

Manchester Local Plan (Publication Draft) Regulation 19

6. Open Space Background Topic Paper, August 2026

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This topic paper summarises the policy background and the evidence base which underpins Policy SI 1: Protection of Existing Open Space, Sport and Recreation Land and Facilities. It explains the methodology behind reaching the quantity thresholds for determining a surplus or deficit in open space. It also sets out in more detail how the quality thresholds, also contained within Policy SI 1, will be used.

2.0 Policy Context

2.1.0 NPPF 2021

- 2.1.1 NPPF 2021 sets out the purpose of the planning system as being to contribute to 21 states that for plan-making this means that:
- a) all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;
 - b) strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:
 - i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area¹; or
 - ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.
- 2.1.2 This wider purpose is important in providing the context within which individual Local Plan policies are prepared.

- 2.1.3 NPPF 2021 states that planning policies should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and provide the recreational facilities that the community needs by planning positively for open space, amongst other listed services and facilities.
- 2.1.4 NPPF 2021 provides further detail on planning for open space and recreation. Planning policies are required to be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information from these assessments is then used to determine what open space sport and recreational provision the plan should seek to accommodate.
- 2.1.5 NPPF 2021 makes it clear that existing open space, sport and recreational buildings, including playing fields should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken to show the open space, land or buildings to be surplus; or the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or the development is for an alternative sports or recreational provision the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.
- 2.1.6 The Manchester Local Plan (Publication Draft) has been written with regard to NPPF 2021 and to be consistent with PfE which was examined against NPPF 2021.

2.2.0 NPPF 2024

- 2.2.1 NPPF 2021 has been superseded by NPPF 2024, however, the approach towards open space and recreational provision within NPPF 2024 remains the same as that set out in NPPF 2021.

2.3.0 National Planning Practice Guidance

- 2.3.1 NPPG provides advice on open space, sports and recreational facilities and other connected areas. Different sections have been updated over the years.

Open Space, Sports and recreation Facilities; Public Rights of Way; and Local Green Space (March 2014)

- 2.3.2 This guidance states that open space should be taken into account in planning for new development and considering new proposals that may impact existing open space. Open space is defined broadly and the range of benefits that open space can bring is acknowledged. Planning Practice Guidance states it is for the local planning authority to assess the need for open space and opportunities for new provision in their areas.
- 2.3.3 Other relevant sections of NPPG are listed below and described in more detail in paragraphs 2.18 - 2.29 of the OSA (2026):
- Planning Practice Guidance - Healthy and Safe Communities(August 2022)
 - Planning Practice Guidance – Climate Change (March 2014)

- Planning Practice Guidance - Natural Environment (June 2025)
- Planning Practice Guidance – Flood Risk and Coastal Change (September 2025)

2.4.0 Places for Everyone Joint Local Plan 2024 (PfE)

- 2.4.1 PfE is the strategic spatial plan for nine of the ten Greater Manchester Authorities including Manchester ([Microsoft Word - Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan](#)). It sets the strategic policies which the Manchester Local Plan policies must be consistent with. It also sets the scale of economic and housing growth that Manchester is required to achieve, including around 1.5 mill sqm of office space and 60,00 new homes by 2039.
- 2.4.2 PfE policies of particular relevance to the Manchester Local Plan open space, sport and recreation policies are as follows:
- 2.4.3 Policy JP-P7: Sport and Recreation. This states that a network of high quality and accessible sports and recreation facilities will be protected and enhanced. The policy lists how this will be achieved, including by, where appropriate, setting out more comprehensive and detailed recreational standards and standards for provision for designated play areas in district local plans, having regard to existing and future needs.
- 2.4.4 Additional PfE policies that relate to open space are:
- JP – G6 –Urban Green Space which seeks to ensure appropriate scale, type and quality of accessible urban green space
 - JP - P1 Sustainable Places which requires development to be consistent with a series of key attributes including the inclusion of high quality and well managed green infrastructure and quality public realm.
 - JP - P6 Health, which requires new development to maximise positive contribution to health and well-being, where practicable.

2.5.0 Further Strategy Documents

- 2.5.1 Further Strategy documents which have informed the OSA and policy preparation are:
- Manchester Parks Strategy (2017 - 2027);
 - Manchester City Council Climate Change Framework (2020-2025);
 - Manchester's Great Outdoors (2015-2025);
 - Our Rivers, Our City Strategy (2021);
 - Manchester City Council: Design for Access 2;
 - Manchester Residential Quality Guidance (2017);
 - Year of the Child Survey (2022);
 - Manchester Play Satisfaction (2021);
 - Greater Manchester Air Quality Action Plan; and
 - Core Strategy DPD - developer contributions.

2.5.2 The review of these documents is found in Appendix B of the OSA (2026).

3.0 Evidence

3.1.0 Open Space Assessment

- 3.1.1 Manchester’s Open Space Assessment (OSA) was originally prepared in 2022 and has since been updated to reflect changing baseline data; to ensure that the sites included or excluded were consistent with the methodology and to take account of more recently published national best practice such as The Green Infrastructure Framework (Natural England, January 2023).
- 3.1.2 Outdoor Sports Facilities (other than those which are multifunctional) are not included in the OSA as these have been assessed separately as part of the Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy.
- 3.1.3 The OSA 2026 builds on the work undertaken by KKP in 2022. The OSA is in line with NPPF 2021 and NPPF 2024 and with National Planning Practice Guidance for Open Space.
- 3.1.4 Table 1, below, describes the open space typologies included within the OSA.

Table 1: Open space typologies included in the open space assessment

Open Space Typology	Description
Allotments	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social Inclusion.
Amenity Greenspace	Most commonly but not exclusively found in housing areas. Includes informal recreation green spaces and village greens.
Cemeteries, Churchyards and other Burial Grounds	Cemeteries and churchyards including disused churchyards and other burial grounds.
Civic Spaces	Mostly hard surfaced areas usually located within town or city centres
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace	Includes country parks, nature reserves, publicly accessible woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands and wastelands.
Parks and Gardens	Includes urban parks and formal gardens. Parks usually contain a variety of facilities and may have one or more of the other types of open space within

Open Space Typology	Description
	them. Note this typology does not include private residential gardens.
Provision for Children and Young People	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction specifically designed as equipped play facilities for young people and children.

- 3.1.5 The OSA methodology is set out in Chapter 3 of the OSA (2026). The approach used follows the principles within the Companion Guide to Planning Policy Guidance Note 17. Whilst Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 has been superseded the approach outlined has not been replaced and is still considered relevant.
- 3.1.6 Chapter 4 of the OSA (2026) provides an assessment of local needs, which considers population, including density, distribution and future growth to 2039. Community consultation was also undertaken to gather views of residents and stakeholders across the City, relating to the use and perception of open space, the detailed results of which can be found in Appendix D of the OSA (2026).
- 3.1.7 Chapter 5 of the OSA presents the results of the quantity, quality, value and accessibility assessment for the City as a whole, the sub areas and each of the open space typologies.
- 3.1.8 Amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural sites listed in the 2022 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), or Pipeline Employment Sites (2022) were not included in the OSA (2022) as they are expected to come forward for development within the lifetime of the emerging Local Plan. This approach was taken to provide a more accurate estimate of the quantity of each typology that could realistically be provided across the city within the strategic context of also meeting objectively assessed housed and employment needs, through until 2039.
- 3.1.9 As part of the OSA (2026) update, sites which were listed in the 2022 SHLAA but remain open space and no longer fall within the 2025 SHLAA have been included in the OSA (2026) update. This updated quantitative assessment has formed the basis for the open space quantity standards set out in Table 12.1 of Policy SI 1 Protection of Existing Open Space, Sport and Recreation Land and Facilities, Manchester Local Plan (Publication Draft). These will be used to assess whether there is a surplus or deficit of individual open space typologies where development is proposed on existing open space.
- 3.1.10 Whilst the sites within the SHLAA and Pipeline Employment Sites were excluded for the purposes of setting these thresholds, the OSA and Manchester Local Plan (Publication Draft) Policy SI 1 make it very clear that any proposals for development on existing open space must be assessed against these thresholds and list the criteria when

development would be permitted in line with NPPF 2021 and NPPF 2024. The accompanying policy explanation provides further clarity that this also includes sites within the SHLAA or any pipeline employment site.

3.2.0 Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy

- 3.2.1 The Manchester Indoor Sports Built Facilities Strategy and Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (MPPOSS) together with the supporting MPPOSS Assessment and MPPOSS Annual Monitoring Report 2024, provide more detail on the needs for indoor and outdoor sports provision.
- 3.2.2 The MPPOSS sets out a series of strategic recommendations. Recommendation (a) under Aim 1 of the MPPOSS states “Ensure, through the use of the Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy, that outdoor sports facilities are protected through the implementation of local planning policy.” Policy SI 1 includes criteria to guide decisions relating to development on existing open space sport and recreation or unused playing fields.
- 3.2.3 Policy SI 1 does not provide individual standards for sports provision as each sport has its own specific space requirements. Instead, the policy signposts the documents above to be used to inform any needs assessment.

4.0 Meeting the Standards

4.1.0 Quantity

- 4.1.1 The open space standards set out in Policy SI 1 (Table 12.1) will be used to assess whether development proposals would result in a surplus or deficit of specific open space types. Open space provision will also be supported through growth locations by retaining existing parks and creating new accessible green spaces. For example, Policy GL 4 Victoria North safeguards Sandhills Park and connects it to an enhanced green and blue infrastructure network, including a new City River Park, green links, public realm improvements and the recently created St Catherine's Wood urban park.

4.2.0 Accessibility

- 4.2.1 The Open Space Assessment uses straight-line walking distance thresholds to assess access to open spaces. The accompanying accessibility maps show which areas are within the recommended catchment of each type of open space and which areas are not. These maps can be used to identify locations where there may be insufficient access to specific forms of open space. The assessment also considers access to open spaces across local authority boundaries. Policy SI 1 sets out the relevant accessibility standards, informed by evidence, consultation and national benchmarks.

4.3.0 Quality

- 4.3.1 The quality standards are set out in detail within the Open Space Assessment, including the assessment methodology, site audits and proposed standards. The quality audit and its methodology are intended to support developers in preparing site-specific open space assessments and identifying priorities for improvements to existing open spaces where mitigation is required, helping ensure investment is targeted where it will have the greatest benefit.

5.0 Regulation 18 Consultation

- 5.1 In response to consultee comments at Reg18 stage (see Consultation Statement Appendix Four Q56-58), the standards included in Policy SI 1, Table 12.1, relating to provision for children and young people, have been amended. The baseline threshold has been increased from 0.04 ha/1,000 pop to 0.125 ha/1,000 pop; an increase from 16% to 50% of national best practice levels. This is considered to be a realistic standard that will increase the importance of retaining existing play provision. Any new provision would not require a significant amount of land and has the potential to be met through new or extended play/youth provision in existing parks.
- 5.2 Following the Regulation 18 consultation the Open Space Assessment was also updated to reference the Natural England Accessible Greenspace Standard in more detail (see Policy SI 1 paragraph 12.3).

6.0 Integrated Appraisal

- 6.1 The Integrated Appraisal (IA) has assessed Policy SI1 (Protection of Existing Open Space, Sport and Recreation Land and Facilities) alongside the other proposal Local Plan policies. It is considered:
- To encourage the protection and enhancement of open spaces, many of which provide multifunctional roles including informal wildlife habitat and green corridors through the urban fabric;
 - To be an efficient use of land resources and will help to offset minor losses in greenfield land, together with Policy SI 2 (Provision of New Open Space, Sport and Recreation Land and Facilities);
 - To positively impact Health and wellbeing through retaining and enhancing existing and new open space and recreational land and facilities.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 This Topic Paper demonstrates that Policy SI 1: Protection of Existing Open Space, Sport and Recreation Land and Facilities is firmly grounded in national planning policy,

strategic Greater Manchester policy, and a comprehensive local evidence base. The policy has been informed by the updated Open Space Assessment (2026), the Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy, and a range of supporting strategies that recognise the vital contribution open space, sport and recreation facilities make to health and wellbeing, climate resilience, biodiversity, social inclusion and the overall quality of life of Manchester's residents.

- 7.2 The Open Space Assessment provides a robust and up-to-date assessment of open space quantity, quality, value and accessibility across the city, consistent with the requirements of both NPPF 2021 and NPPF 2024. The quantity standards included within Policy SI 1 have been derived from this evidence and provide a clear and transparent basis for assessing whether a surplus or deficit of open space exists when development proposals affect existing provision. The policy also incorporates quality standards to ensure that decisions are informed not only by the amount of open space available, but also by its condition, functionality and contribution to local communities.
- 7.3 The approach taken recognises Manchester's need to accommodate significant housing and employment growth while ensuring that existing open space, sport and recreation assets are protected and enhanced wherever possible. By requiring robust justification for any loss of provision, and by directing mitigation and investment towards areas of greatest need, Policy SI 1 seeks to strike an appropriate balance between growth and the creation of healthy, sustainable and resilient neighbourhoods.
- 7.4 The policy is also supported by the findings of the Integrated Appraisal, which confirms its positive contribution to environmental quality, efficient use of land resources, biodiversity, and the health and wellbeing of residents. Together with Policy SI 2 and wider Green Infrastructure policies, it will play a key role in safeguarding and enhancing Manchester's network of open spaces and recreational facilities throughout the plan period to 2039.
- 7.5 For these reasons, Policy SI 1 is considered to be justified, effective, positively prepared and consistent with national policy, providing a sound framework for the protection and enhancement of open space, sport and recreation land and facilities across Manchester.