising from consultation, as well as the analysis of existing provision and the application of the standards.

The quality of natural and semi natural open spaces

5.37 Consultation revealed that the quality of natural and semi natural open spaces is as important as the quantity of sites. The need to consider quality from both a recreational and conservation perspective was emphasised.

5.38 From a recreational perspective, while it is not expected that sites will be managed in the same way as parks/amenity green spaces, they should be inviting and controlled.

5.39 The key aspirations for natural and semi natural open spaces identified by residents included nature features, flowers and trees and footpaths. At workshops, residents also highlighted the importance of providing information and learning points. Information boards at local nature reserves were highlighted as a good example of this.

5.40 Site assessments revealed that the quality of natural and semi natural open space in Manchester is average, with the average quality score of sites being 63%. The quality scores of sites ranges significantly (from 20% - 100%) and the average quality scores of sites within the six analysis areas is largely similar, with the exception of Central Manchester, where the average quality score of a site is 56%.

5.41 The highest quality natural and semi natural open space can be found in South Manchester, where the average quality score of a site is 70%. The poorest quality provision is located in Central Manchester, where the average quality score of a site is 56%.

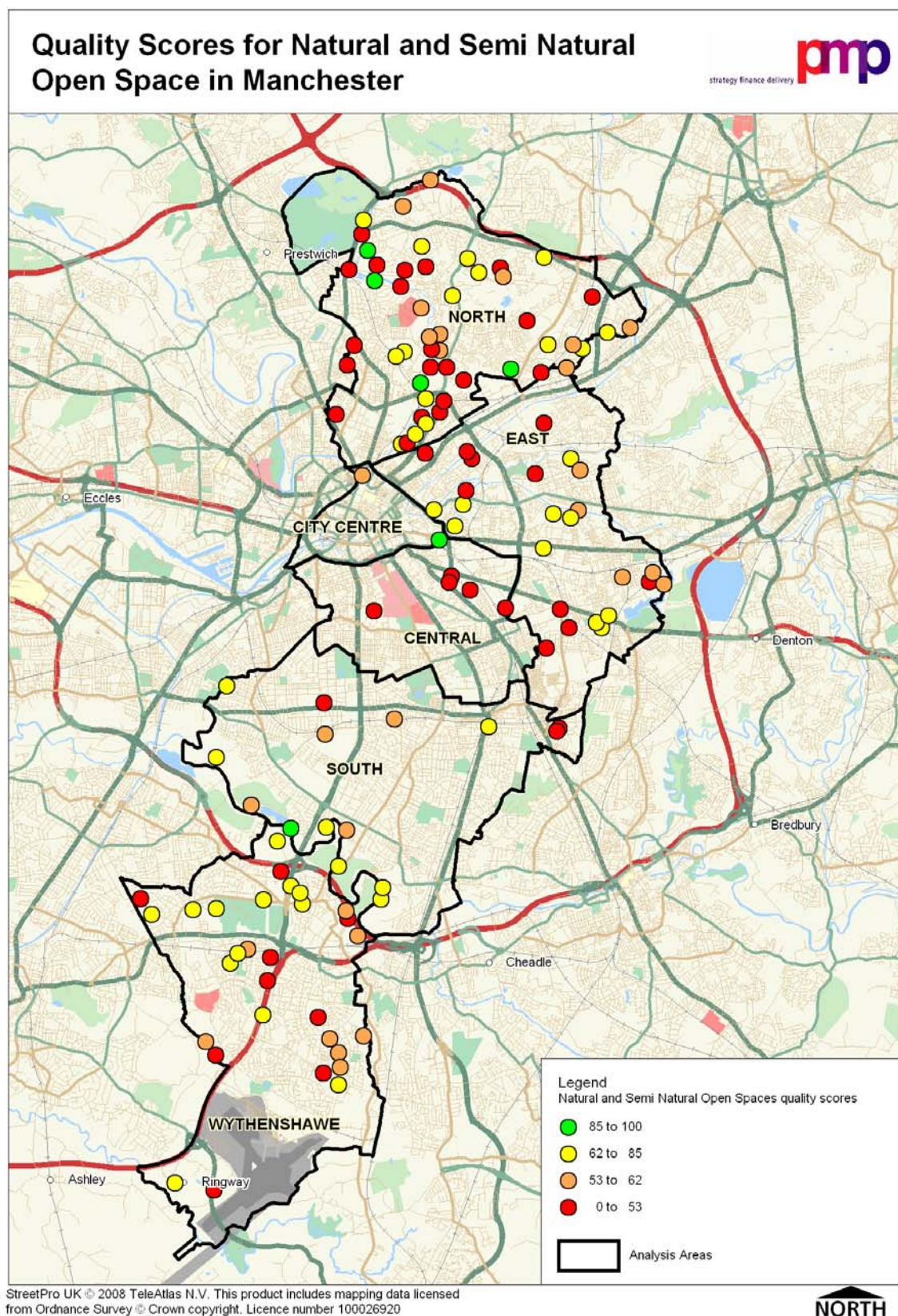
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- 5.42 33 sites achieved quality scores below 60%, highlighting the need for significant improvement to a number of sites in the City. The poorest quality sites are as follows:
- Middleton Road (20%)
 - Kingsbridge Road (24%)
 - Glencastle Road (30%)
 - Bailey's Wood (30%).
- 5.43 The key issues arising with regard to the quality of natural and semi open spaces included a perception that these sites were not safe, the need to improve ancillary provision and to ensure that footpaths were accessible to all residents.
- 5.44 Natural and semi natural open spaces been divided into quartiles, based on the quality scores achieved during site assessments. These quartiles are as follows:
- poor quality – 0% - 53%
 - average quality – 54% - 62%
 - good quality – 63% - 84%
 - excellent quality – 85% - 100%.
- 5.45 The quality benchmark for natural and semi natural open space is set at 85%, the score required for a natural or semi natural open space to be categorised as excellent.
- 5.46 Map 5.3 illustrates the quality of natural and semi natural open spaces from a recreational perspective. It can be seen that there are only a small number of high quality sites in Manchester. Clusters of poor quality sites are evident across Manchester, particularly within Wythenshawe, North Manchester and East Manchester. The quality of provision in Central Manchester is particularly poor.

NSN1

Identify opportunities for improving the quality of natural and semi natural open spaces. Enhancements should be informed by the quality vision and site assessment quality scores. Sites require an overall score of 85% or above to fall within what is currently classified as the top quartile – the benchmark for quality.

Map 5.3 – Quality of natural and semi natural open space in Manchester



- 5.47 While enhancement of sites for recreational purposes is important, consideration should also be given to the ecological and conservation opportunities provided and the habitats that these sites can create. As consultation highlights, natural and semi natural open spaces are amongst the most popular of all the open spaces in the City. It is therefore important to ensure that promotion of recreational opportunities on site is balanced with the wider functions of the site and that recreation and wildlife uses are in equilibrium. This will require careful management and maintenance. The Biodiversity Strategy highlights the fact that ecologically-sensitive management practices are already in place at parks and open spaces across the City and that this practice should be promoted further.

NSN2

Support and implement the priorities of the Biodiversity Action Plan. This may include encouraging the use of sustainable and sympathetic management techniques, active conservation management and the preparation of management plans for key sites to protect and increase the biodiversity across the City.

The impact of recreation on sites of high biodiversity value should be monitored.

Protecting Natural Open Spaces

- 5.48 The overriding theme of consultation was the need to protect natural and semi natural open space from development. Linked with this, Manchester's Biodiversity Strategy aims to protect and enhance biodiversity in the City. The strategy identifies a number of priority habitats at natural or semi natural open space sites across the City and reinforces the biological value of many sites.
- 5.49 The local quantity standard has been set at the existing level of provision. This places an emphasis on improving the quality of natural open spaces. In light of the importance of these sites to local residents, consideration should be given to the protection of these sites from development. The protection of these sites will also be a key component of the strategy to reduce climate change and promote urban cooling. Protection should extend to all natural and semi natural sites.
- 5.50 The implications for the LDF of the protection of these sites will be discussed in Section 20.

NSN3

In light of the importance of natural open spaces, allocate all natural open spaces as protected open space through the Local Development Framework. Natural open spaces should only be lost to development where a series of exception criteria can be met

Access to natural and semi natural open spaces and creating a green network

- 5.51 Site visits highlight that signage is poor at a number of natural open space sites. General access to sites, particularly footpaths, is also considered to be poor at numerous sites.
- 5.52 Manchester's Biodiversity Strategy emphasises the importance of increasing access to natural or semi natural open space.

- 5.53 In addition to the accessibility issues identified during site visits, awareness of natural and semi natural open spaces and the opportunities that they provide emerged as a key issue.
- 5.54 The accessibility issues and desire to promote usage of natural and semi natural open space reinforces the importance of an effective green infrastructure and links between different types of open space. The urban nature of Manchester means that access to natural and semi natural open spaces is more restricted than in other areas. In many instances, green corridors (including footpaths and towpaths) will offer solutions to meet natural and semi natural open space needs.
- 5.55 The emphasis on improving such linkages is a priority of the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks Citywide and will help to create a sustainable environment.

NSN4

Maximise access to natural and semi natural open space sites by ensuring that footpaths are well maintained and clear signage is provided.

Promote awareness of natural and semi natural open spaces and the benefits that they offer within the local community.

Promote the development of a green network across the City by creating links between amenity spaces, parks and natural open spaces.

Determining the priorities in each area of the City

- 5.56 In order to identify geographical areas of priority and those areas where there is potential unmet demand, the quantity and accessibility standards are applied together. The quantity standards identify whether areas are quantitatively above or below the recommended minimum standard; and the accessibility standards will help to determine where those deficiencies are of high importance. The quality on existing provision is also of paramount importance, particularly in light of the emphasis on quality evident during local consultations.
- 5.57 While there is a focus on the quality of natural areas, it remains important to ensure that all residents are within the appropriate distance threshold of a site.
- 5.58 While the previous issues relate to natural and semi natural open space in all areas of the City, consideration has therefore been given to the key issues relating to the provision of natural and semi natural open space in each area.

Manchester City Centre

- 5.59 Only one natural open space is located in this area (Hunt's Bank). Due to the character of this area and the lack of naturally occurring space, quantity standards have not been applied to this area.
- 5.60 Application of the accessibility standard reveals that all residents in the City Centre have access to a natural or semi natural open space within the recommended 15 minute drive time by public transport.
- 5.61 Although the lack of quantity standard in this area demonstrates that new provision is not expected, it remains important to maximise local access to these types of open space for residents.

Short – Medium Term / Ongoing	Promote the development of green linkages connecting residents with natural open spaces in nearby areas. This may include opening up access to river and canal corridors as well as making links between existing open spaces.
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East Manchester

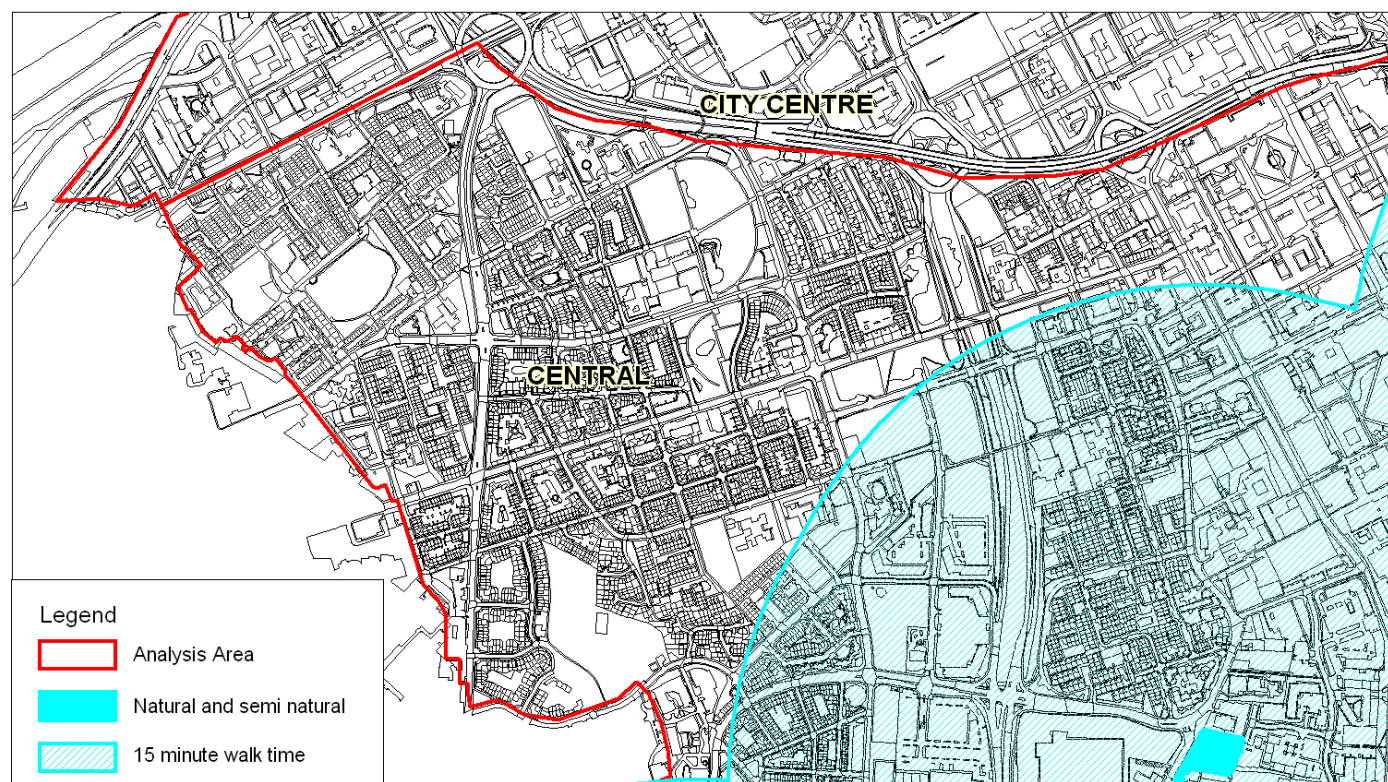
- 5.62 Application of the quantity standard indicates that there is insufficient provision of natural and semi natural open space to meet demand.
- 5.63 Despite this, accessibility mapping suggests that all residents in the area have access to a natural or semi natural open space within the recommended 15 minute walk time. This suggests that the overall distribution of sites is even.
- 5.64 The quality of natural and semi natural open space in East Manchester is average. The average quality score of a site is 58% and quality scores range significantly from 30% - 80%. Nine sites scored 50% or below, highlighting the need for significant qualitative improvements to a number of sites in the area. Medlock Valley Clayton Vale (53 hectares) is a particularly important site in East Manchester in terms of recreational and wildlife value.
- 5.65 In light of the even distribution of natural and semi natural open space, priorities should focus on qualitative improvements. As previously recommended, it will be important to maintain a balance between recreation and biodiversity. This focus on quality supports the targets of the New East Manchester SRF, which sets out to restore and enhance unique natural features.

Short – Medium Term	Drive a programme of improvements to the quality of existing natural open spaces, taking into account the findings of the site assessments as well as the need to balance recreation with biodiversity and conservation.
Longer Term	Promote the development of green linkages connecting residents with open spaces in nearby areas as well as creating wildlife corridors for migration and travel. This may include opening up access to river and canal corridors as well as making links between existing open spaces.

Central Manchester

- 5.66 With the exception of the City Centre the Central area contains the lowest levels of natural and semi natural open space (7.19 hectares). As a consequence of low levels of provision, application of the quantity standard demonstrates a significant shortfall. (134.86 hectares).
- 5.67 Despite the greatest quantitative shortfall of natural and semi natural open space accessibility mapping reveals that nearly all residents have access to a natural or semi natural open space within the recommended accessibility catchment. Only a small number of residents in the west (Hulme area) do not have access to a natural or semi natural open space (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 – Deficiencies in Central Manchester



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SECTION 5 – NATURAL AND SEMI NATURAL OPEN SPACE

- 5.68 Although there is a lack of natural and semi natural open space, residents in this area are within the recommended 10 minute walk time of local parks and amenity spaces. This ensures that residents have access to at least one site offering informal recreation opportunities in this area.
- 5.69 The quality of natural and semi natural open space is the lowest of all areas in the City, with the average quality score of a site being 53%. Only one site, Mill Green Street (85%), scored over 60% and four sites scored below 50%, indicating the need for significant qualitative improvements to a number of sites in the area.
- 5.70 As highlighted, there are a range of challenges with regard to the provision of natural and semi natural open spaces within the Central area. Although with the exception of the Hulme area the distribution of these sites is even, the sites are small in size and do not have the capacity to serve the quantity of residents they are required to. Additionally, the majority of sites are part of larger sites, such as parks.
- 5.71 In order to address these issues, it is likely that a variety of solutions will be required. The nature of the Central area means that the creation of new spaces will be difficult. It will therefore be essential to maximise the function of, and access to, existing open spaces as well as taking opportunities for new space where these arise.

Short – Medium Term	Drive a programme of improvements to the quality of existing natural open spaces, taking into account the findings of the site assessments as well as the need to balance recreation with biodiversity and conservation.
Short – Medium Term	Integrate natural and semi natural open spaces with other types of open space for example ensure that parks contain an area of natural space. Seek opportunities to provide new spaces where possible.
Short – Medium Term	Promote the development of green linkages connecting residents with natural open spaces in nearby areas as well as creating wildlife corridors for migration and travel. This may include opening up access to river and canal corridors as well as making links between existing open spaces. As an alternative, it may include development of tree lined streets etc.

South Manchester

- 5.72 Application of the quantity standard reveals that there is insufficient natural and semi natural open space to meet the minimum standard, with the shortfall equating to 58.83 hectares.
- 5.73 Accessibility mapping illustrates this shortfall, with the majority of residents in the east of the area (around Fallowfield, Burnage and Levenshulme) unable to access this type of open space (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 – Deficiencies in the east of South Manchester



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- 5.74 When considering the provision of local parks and amenity green space in the east of South Manchester, the majority of residents have access to at least one of these types of open space within a 10 minute walk time. However, areas of deficiency are still evident.
- 5.75 The SRF emphasises the importance of natural open space, particularly local nature reserves, in this area of the City and an objective of the strategy is to protect and enhance the natural environment.
- 5.76 The quality of natural and semi natural open space in South Manchester is the greatest of all areas in the City, with the average quality score of a site being 64%. Although the average quality of natural open space is highest in this area of the City, nine sites scored below 70% and only one site achieved a quality score that falls within the top quartile (85% and above). Focus should therefore be placed on enhancing the quality of natural and semi natural open space in South Manchester.
- 5.77 Like the Central area, in order to address these issues, it is likely that a variety of solutions will be required. Since the creation of new spaces will be difficult, in light of the shortfalls in existing provision, it will therefore be essential to maximise the function of and access to existing open spaces.

Short – Medium Term	Drive a programme of improvements to the quality of existing natural open spaces, taking into account the findings of the site assessments as well as the need to balance recreation with biodiversity and conservation.
Short – Medium Term	Integrate natural and semi natural open spaces with other types of open space for example ensure that parks contain an area of natural space.
Short – Medium Term	Promote the development of green linkages connecting residents with natural open spaces in nearby areas as well as creating wildlife corridors for migration and travel. This may include opening up access to river and canal corridors as well as making links between existing open spaces.

North Manchester

- 5.78 North Manchester contains the highest quantity of natural and semi natural open space of all analysis areas (344.83 hectares). As a result, application of the quantity standard reveals that there is sufficient provision to meet demand and the current provision of this type of open space can accommodate a population growth of 91,866.
- 5.79 Accessibility mapping reinforces this with all residents able to access a natural or semi natural open space within the recommended 15 minute walk time.
- 5.80 The quality of natural and semi natural open space is average, with the average quality score of a site being 58%. Quality scores range significantly from 20% - 88% and 23 sites scored below 60%, highlighting the need to enhance the quality of natural and semi natural open space in this area of the City.
- 5.81 In light of the high quantity of natural and semi natural open space, the future focus will be on enhancing the quality of existing sites in the area.

Short – Medium Term	Drive a programme of improvements to the quality of existing natural open spaces, taking into account the findings of the site assessments as well as the need to balance recreation with biodiversity and conservation.
Short – Medium Term	Promote the development of green linkages connecting residents with natural open spaces in nearby areas as well as creating wildlife corridors for migration and travel.

Wythenshawe

- 5.82 Application of the accessibility standard indicates that all residents have access to a natural or semi natural open space within the recommended 15 minute walk time. This suggests that sites are well distributed across the area. Quantitative analysis supports this high level of accessibility, with provision exceeding minimum standards. The provision of natural and semi natural open space is sufficient to accommodate a population growth of 24,035.
- 5.83 The quality of natural and semi natural open space in the area is average. Quality scores range from 40% - 77% and the average quality score of a site is 59%. However, there are significant improvements required to a number of sites, with 15 sites in Wythenshawe achieving a quality score below 60%.
- 5.84 In consideration of the high level of access and sufficient provision, the Council should seek to enhance the quality of natural and semi natural open space in the area. The SRF identifies Wythenshawe Park as an important site in the area at which biodiversity and nature conservation should be enjoyed and improved.

Short – Medium Term	Drive a programme of improvements to the quality of existing natural open spaces, taking into account the findings of the site assessments as well as the need to balance recreation with biodiversity and conservation. In particular, the SRF identifies particular opportunities to improve the biodiversity value of Wythenshawe Park.
Short – Medium Term	Promote the development of green linkages connecting residents with natural open spaces in nearby areas as well as creating wildlife corridors for migration and travel.

Summary

- 5.85 Natural and semi natural open space is one of the most frequently visited types of open space in the City, with 36% of residents visiting natural open spaces weekly or more frequently.
- 5.86 In addition to the recreational value of natural resources, residents also frequently recognise the wider benefits of natural open spaces, particularly in terms of providing opportunities for biodiversity and habitat creation. The need to protect natural and semi natural open space from development was a key theme throughout consultation and while recreational opportunities should be encouraged, this should be balanced with conserving and promoting biodiversity.
- 5.87 Application of the recommended quality, quantity and accessibility standards highlights that the key priority for natural and semi natural open space is

improvements to the quality of sites. While there are quantitative deficiencies, the even distribution of sites means that the majority of residents fall within the appropriate catchment area of at least one natural open space. Maximising access to natural and semi natural sites across the City and increasing awareness should also be key priorities for the Council going forward.

- 5.88 While the distribution of sites is good, the low quantity of natural and semi natural open space in some areas of the City should be addressed over the LDF period, either through the creation of new natural areas or through the implementation of alternative solutions, such as green corridor routes.
- 5.89 It is therefore recommended that the key priorities for the future delivery of provision of natural and semi natural open space in Manchester that should be addressed Local Development Framework and/or other delivery mechanisms are:
- improve access to natural and semi natural open spaces through improved signage and well maintained footpaths
 - monitor the impact of recreation on natural and semi natural open spaces
 - identify opportunities for improving the quality of natural and semi natural open spaces, both in terms of the wildlife and habitat values of the site, but also for recreational purposes
 - maximise biodiversity on natural and semi natural open spaces through the implementation of effective management and maintenance regimes. This might include active conservation management and the preparation of management plans for each site
 - incorporate a policy protecting existing natural and semi natural open space within the Local Development Framework and a policy advocating improved biodiversity and conservation management
 - facilitate the development of new semi natural open spaces prioritising areas where access to natural open space is currently limited particularly the central and south areas of the City. This may be through the development of new sites or the creation / enhancement of green corridors.