

Appendix 2 - Contexts

1 Policy Context

1.1 The provision of good quality open space is relevant to 4 of the **Scottish Government's 15 national outcomes**:

- We live longer, healthier lives;
- Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed;
- We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need;
- We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe.

1.2 **Scottish Planning Policy** indicates that green infrastructure, including open space and green networks should be protected, enhanced and promoted as an integral component of successful placemaking. It also requires the preparation of up to date audits, strategies and action plans which cover the multiple functions of open space.

1.3 Scotland's third **National Planning Framework (NPF3)** identifies the Central Scotland Green Network as a national development with wide ranging environmental objectives including:

- Creating an environment for sustainable economic growth;
- Creating an environment more in balance, one that will support Central Scotland to thrive in a changing climate;
- Creating an environment which supports healthy lifestyles and good physical and mental wellbeing;
- Creating an environment that people can enjoy and where they choose to live and bring up their families; and
- Creating an environment where nature can flourish

1.4 Parks and open spaces within the Falkirk Council area form part of the Central Scotland Green Network. NPF3 indicates that, during its lifetime, remediation of derelict land, prioritised action in disadvantaged communities and active travel to maximise community and health benefits should be the priorities for funding.

1.5 Falkirk Community Planning Partnership has created a **Single Outcome Agreement** to measure the progress we are making locally to our shared vision for the Falkirk Council area. It contains a series of outcomes which our parks and open spaces can help to achieve:

- We will be healthier and live longer;
- Children will be supported in early years so that they become young people who are confident and successful;
- Our area will be a fairer and more equal place to live; and
- Prosperous businesses will underpin the success of our local economy, providing sustainable and quality employment

1.6 The vision of the **Falkirk Local Development Plan** is for the Falkirk area to be a dynamic and distinctive area at the heart of Central Scotland, characterised by a network of thriving communities and greenspaces and a vibrant and growing economy which is of strategic significance in the national context, providing an attractive and sustainable place in which to live work and invest. The open space

strategy will have a role in creating and maintaining the network of thriving greenspaces and helping to deliver an attractive and sustainable place to live work and invest.

1.7 The Council's **Culture and Sport Strategy "Inspiring Lives"** recognises that parks and open spaces are one of the places where people make culture and sport happen; they are a focal point for participation and community cohesion, they attract visitors and enhance the image of the area and therefore they need to be fit for purpose. The Strategy also recognises that participation is key to improving a sense of well-being and enriching the lives of people of all ages and therefore structures need to be in place to encourage and enable grass roots participation in parks and open spaces. The Strategy is also clear that any forward plans for parks and open space need to be aligned to partner expectations to ensure opportunities for investment are maximised.

1.8 **Falkirk Greenspace – A Strategy for our Green Network** aims to connect areas of natural, semi-natural and man-made open spaces within our towns and villages, and create links into the wider countryside. The strategy recognises that the development of a high quality, multi-functional green network will provide a range of benefits for people, businesses and wildlife across our area. Priority actions are proposed conserving 9 themes:

- Economic Development and Placemaking
- Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land
- Outdoor Access
- Community Growing
- Education Services
- Woodland
- Water Environment
- Biodiversity; and
- Landscape

1.9 The Falkirk Council **Core Paths Plan** identifies a network of paths that gives people reasonable (non-motorised) access throughout the Falkirk Council area. It also identifies various opportunities to expand the core path network across the entire district. The open space strategy can play a role in helping to deliver these opportunities for expansion.

1.10 The consultative draft **Falkirk Forestry and Woodland Strategy** envisages that by 2055 an expanded and better connected network of high quality woodland will make a significantly enhanced contribution to Falkirk's economy, the health and well-being of our communities and the quality and resilience of our environments. The open space strategy can play a role in helping to deliver an expanded and better connected network of high quality woodland.

1.11 The **Falkirk Area Biodiversity Action Plan's** primary objective is to safeguard the local variety of life. In working towards this objective it aims to: protect and enhance our rare and threatened plants, animals and habitats; encourage, inspire and enable the community to take action to conserve their local biodiversity; and promote awareness and understanding of biodiversity. The open space strategy can play a role in helping to deliver all of these aims.

1.12 The strategic vision of the **Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy** is for a Falkirk Council area where the sustainable use of resources and

partnership working had resulted in economically and socially vibrant communities living in a flourishing environment. The open space strategy will have a role in helping to enable socially vibrant communities and creating a flourishing environment.

1.13 The ***Flood Risk Management Strategy*** for the Forth Estuary Local Plan District is expected to be published by SEPA in late 2015. It will confirm the immediate priorities for flood risk management in the area as well as setting out the future direction to be taken by all flood risk authorities. The open space strategy will have a role in helping to deliver some of the flood risk management priorities for the Falkirk area which could involve delivering natural flood management measures such as: the creation or restoration of intertidal areas; river or floodplain restoration; and runoff control actions.

1.14 The ***Scotland River Basin Management Plan*** aims to progressively improve the ecological status of all water bodies in the Scotland river basin district. The term ecological status includes water quality, water quantity, ecology and physical impacts (including culverting and engineering of watercourses) and the water environment includes all surface waters (including wetlands and transitional waters) and groundwater (including drinking water supplies). The open space strategy could have a role to play in helping to deliver improvements to the ecological status of water bodies within the Council area, particularly through helping to deliver improvements to riparian habitats within open spaces and to restore water courses to their natural status where they are physically impacted.

1.15 There is a range of other legislation which dictates the way the Council uses and maintains its parks and open space:

The Burial Grounds Act 1885

National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967

Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011

High Hedges (Scotland) Act 2013

Protected species legislation

Community Empowerment Bill

Health and Safety legislation

2 How much open space do we have?

2.1 The Council undertook an audit of 632 parks and open spaces between 2013 and 2015. Table 1 below shows the amount of open space within the different settlement areas across the district. Table 2 shows the amount of open space within the different Council wards.

Settlement Area	Area of Open Space (Hectares)	Population (2013 mid year estimate)	Hectares of open space/1000 people 2013
Bo'ness	243.7	14,531	16.8
Bonnybridge and Banknock	127.8	12,424	10.3
Denny	154.5	13,184	11.7
Falkirk	795.0	38,886	20.4
Grangemouth	100.1	17,269	5.8
Larbert and Stenhousemuir	223.6	25,498	8.8
Polmont Area	274.0	22,308	12.3
Rural North	70.9	2,691	26.3
Rural South	458.6	7,178	63.9
Rural Villages	529.5	9,869	53.7
Urban Settlements	1919.4	144,100	13.3
Falkirk Council	2448.9	153,969	15.9

Table 1: Amount of open space within settlement areas

Ward	Area of Open Space (Hectares)	Population (2013 mid year estimate)	Hectares of open space/1000 people
Bo'ness and Blackness	296.3	15,295	19.4
Bonnybridge & Larbert	356.3	16,614	21.4
Carse, Kinnaird & Tryst	150.4	19,820	7.6
Denny & Banknock	188.3	18,539	10.2
Falkirk North	334.2	20,122	16.6
Falkirk South	364.6	18,786	19.4
Grangemouth	84.4	17,482	4.8
Lower Braes	202.0	14,519	13.9
Upper Braes	472.5	15,963	29.6

Table 2: Amount of open space within Council wards.

2.2 Table 1 shows that on average there is 15.9 hectares of open space per 1000 people across the Council area. This amounts to an average of 159m² per person. It shows that the amount of open space within each settlement area varies from a high of 537m² per person in the rural villages to a low of 58m² per person in Grangemouth. Table 2 shows the variation between Council wards from 296m² per person in the Upper Braes to 48m² per person in Grangemouth.

3 What quality is our open space?

3.1 As part of the open space audit an assessment of fitness for purpose was carried out for 612 of the 632 open spaces. A detailed description of how the fitness for purpose assessment was carried out is contained within appendix 1. Table 3 below shows that the quality of open space varies across the Council area.

Settlement Area	Number of open spaces	Average score of an open space in the fitness for purpose assessment	Percentage of total number of open spaces which are fit for purpose	Percentage of total area of open space which is fit for purpose
Bo'ness	48	2.49	33.3%	69.3%
Bonnybridge and Banknock	82	2.29	15.0%	44.0%
Denny	51	2.48	19.6%	47.9%
Falkirk	124	2.62	36.4%	69.8%
Grangemouth	33	2.55	28.1%	50.3%
Larbert and Stenhousemuir	109	2.38	18.6%	40.5%
Polmont Area	97	2.53	31.3%	66.0%
Rural North	21	2.83	35.0%	5.1%
Rural South	61	2.52	34.4%	84.4%
Rural Villages	82	2.60	34.6%	73.8%
Urban Settlements	550	2.48	26.6%	61.3%
Falkirk Council	632	2.50	27.6%	64.0%

Table 3: Quality of open space within settlement areas

Ward	Number of open spaces	Average score of an open space in the fitness for purpose assessment	Percentage of total number of open spaces which are fit for purpose	Percentage of total area of open space which is fit for purpose
Bo'ness and Blackness	60	2.58	40.0%	59.9%
Bonnybridge & Larbert	79	2.44	21.1%	45.3%
Carse, Kinnaird & Tryst	94	2.38	20.7%	30.8%
Denny & Banknock	92	2.41	18.5%	45.5%
Falkirk North	55	2.73	36.4%	77.0%
Falkirk South	74	2.55	35.2%	68.4%
Grangemouth	33	2.49	25.0%	39.1%
Lower Braes	60	2.62	35.6%	70.5%
Upper Braes	85	2.40	25.0%	87.6%

Table 4: Quality of open space within Council wards

3.2 Overall, Falkirk has the best quality of open space with: the second highest average score in the fitness for purpose assessment (2.62); the second highest percentage (36.4%) of the total number of open spaces scoring good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment and the second highest percentage (69.8%) of the total area of open space scoring good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment.

3.3 Bonnybridge and Banknock have the worst overall quality of open space with the lowest average score (2.29) in the fitness for purpose assessment; the lowest percentage (15.0%) of the total number of open spaces scoring good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment and the third lowest percentage (44.0%) of the total area of open space scoring good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment.

3.4 Table 3 shows that there appears to be two tiers of quality of open space provision across the Council area with a greater number of larger, higher quality open spaces in Bo'ness, Falkirk, Polmont and the Rural Area and significantly less of these in Bonnybridge and Banknock, Denny, Grangemouth and Larbert and Stenhousemuir.

3.5 Each audited park and open space has been assigned a place in a hierarchy of importance. To decide where to place each open space on the hierarchy of importance we considered whether people would be likely to travel to that open space from across Scotland, from across the Council area, from across the settlement or only from within their neighbourhood to visit. Table 5 below shows how the quality of an open space can vary depending on where it sits in the hierarchy of importance.

Hierarchy Level	Number of sites surveyed	Average Score	Area covered by sites in hectares	Percentage of total sites scored "good" or better fitness for purpose	Percentage of total area which scored "good" or better fitness for purpose.
National	23	3.61	356.8	90.0%	98.9%
Regional	26	3.28	957.6	73.1%	84.4%
Settlement	162	2.77	764.3	41.6%	45.9%
Neighbourhood	421	2.27	370.3	15.7%	14.5%

Table 5: Quality of open spaces at different levels of the hierarchy of importance

3.6 Although only 27.6% of the sites surveyed scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment, they represent 64.0% of the total area of open space surveyed. Generally the higher an open space is in the hierarchy of importance, the more likely it is to score good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment. These results may reflect the Council's long running strategy of focussing investment on its more important open spaces and that this strategy might have been to the detriment parks and open spaces of lesser importance.

3.7 Open space across the Council area is multi functional. The open space audit assigned each surveyed open space a function or a number of functions depending

on the way it was used. Table 6 below shows how the quality of an open space can vary according to its function.

Function	Number of sites surveyed	Average Score	Area covered by sites in hectares	Percentage of total number of sites scored "good" or better fitness for purpose	Percentage of total area which scored "good" or better fitness for purpose.
Parks and Amenity Open Space	434	2.35	1129.1	19.1%	54.7%
Playspace	174	2.78	597.8	39.6%	79.3%
Sports Area	79	2.81	452.5	40.5%	38.6%
Natural/ Semi Natural	153	2.78	1701.2	44.4%	77.2%

Table 6: Quality of different functions of open space

3.8 Overall, sports areas have the highest average score in the fitness for purpose assessment and the second highest percentage of the total number of sites scoring good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment, however, the smallest percentage by area of sports pitches scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment. What this appears to suggest is that for all other functions of open space, the larger the park or amenity open space, playspace or natural/semi natural open space the more likely it is to score good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment, whereas the quality of a sports area is less likely to be dictated by its overall size.

3.9 It should be borne in mind that the fitness for purpose assessment of sites containing a sports area does not attempt to make a detailed assessment of whether the quality of that site is sufficient to meet the sports development needs of the Council area. This, more detailed assessment, has been carried out by the Council for the purposes of producing a Sports Pitches Strategy. So, although sports areas appear to have the highest average score in the fitness for purpose assessment, this does not necessarily mean that they are adequately fulfilling their sports development role.

4 How easy is it to get to different functions of open space across the Council area?

4.1 Table 7 below shows the percentage of households within each settlement with access to different functions of open space within defined walking distances and the percentage of households within each settlement with access to fit for purpose open space within 400m.

Settlement Area	Fit for purpose open space within 400m (5 minutes walk)	Park or amenity open space bigger than 0.2ha within 400m (5 minutes walk)	Open space containing a playspace within 400m (5 minutes walk)	Open space containing a sports area within 800m (10 minutes walk)	Natural/ Semi Natural Open Space within 1200m (15 minutes walk)
Bo'ness	75.0%	98.8%	57.7%	80.0%	98.5%
Bonnybridge and Banknock	55.8%	92.9%	75.1%	44.5%	99.5%
Denny	78.8%	90.7%	73.3%	92.5%	99.0%
Falkirk	74.5%	87.5%	68.2%	71.8%	99.4%
Grangemouth	60.5%	78.3%	76.1%	89.8%	86.2%
Larbert and Stenhousemuir	58.1%	90.8%	86.9%	89.3%	99.6%
Polmont Area	66.0%	81.9%	71.9%	72.1%	99.1%
Rural North	59.9%	51.9%	73.8%	79.1%	93.0%
Rural South	24.8%	82.5%	68.5%	86.9%	74.8%
Rural Villages	34.1%	74.3%	69.9%	84.8%	79.6%
Urban Settlements	67.7%	87.9%	72.8%	77.7%	97.7%
Falkirk Council	65.7%	85.7%	72.6%	78.1%	96.6%

Table 7: Percentage of households within the minimum walking distance of different types of open space by settlement area

Ward	Fit for purpose open space within 400m (5 minutes walk)	Park or amenity open space bigger than 0.2ha within 400m (5 minutes walk)	Open space containing a playspace within 400m (5 minutes walk)	Open space containing a sports area within 800m (10 minutes walk)	Natural/ Semi Natural Open Space within 1200m (15 minutes walk)
Bo'ness & Blackness	73.8%	96.4%	62.3%	80.2%	98.0%
Bonnybridge & Larbert	53.7%	88.0%	77.7%	72.5%	98.8%
Carse, Kinnaird & Tryst	61.8%	83.9%	84.9%	87.3%	97.4%
Denny & Banknock	68.5%	88.4%	71.8%	70.5%	96.5%
Falkirk North	83.7%	84.1%	71.1%	74.9%	99.0%
Falkirk South	65.4%	90.2%	66.5%	63.0%	99.5%
Grangemouth	59.5%	84.5%	76.3%	89.9%	86.2%
Lower Braes	66.0%	77.7%	64.8%	70.7%	99.0%

Upper Braes	44.1%	81.9%	72.5%	77.2%	83.4%
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Table 8: Percentage of households within the minimum walking distance of different types of open space by Council ward.

4.2 Access to fit for purpose open space within 400m is particularly low in the Rural area although the problem is concentrated in the villages of Allandale; Avonbridge; California; Dunmore; Greenhill; Shieldhill; Skinfats; Torwood and Whitecross. Amongst the main settlements Bonnybridge and Banknock; Grangemouth and Larbert and Stenhousemuir score below the Council average.

4.3 The Council's Open Space and New Development Supplementary Guidance indicates that the minimum functional size of parkland is 2000m². Access to parkland of 2000m² or greater is lowest in Falkirk, Grangemouth and Polmont, where historic settlement patterns have meant that there are significant parts of the older areas of these towns where there is no accessible parkland. The Rural North also scores badly with the villages of Airth and Torwood a particular problem.

4.4 Amongst the urban settlement areas access to an open space containing a playspace is only significantly below the Council average in Bo'ness. The villages of Torwood, The Loan, Shieldhill, South Alloa and Avonbridge also score significantly below the Council average.

4.5 Access to a sports area is only significantly below the Council average in Bonnybridge and Banknock. This is mainly because of the linear nature of the settlement which runs between Bonnybridge and Banknock along the A803 corridor and the lack of a functional sports area to serve the majority of Banknock. Of the rural villages, Allandale, Torwood, The Loan and South Alloa do not have access to a sports area within 800m.

4.6 The percentage of households with access to Natural/ Semi Natural open space within 1200m is particularly high. This is largely due the nature of the Falkirk Council area which has extensive accessible natural/ semi natural open space on the urban fringe which is rarely more than 15 minutes walk from any household. High performance is a mark of the success of the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative. It is notable that the Rural South, perhaps counter intuitively, has the lowest percentage of households within 1200m of natural/semi natural greenspace. This is perhaps a reflection that the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative did not cover settlements in the Rural area.

5 How have things progressed since the last open space audit?

Has the amount of open space changed?

5.1 The amount of open space across the Council area does not change very fast. Table 10 below summarises the main changes which have taken place between the Council's first audit of open space and the second audit. In all this amounts to a net loss of 6.35 hectares of open space which represents a reduction in open space of 0.03%.

Creation of open space	Change of function	Loss of open space
1.8 hectares of new parkland at Kinnaird Village	33.6 hectares of semi natural open space between Falkirk and Grangemouth transformed into Helix Park	2 hectares of park/ sports area at Antonshill to accommodate a new primary school
0.2 hectares of new playspace at Drover Round in Kinnaird Village		7.3 hectares at the former BP amenity grounds in Grangemouth to accommodate a new freight distribution centre.
4ha of new semi natural open space at Lionthorn		0.5 hectares of parkland at Glenfuir Road to accommodate new Council housing
0.05 hectares of new playspace at Ewing Place in Kinnaird Village		0.6 hectares at the former Maddiston Primary School to accommodate new Council housing
0.08 hectares of new playspace at Cambus Avenue in Kinnaird Village		0.3 hectares of parkland at Coo Park in Dawson to accommodate new Council housing
		1.67 hectares of semi natural open space at Rodel Drive to accommodate new housing.
		0.11 hectares of open space across the district changed to private garden ground.

Table 10: Change in open space provision

Has the quality of open space changed?

5.2 Of the 612 open spaces surveyed as part of the second open space audit, 169 of them had previously been surveyed as part of the first open space audit in 2007. Table 11, 12 and 13 below show how things have changed since the first audit across the different settlement areas, across the different hierarchies of importance and across the different open space functions.

Settlement Area	Change in average score of all open space	Percentage point change of the total number of open spaces which scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment	Percentage point change of the total area of open space which scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment
Bo'ness	+0.27	+40	+39.7
Bonnybridge and Banknock	-0.04	0	- 2.0
Denny	+0.16	+8.3	+0.5
Falkirk	+0.18	+5.2	+0.8
Grangemouth	+0.29	0	+30.1
Larbert and Stenhousemuir	+0.21	+4.7	+31.2
Polmont	+0.24	+11.1	+27
Rural North	+0.46	+10.0	-0.1
Rural South	+0.16	+12.5	-1.6
Rural Area	+0.25	+11.8	-1.1
Urban Area	+0.18	+8.9	+13.9
Falkirk Council	+0.19	+9.5	+12.1

Table 11: Change in quality of open space across settlement areas

5.3 There appears to have been a general improvement in the quality of open spaces across the Council area with the most stark improvement in Bo'ness and strong improvement in Grangemouth and Larbert and Stenhousemuir. Of the main settlement areas the quality of open space has deteriorated in only Bonnybridge and Banknock and the percentage of the total area of open space which scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment has reduced marginally in Bonnybridge and Banknock, the Rural North and the Rural South.

Hierarchy	Change in average score	Percentage point change of the total number of open spaces which scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment	Percentage point change of the total area of open space which scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment
National	+0.33	0	0
Regional	+0.46	+21.8	+15.9
Settlement	+0.12	+9.0	+12.0
Neighbourhood	+0.20	+5.1	+1.6

Table 12: Change in quality of open space across the hierarchies of importance

5.4 Most improvement has been made to the national and regional levels of open space reflecting the Council's long running strategy of focussing investment on its more important open spaces. Settlement and neighbourhood level open spaces also appear to have improved although not by as much as national and regional level open spaces.

Function	Change in average score	Change in percentage of the total number of open spaces which scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment	Change in percentage of the total area of open space which scored good or better in the fitness for purpose assessment
Park and Amenity Open Space	+0.33	+9.2	+14.1
Playspace	+0.23	+8.0	+9.2
Sports Area	+0.06	+3.6	+12.7
Natural/ Semi Natural Open Space.	+0.26	+14.9	+13.1

Table 13: Change in quality of different functions of open space

5.5 There appears to have been an across the board improvement in all functions of open space. Of all functions of open space, sports areas appear to have improved by the smallest amount since 2007.

How much investment has been made in open space?

5.6 Since the Open Space Strategy was approved in 2010 there has been significant capital investment in open space. Table 10 below shows the amount of money which has been invested in each financial year and the different funding streams it came from.

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
CSFT/CSGN	£302,559	£706,325	£314,400	£368,321	£920,819
Outdoor Access	£80,000	£848,781	£1,410,738	£1,898,180	£2,781,785
Parks and Recreation	£122,725	£392,888	£949,708	£1,275,458	£1,150,623
Helix	£2,300,000	£3,000,000	£16,400,000	£16,500,000	£3,800,000
Falkirk Community Trust	N/A	£119,182	£ 74,906	£1,680	£132,000
Total	£2,805,284	£5,067,176	£19,149,752	£20,051,959	£8,639,727
Total excluding the Helix	£505,284	£2,067,176	£2,749,752	£3,541,959	£4,839,727

Table 14: Capital investment in open space since 2010

5.7 Of the figures quoted above, not all capital investment has come from Council coffers. Significant sums of money have been levered from partner organisations such as the Forestry Commission, Central Scotland Forest Trust, the Central Scotland Green Network Trust, Falkirk Environment Trust, LEADER, SportsScotland, Scottish Canals, NHS Forth Valley, Callender Estates and SUSTAN.

