



Open Space Audit Position Statement 2012



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1 Introduction

1.1 In December 2006 the Council published the 'Open Space Review', a report which set out the Council's approach to planning for open space inclusive of open space standards, how these standards were derived and how these were to be applied in the determination of planning applications. At this time the Council's open space and recreation audit, essentially a record of all sites which fulfil an open space or recreation function, was comprehensively updated and the headline findings from this work published in the report.

1.2 It was acknowledged in the 2006 Open Space Review that the Council's open space and recreation audit is a living record in that it is updated to reflect any changes as soon as these are known. Whilst the audit has and continues to alter to keep abreast of change over time, a snapshot of headline findings has not been published since 2006, primarily because there is no statutory requirement to do so.

1.3 This position statement provides a snapshot of the headline findings from the open space and recreation audit as at 1st April 2012. In addition to publishing updated figures it seeks to draw a comparison against previously published findings with a view to identifying any meaningful trends.

1.4 More detailed information on the Council's approach to planning for Open Space is set out in the 'Open Space Review' (2006). Detailed matters of policy implementation are set out in the Council's Open Space and Recreation Provision Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which was adopted in 2007.

1.5 Further information on planning for open space can also be obtained by contacting the Council's Urban Policies and Programmes team on 01925 442793 or ldf@warrington.gov.uk



2 Audit Methodology

2.1 The audit seeks to provide a comprehensive record of those sites within the Borough which fulfil an open space and recreation function. The audit comprises of an Excel spreadsheet which is used to record simple information about known sites. All sites identified are also accurately mapped utilising Geographic Information System (GIS) software. Collectively the Excel spreadsheet and GIS data form the 'central hub' or reference point of planning related open space information. The Excel spreadsheet is available to download from the Council's website and the corresponding GIS dataset is available upon request.

2.2 Open Space sites are included within the audit where they fall within one of the adopted typologies referred to in Table 1, which remain unchanged from those set out in the 2006 Open Space Review and also published in the Council's Open Space and Recreation Provision SPD.

Green Spaces	Allotments
	Cemeteries and Churchyards
	Childrens Play
	Green Corridors
	Incidental Space
	Natural/Semi-natural Green Space
	Outdoor Sports
	Parks & Gardens
Civic Spaces	

Table 1 - Employed Open Space Typologies

2.3 Information recorded within the audit includes:

- Site name;
- Site address;
- Open space neighbourhood within which the site is located;
- Site area;
- Typology of open space the site is categorised as (employing primary purpose approach);
- Area assigned to specific typologies; and
- Whether the site can be accessed by the public.

2.4 There is no minimum size threshold for site inclusion within the audit through recognition that even relatively small spaces can serve a practical and valuable function within a community.

2.5 Sites with clear evidence of frequent public use, regardless of whether there are formal access arrangements, are included in the audit. Inclusion of those sites without formal access should not however be interpreted to imply that the Council endorses the recreational use of such sites.

2.6 Sites without public access are included where they are deemed to make an important and identifiable contribution in terms of their size and character to the settlement form or an important contribution to one or a number of wider benefits that open spaces are recognised to entail.

2.7 Land not included in the audit, but which nevertheless constitute important elements of the wider 'Green Infrastructure' concept, include:



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- Small roadside verges (significant, continuous road side verges featuring extensive landscaping such as those characteristic of the New Town are included);
- Railway embankments (except if the railway is disused and enjoys public access);
- Private residential garden space;
- SLOAP (space left over after planning) e.g. space around buildings; and
- Farmland.

2.8 The audit is updated as and when new information becomes available about a site(s) relying primarily on secondary data sources. Updating the audit is therefore largely a desktop based exercise, with site visits only undertaken where necessary to resolve uncertainty or confusion with regards to a specific site.

2.9 Key changes between the 2006 and this (2012) snapshot owe primarily to the audit having been updated to reflect:

- Previous omissions which have since come to light;
- New sites delivered as part of or alongside new developments within the Borough;
- New sites or enhancements to existing sites resulting from planned investment;
- Updated Ordnance Survey information which has enabled more accurate plotting (following a programme of positional accuracy improvement in Warrington);
- Sites which are known to have been lost to development or other uses; and
- Changed circumstances for a given site where known.

2.10 It should be noted that adding a site is often reliant on the Ordnance Survey mapping data firstly being available which can result in a lag occurring between the delivery of a new site and its subsequent inclusion within the audit and hence headline findings.

2.11 To date the audit has been primarily concerned with information from a quantitative perspective but over time a qualitative snapshot of Warrington's open space has began to emerge and this is reported in this position statement.



3 Total Recorded Open Space

3.1 As at 1st April 2012 a total of 903 individual sites were recorded within the audit. This represents a net increase of 75 sites (or c. 10% increase) in comparison to the 2006 position when 828 sites were recorded.

3.2 As at the 1st April 2012 the total combined area of sites recorded was 1,725 Hectares. This represents a net increase of 107 Hectares (or c. 7% increase) in the total area of open space recorded when compared to the 1,618 Hectares recorded in 2006.

3.3 Out of the 1,725 Hectares recorded in 2012, 1,613 of these were assigned to specific typologies. This represents a net increase of 105 Hectares compared to the 2006 position (1,1618 Ha.).

3.4 Table 2 shows the recorded area of open space as a percentage of the Borough's gross overall area. Table 3 shows how the position has changed in comparison to the same measures recorded in 2006.

Area	2012 Hectares (Ha.)	2012 % of Borough
Borough of Warrington	18,190	100%
Open Space (Total site area)	1,725	9.5%
Open Space (Assigned typology area)	1,613	8.9%

Table 2 - Recorded area (in Ha.) of Open Space within the Borough

Area	2006	2012	Change between 2006 and 2012
Borough of Warrington (Total site area) Ha.	18,190	18,190	0
Open Space (Total site area) Ha.	1,618	1,725	+ 107
Open Space (Total site area Ha.) as a % of Borough	8.9%	9.5%	+ 0.6
Open Space (Assigned typology area Ha.)	1,507	1,612	+ 105
Open Space (Assigned typology area) as a % of Borough	8.3%	8.9%	+ 0.6

Table 3 - Comparison of area (in Ha.) of Open Space recorded within the Borough between 2006 and 2012

3.5 As can be seen from Table 3 recognised Open Space within the Borough has increased significantly in the time that has elapsed since the last position statement was published.

3.6 Improved and updated O.S. mapping and specifically aerial photography has enabled additional sites to be identified via a desktop based assessment where as previously these sites could not be. This has therefore enabled sites to be included which were omitted in error from the audit previously and also new provision which has been delivered alongside new housing achieved through the regeneration of large swathes of previously developed land such as at Chapelford Urban Village, Britannia Wireworks, Carrington Park and Saxon Park. In contrast very few sites have been deleted from the audit in the period as few sites have been lost to development or other uses.

4 Breakdown of Open Space Typology

4.1 Whilst the open space audit seeks to categorise spaces according to their primary purpose, some sites such as parks will record a breakdown of information e.g. a large 2Ha park may record 1Ha as Parks and Gardens and this will be the primary purpose, however 0.8Ha and 0.2Ha may be be Outdoor Sports and Equipped Play respectively. In this instance the audit would record 3 entries for this site as this more detailed information would be required for assessment purposes. Owing to this approach it should be noted that the total number of entries shown in Table 4 exceeds the total number of 'sites' referred to elsewhere within this statement.

4.2 Table 4 shows the total number of site entries assigned to each typology at 2006 and 2012 and identifies the net change between these two points in time.

Typology	No. Entries		
	2006	2012	Net Change
All	989	1,073	+ 84
Allotments	15	16	+ 1
Cemeteries & Churchyards	6	7	+ 1
Equipped Childrens Play	167	165	- 2
Green Corridors	88	109	+ 21
Incidental Space	130	164	+ 34
Informal Childrens Play	206	231	+ 25
Natural / Semi Natural Green Space	109	112	+ 3
Outdoor Sports	187	184	- 3
Parks & Gardens	80	81	+ 1
Other	1	4	+ 3

Table 4 - Comparison of the No. of audit entries assigned to each Typology

4.3 As can be seen from Table 4 the greatest increase with regards to the number of entries recorded in the audit relates to incidental space and informal childrens play space. These two typologies of open space provision are those most commonly associated with new development and their increase can therefore be attributed to the significant development which has been completed within the Borough over the six year period between 2006 and 2012. The number of green corridors recorded in the Borough has also increased significantly which owes to efforts in 2011 to record canal and riverside paths which constituted an obvious omission from earlier audits.



4.4 Table 5 shows the total area in Hectares assigned to each typology at 2006 and 2012 and again identifies the net change between these two points in time.

Typology	Area (Ha.)		
	2006	2012	Net Change
All	1,506	1,613	+ 107
Allotments	15	16	+ 1
Cemeteries & Churchyards	22	22	0
Equipped Childrens Play	10	10	0
Green Corridors	120	137	+ 17
Incidental Space	42	47	+ 5
Informal Childrens Play	99	102	+ 3
Natural / Semi Natural Green Space	353	417	+ 64
Outdoor Sports	455	468	+ 13
Parks & Gardens	389	392	+ 3
Other	1	2	+ 1

Table 5 - Comparison of the 'total area' (Ha.) assigned to each Typology

4.5 As can be seen from Table 5 the greatest increase in area terms of individual typologies relates to natural and semi-natural green space, and does not therefore directly correlate with the increase in entries set out in table 4. This increase owes to the inclusion of three sites, Spud Wood in Lymm (17 Ha.); land to the south of Birchwood Way in Bruche (11 Ha.); and Wheatacre Farm in Burtonwood (37 Ha.). The latter site is largely within the administrative area of St. Helens but nevertheless constitutes an important recreational opportunity, which entails multiple wider benefits, for residents of North West Warrington and particularly Burtonwood.

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4.6 Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the typology entries and their respective areas as at the 1st April 2012.

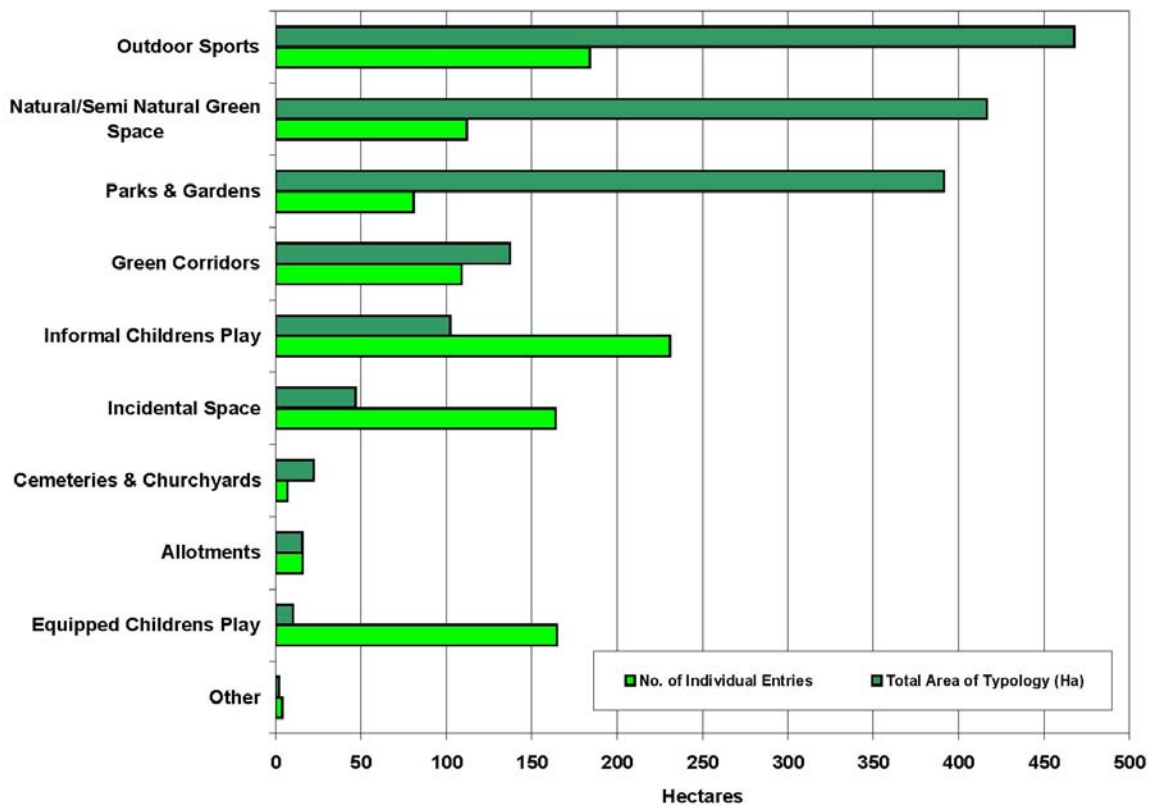


Figure 4.1 Overview of Typology 'entries' and 'area' (in Ha.) as at 1st April 2012

4.7 Figure 4.2 provides an overview of the area of each typology as a percentage of the total area assigned to open space typologies.

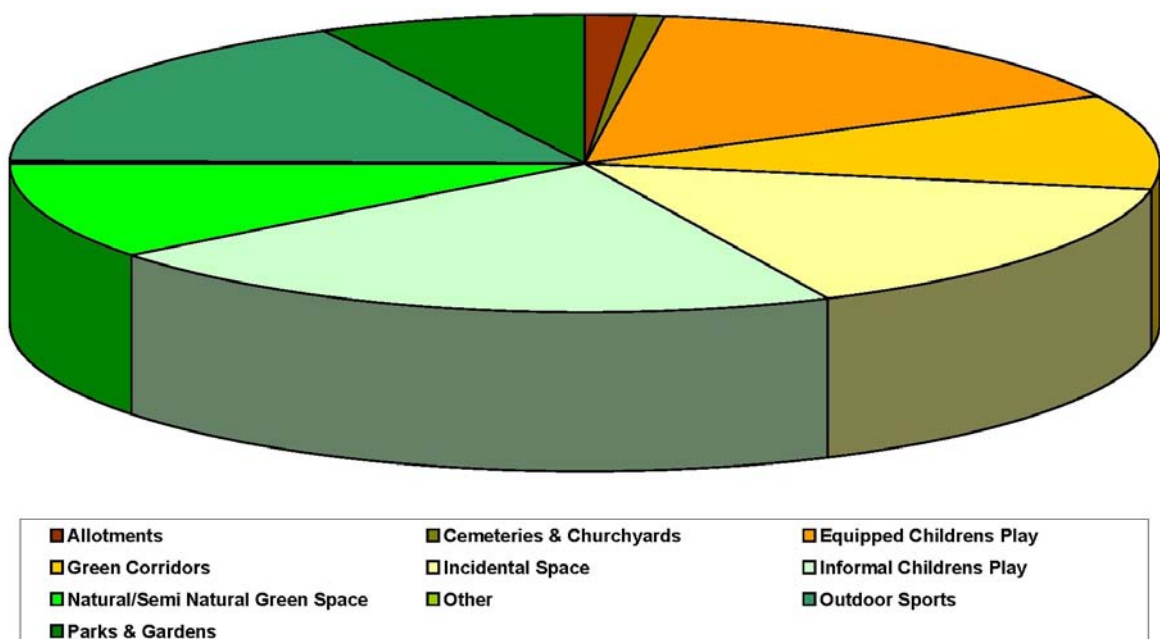


Figure 4.2 Percentage split of Open Space per Typology (using area in Ha.)



4.8 The entries under the Outdoor Sports typology can be subdivided into public, school and private ownership as illustrated in Table 6. Figure 4.3 presents an illustrative overview of this same distinction.

Ownership	No. Of Entries	Area (Ha)	% (based on area)
Total Outdoor Sports	184	468	100
Public	41	143	31
School	80	153	33
Private	63	172	36

Table 6 - Outdoor Sports Typology breakdown of Ownership (as at 1st April 2012)

4.9 In comparison to 2006 the percentage of land in public ownership, the primary purpose of which is outdoor sports, has increased (up from 28%) at the expense of land in private ownership (down from 38%).

4.10 Further information on Outdoor Sports sites and facilities is provided within the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) which provides a comprehensive overview of need and demand for such facilities within the Borough and whether existing sites and facilities meet these needs and demands in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The PPS is currently being refined and is expected to be published in its final form in late Summer 2012.

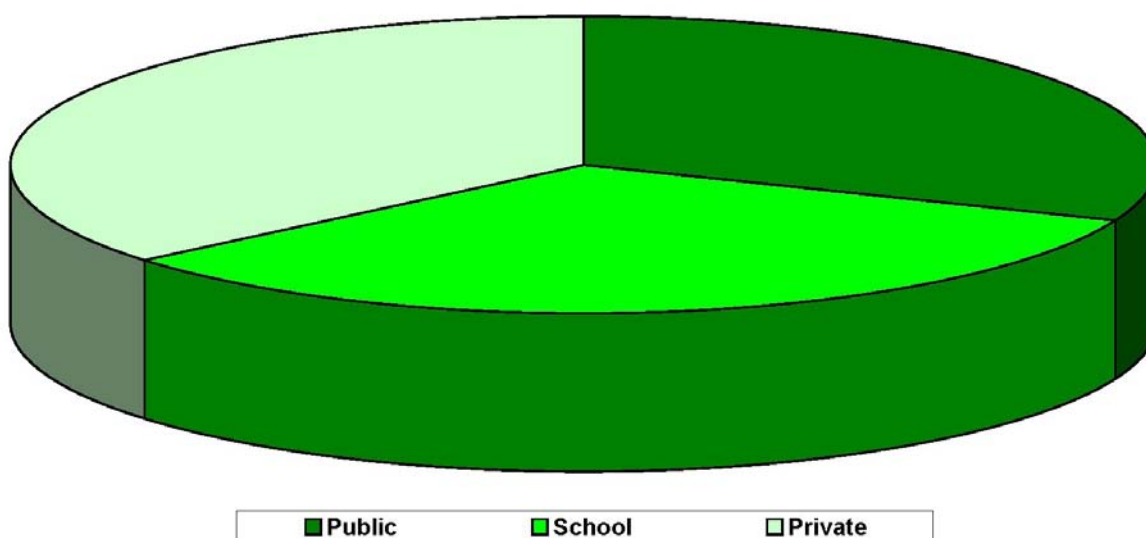


Figure 4.3 Percentage of Ownership of 'Outdoor Sports' by area (Ha.)

4.11 A differentiation is also made within the audit with regards to whether Incidental Space is regarded as in public or private ownership. This position as at the 1st April 2012 is set out in Table 7. Figure 4.4 presents an illustrative overview of this same distinction.

Ownership	No. Of Entries	Area (Ha)	% (based on area)
Total Incidental Space	164	47	100
Public	149	38	80
Private	15	9	20

Table 7 - Incidental Space Typology breakdown of Ownership (as at 1st April 2012)



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4.12 In comparison to 2006 the percentage of incidental space in public ownership has increased (up from 75%). Conversely the percentage of space in private ownership has decreased (down from 38%). The increase experienced can be attributed to a number of large new housing developments having been developed within the preceding six years, many of which have entailed new purpose designed public amenity areas within.

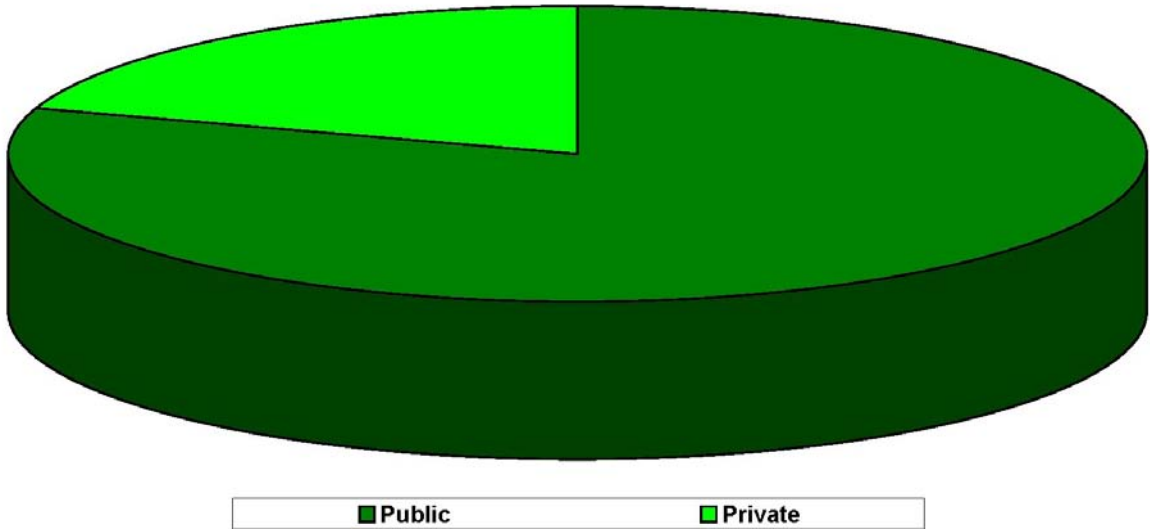


Figure 4.4 Percentage of Ownership of 'Incidental Space' by area (Ha.)



5 Publicly Accessible Open Space

5.1 The audit records two elements of public open space; 'traditional' and 'informal'. 'Traditional' public open space relates to those open spaces with formal access arrangements. 'Informal' public open space represent those sites where there is clear evidence of frequent public use, but where no formal access arrangements are currently in place.

5.2 It should be noted that 'equipped play areas' and 'outdoor sports' areas are not, for the purposes of the audit, classed as public open space. This is in keeping with the approach set out in the Council's Open Space Review (2006) and Open Space and Recreation Provision SPD. With regards to the latter it is acknowledged however that public playing fields can fulfil the function of public open space and hence specific detailed assessments conducted on a localised level may at that stage opt to include such sites.

Access Arrangement	No. Of Sites		Change between 2006 and 2012
	2006	2012	
Total Public Open Space	533	642	+ 109
Traditional	488	539	+ 51
Informal	45	103	+ 58

Table 8 - Public open space access arrangement by site numbers

5.3 As can be seen from Table 8 the number of sites classed as publicly accessible has significantly increased (by 109 sites or c. 21%) since 2006, with a relatively even split between the increased number of 'traditional' and 'informal' public open spaces. The change in the number of public open space recorded owes not only to new sites having been identified but equally to those sites previously included within the audit but where circumstances have changed e.g. where a site previously had no public access but now has.

Access Arrangement	Area (Ha.)		Change between 2006 and 2012
	2006	2012	
Total Public Open Space	920	1057	+ 137
Traditional	740	813	+ 73
Informal	180	244	+ 64

Table 9 - Public open space access arrangement by area (Ha.)

5.4 As can be seen from Table 9 the total area of land classed as publicly accessible has also significantly increased (by 137 Ha. or c. 15%) since 2006, with a relatively even split between the increased area assigned to 'traditional' and 'informal' public open spaces.

5.5 Figure 5.1 illustrates the collective area of 'traditional' and 'informal' public open space as a percentage of the total (gross) recorded open space as at the 1st April 2012. This identifies that 47% of all recorded open space (1725 Ha.) is regarded as 'traditional' public open space, 15% as 'informal' public open space and 38% as not publicly accessible.



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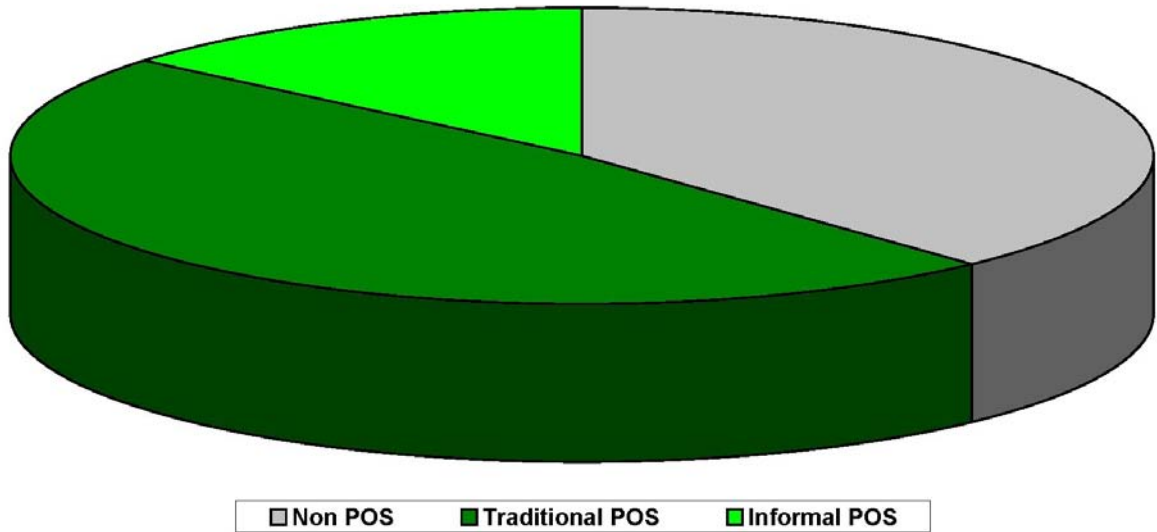


Figure 5.1 Percentage of public open space (as an area) with 'traditional' and 'informal' public access - as at 1st April 2012

5.6 Figure 5.2 illustrates the percentage of open space sites which have 'traditional' and 'informal' access against the total number of recorded sites (903) as at the 1st April 2012. This identifies that 60% of all recorded sites (903) are regarded as 'traditional' public open space, 11% as 'informal' public open space and 29% as not publicly accessible.

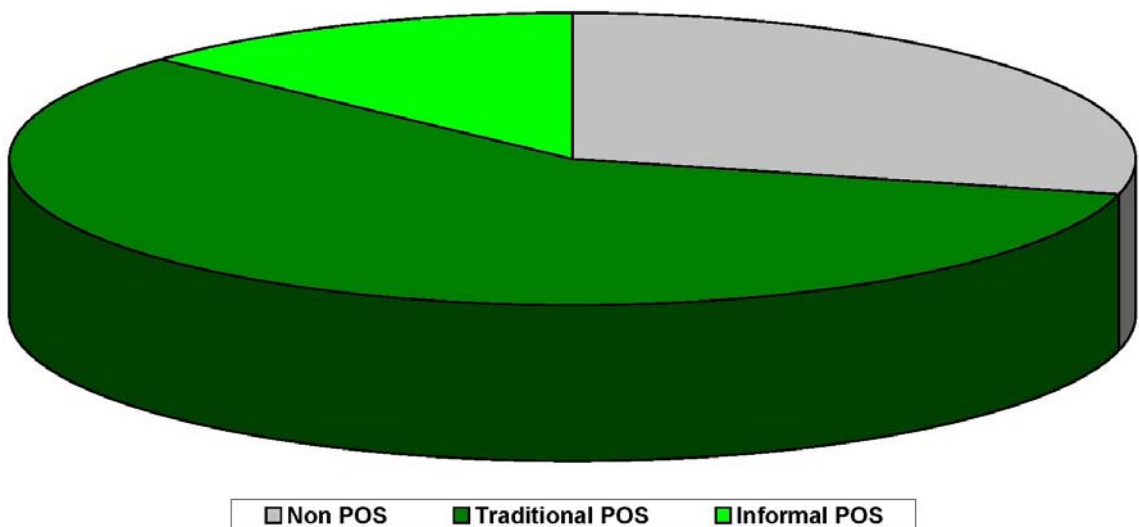


Figure 5.2 Percentage of public open space sites with 'traditional' and 'informal' public access - as at 1st April 2012



6 Quality of Open Space Provision

6.1 The Council's Open Space Review (2006) recognises the importance of quality when assessing open space provision.

6.2 Poor quality is the most commonly cited reason as to why people don't use public space more regularly. If an area enjoys good access to the right quantity of open space but the quality is poor, then the space or facility is likely to be underused and of little benefit to the community. Whilst good design is essential in ensuring high quality spaces, quality goes beyond this to encompass management and maintenance issues. Standards for assessing the quality of the employed typologies of open space are set out in the Open Space Review (2006).

6.3 Given the significant number of open spaces the Council does not have the resources to undertake qualitative assessments for all sites. Over time however, as localised assessments have been conducted for specific purposes, some sites have been subject to an assessment and the scores recorded within the audit.

6.4 Given these assessments were conducted some time ago however their value is considered limited. By means of an example the audit previously recorded that provision in Howley, specifically with regards to equipped play provision, was of below average and generally poor quality. Significant recent investment in this area has however enhanced this provision, with equipped play provision likely now amongst the highest quality experienced in the Borough, but the audit has not been updated to reflect this owing to resources. The audit should not therefore be relied upon as a means of providing an overview of quality, and instead more generalised information should be relied upon.

6.5 In this latter regard the 2008 and 2010 Warrington Together Surveys provide a useful indication of peoples' perception of the quality of the Borough's open spaces. Given that only 12% and 13% of respondents (in each of the respective years) identified parks and open spaces within their areas as in need of improvement, quality is evidently perceived to be good.

6.6 Given the significant investment which has recently been applied across equipped play provision on a Borough wide level, alongside initiatives associated with the Council's Look of the Borough and Greenways and Healthy Lifestyle programmes, it is hoped that satisfaction levels with regards to the quality of open space within the Borough will increase further. It is hoped that this trend will be evidenced by future Warrington Together or similar surveys.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Since 2006 there has been a notable net increase (up by 7%) in open space provision within the Borough with 1,725 Hectares across 903 sites recorded as at the 1st April 2012. This increase owes to previous omissions from the audit having been identified and subsequently included alongside the inclusion of new spaces which have been delivered as part of the many comprehensive regeneration and redevelopment schemes which have materialised over the past six years. Conversely very few spaces have been lost to development or other uses over this same period.

7.2 The amount of available open space which is publicly accessible has also notably increased (up by 15%) since 2006 with a relatively even split of this newly accessible space between sites with formal and sites with informal access arrangements. An increasing percentage of land dedicated to outdoor sports but in public ownership has also been experienced although this increase has been more modest (up by 2%).

7.3 With regards to the quality of open space provision, there remains a significant gap in the audit in this respect. The Council do not have the resources to undertake comprehensive qualitative assessments for all sites at this time nor is such an approach deemed needed and hence justified at this time. Importantly the general perception of open space within the Borough, as alluded to by the 2008 and 2010 Warrington Together Surveys, is good with only 12% and 13% (respectively) of respondents identifying parks and open spaces within their areas as in need of improvement. Significant recent investment in the look of open spaces and particularly enhancements to children's equipped play provision should help to ensure these positive perceptions endure.

7.4 The Council's policy approach to open space is to protect, enhance and ensure the timely delivery of new provision where proven as needed to cater for the increased demand placed on such spaces brought about by new developments and hence population growth. This updated position statement suggests that this policy approach is evidently working with a net gain recorded in both the total area and publicly accessible open space, and the quality of spaces perceived to be good.

7.5 It is important that the Council continue to roll forward the existing policy approach and continue to monitor the effectiveness of this policy approach through future analysis of the open space audit and other relevant data sources. Based on the analysis undertaken in producing this current snapshot of provision a number of improvements to the way in which changes are recorded have been identified, including being more explicit about recording why new sites have entered or been removed from the audit. These changes will be implemented immediately and should help to improve the value of future monitoring through enabling more comprehensive and detailed analysis and hence reporting.

7.6 Finally it must be noted that it is the Borough's communities and residents who know their local spaces best. In this regard people are encouraged to refer to the actual audit and maps published alongside this statement and report any obvious omissions or inaccuracies to the Council. This input will help to ensure that the audit continues to constitute an accurate and robust evidence base.



8 Maps

8.1 The remaining sections of this statement set out maps which provide an overview of the recorded open space within a given Neighbourhood Area, and differentiate between the different typologies employed by the audit.

8.2 The GIS dataset used to produce these maps can be made available upon request. Alternatively more detailed maps, tailored to specific requests if necessary, can be produced but such work will under normal circumstances incur a charge.

9 Inner Warrington

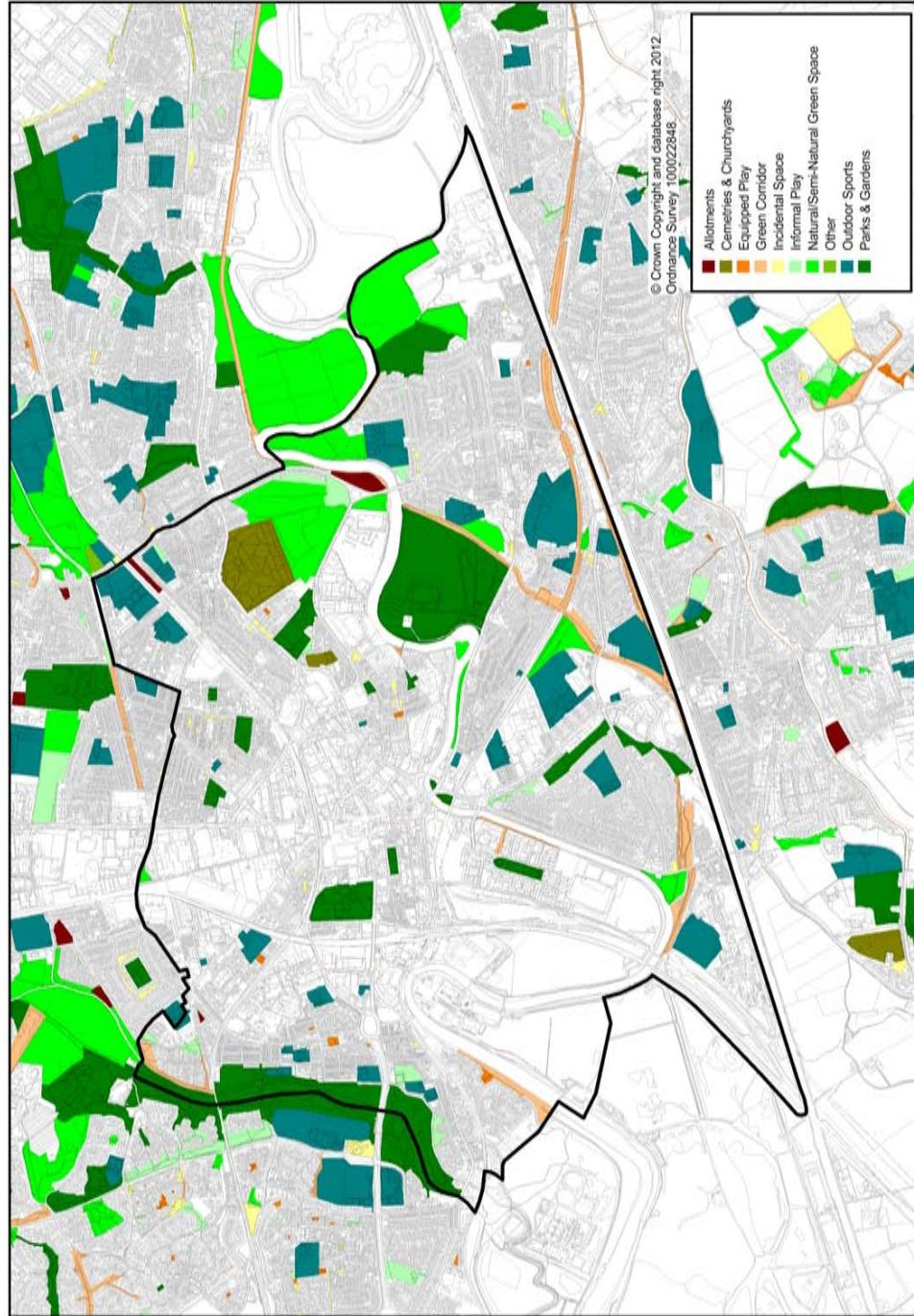


Figure 9.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology within Inner Warrington



10 North Warrington

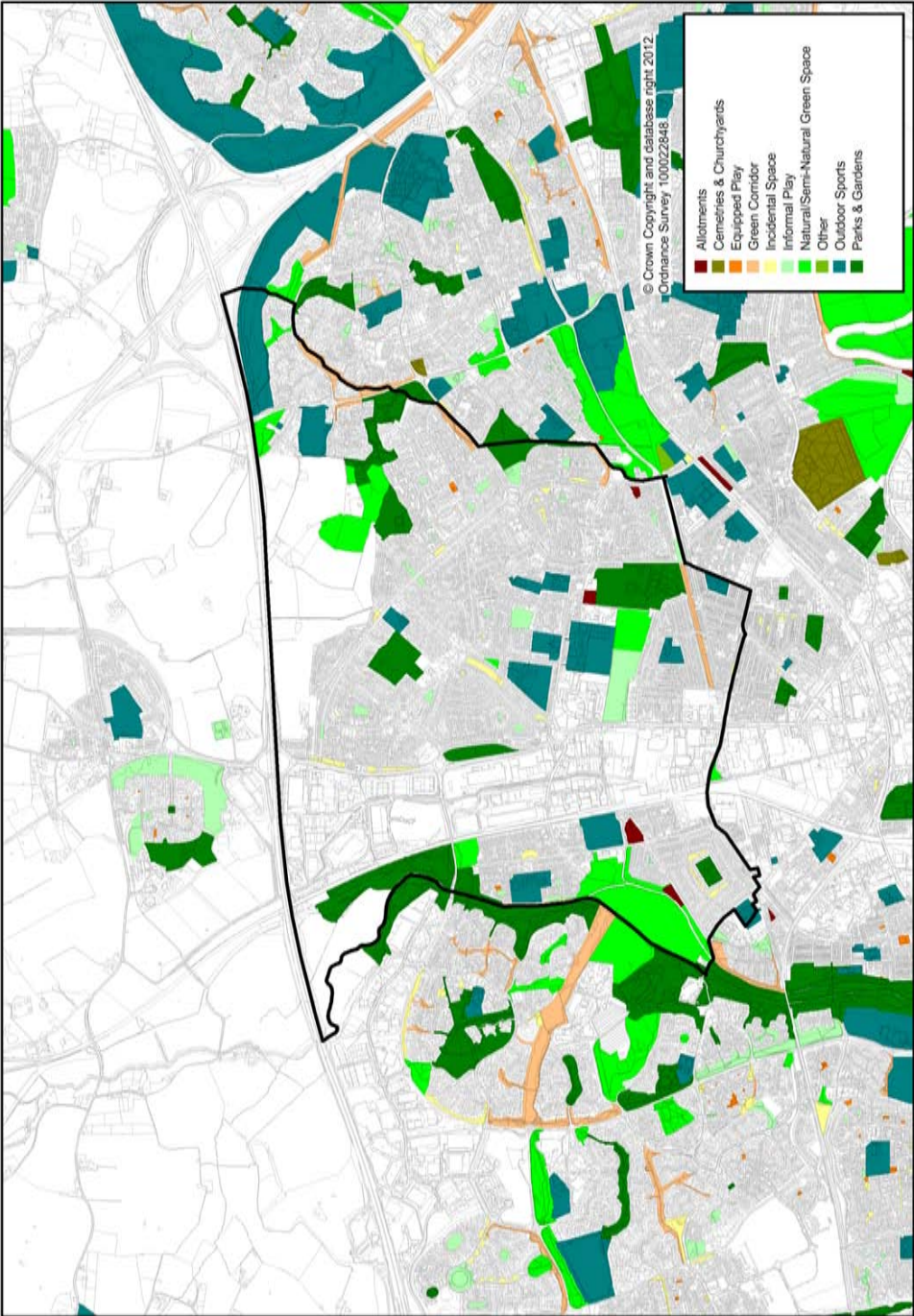


Figure 10.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology within North Warrington

11 West Warrington

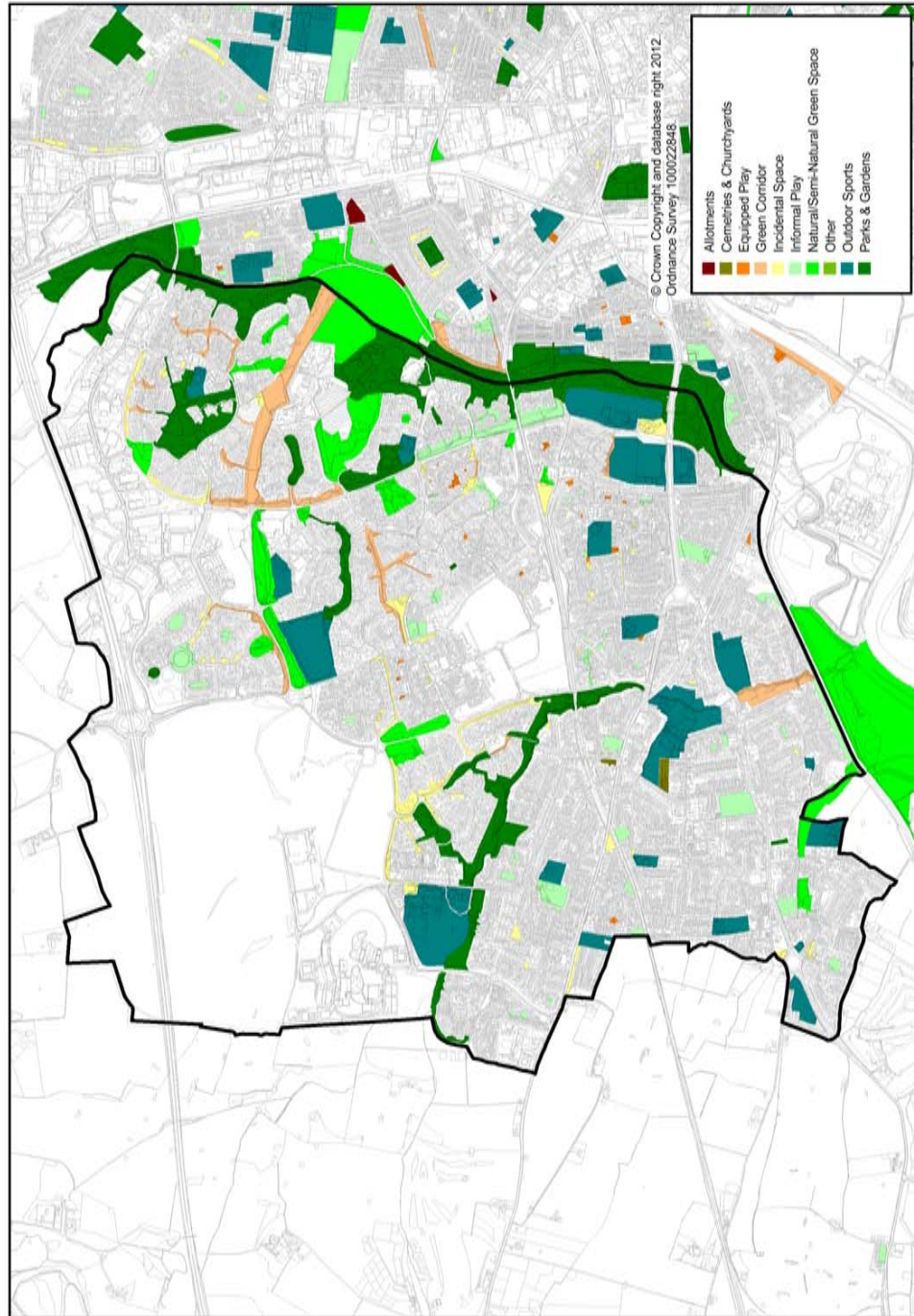


Figure 11.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology within West Warrington



12 East Warrington

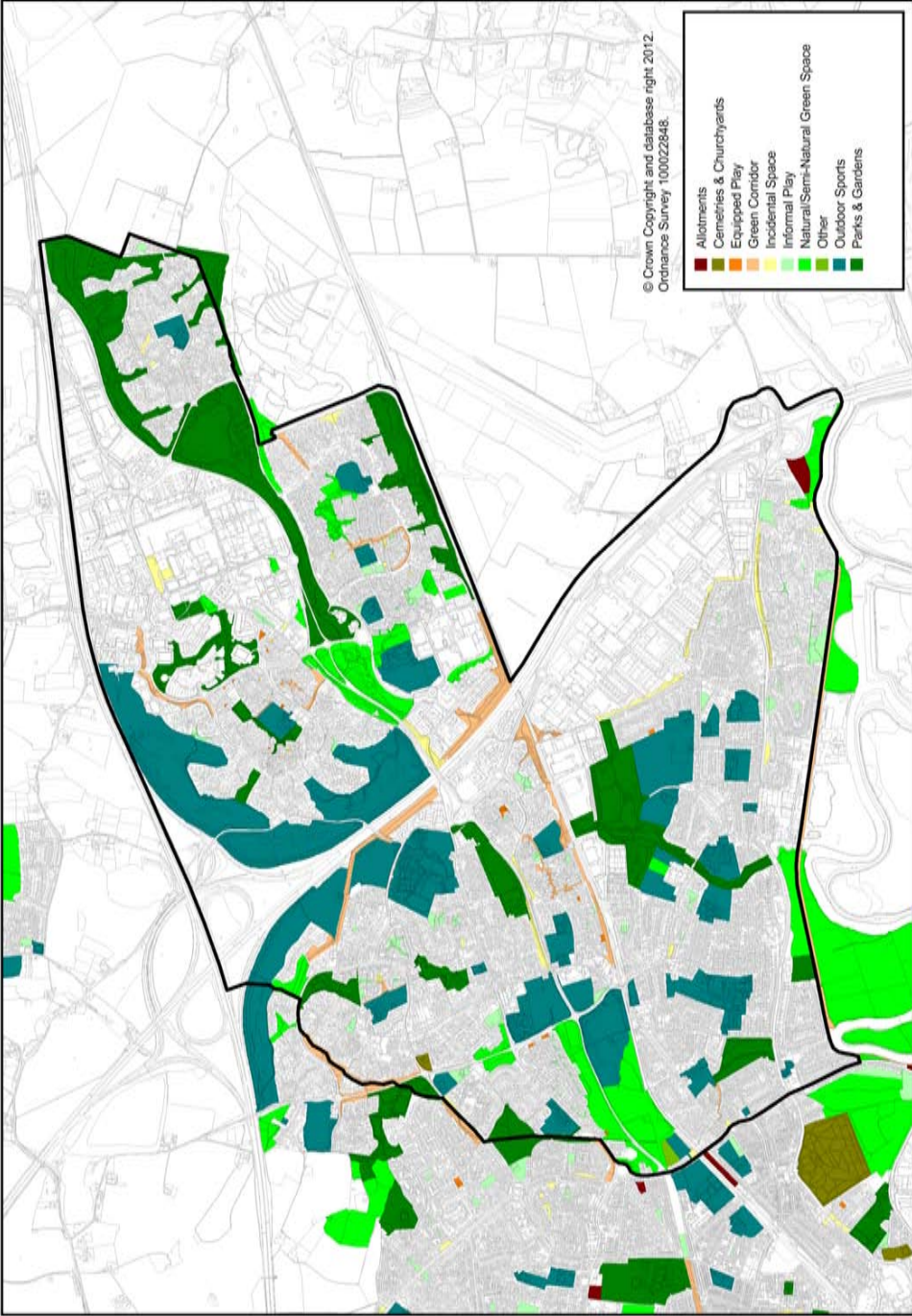


Figure 12.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology within East Warrington

13 South Warrington

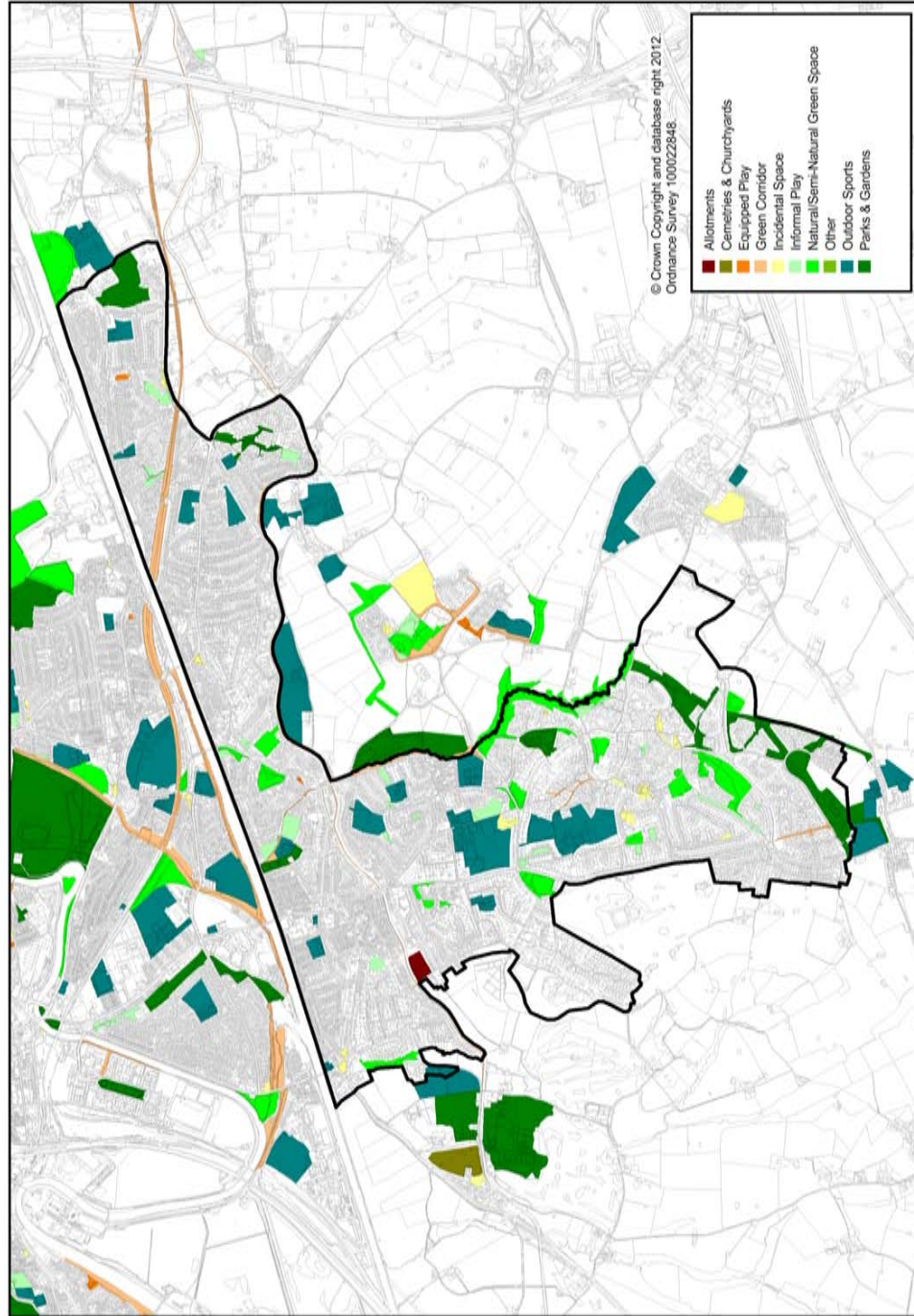


Figure 13.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology within South Warrington



14 Lymm

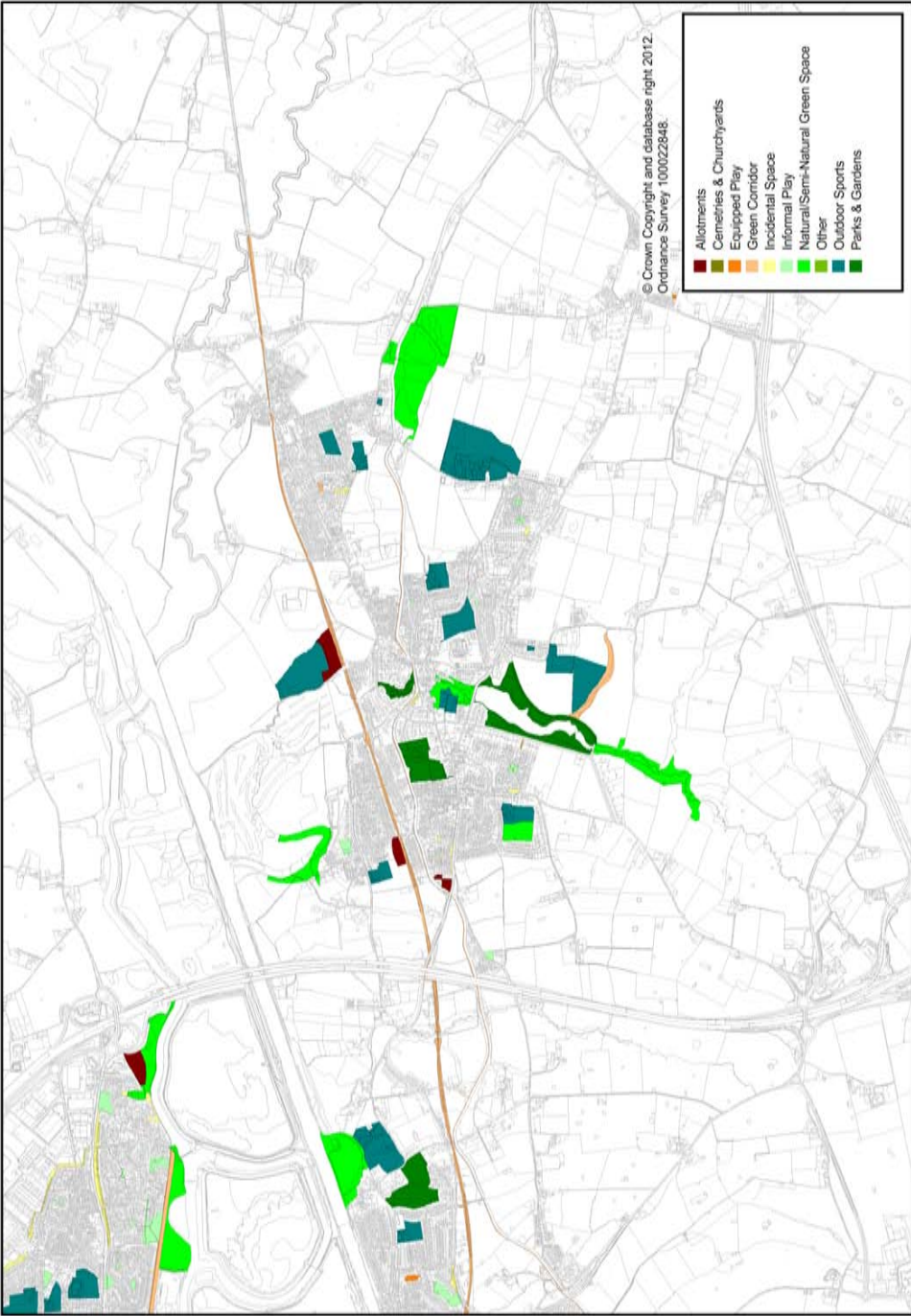


Figure 14.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology around Lymm



15 Culcheth & Croft

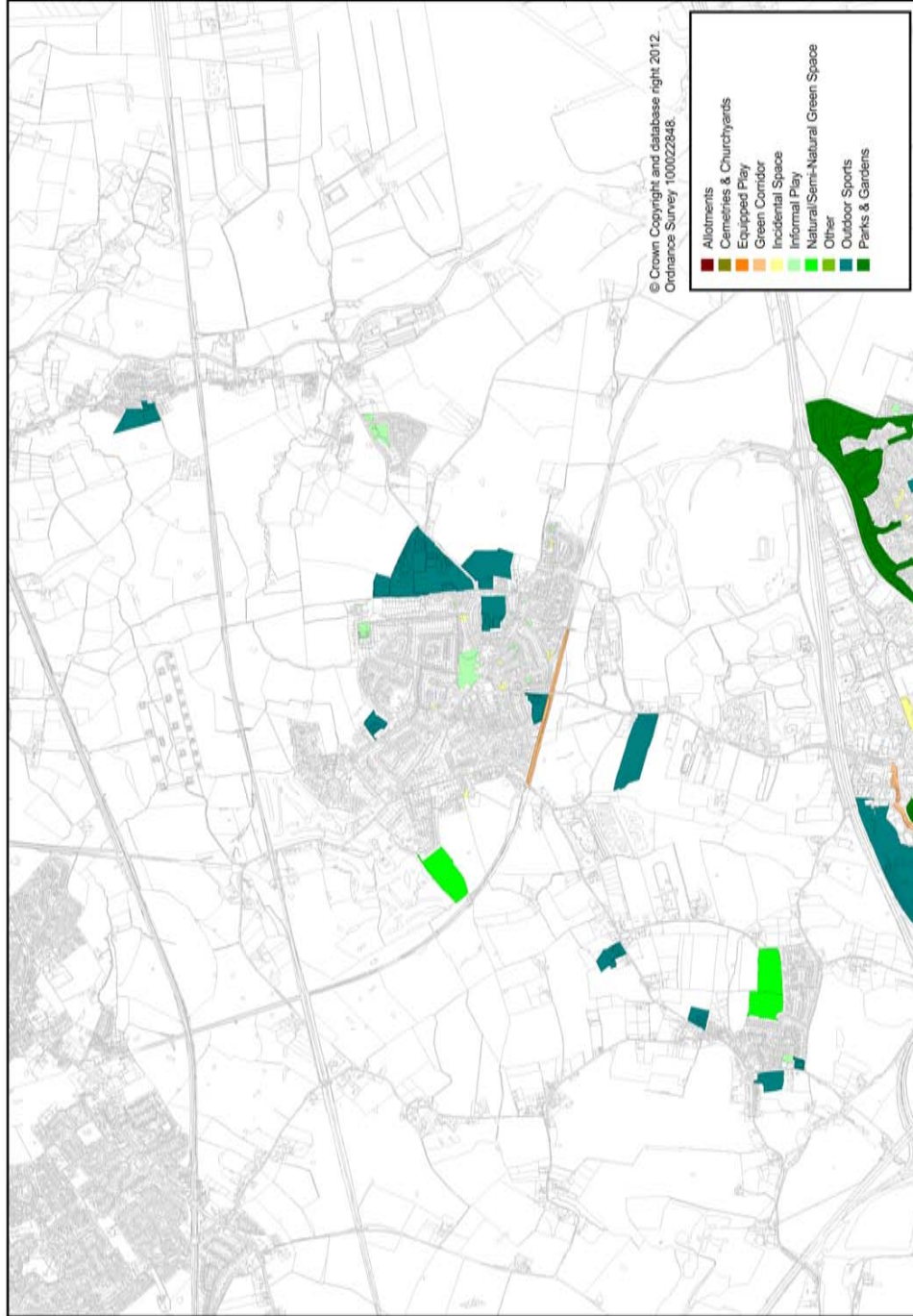


Figure 15.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology around Culcheth and Croft



16 Burtonwood



Figure 16.1 Recorded Open Space by Typology around Burtonwood



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