

Appendix 6 - Accessibility Standard Review

1. Introduction

1.1 The first open space strategy set the following accessibility standards:

- People should be no more than 400m (5 minutes walk) from a surveyed open space which is good quality.
- People should be no more than 400m (5 minutes walk) from a public park.
- People should be no more than 400m (5 minutes walk) from a play space.
- People should be no more than 800m (10 minutes walk) from a sports area.
- People should be no more than 1200m (15 minutes walk) from a natural/semi natural open space.

2. Access to “good quality” open space

2.1 The second open space audit has revealed that, Council wide 65.5% of households are within 400m of a surveyed open space which is of good quality (i.e. scores 3 or better in the fitness for purpose assessment) and that performance varies across different parts of the Council area with as low as 37.5% meeting this standard in the rural area and as high as 80.6% meeting this standard in the Denny area.

2.2 94.9% of households across the Council area have access to a surveyed open space within 400m walk so there are a wide range of opportunities to improve performance everywhere, by improving the quality of existing parks and open space. It seems reasonable therefore to retain this open space standard.

3. Access to a park within 400m

3.1 When defining the multiple functions of an open space in the open space audit two of the options available were “public park or garden” and “amenity open space”. It is not entirely clear what the difference between a public park and garden and an amenity open space is other than spaces which have been classified as a public park or garden generally have more formal parkland features, and are bigger.

3.2 The previous open space standard applied only to access to a public park or garden and excluded many large, good quality amenity open spaces from the analysis.

3.3 **SG13 Open Space and New Development** provides some useful guidance indicating that the minimum functional size of a new park should be 2000m². It seems reasonable therefore for the new open space standard to apply to access to a public park and garden or amenity open space of over 2000m².

3.4 The second open space audit reveals that Council wide, 85.7% of households are within 400m of a public park and garden or amenity open space of over 2000m². Performance varies across different parts of the Council area with as low as 60.7% meeting this standard in the rural area and as high as 98.8% meeting this standard in the Bo’ness area.

3.5 There are a limited number of ways to improve performance in this area:

- Where possible creating new parks within areas which don't meet this standard;
- Promoting the development of new parks in association with development opportunities in areas which do not meet this standard;
- Creating new park or amenity features within existing sports areas and natural/semi natural open spaces in areas which do not already meet this standard.
- Creating new entrances to open spaces to shorten the walking distances to them

3.6 Despite the limited opportunities to improve performance, current performance is sufficiently high to justify retaining the previous standard, albeit with slightly revised wording. Opportunities to improve performance will be highlighted within the various area strategies in section 6.

4. Access to play space within 400m

4.1 The second open space audit reveals that Council wide, Council wide 72.6% of households are within 400m of an open space containing a playspace. Performance varies across different parts of the Council area with as low as 57.7% meeting this standard in Bo'ness and as high as 86.9% meeting this standard in the Larbert and Stenhousemuir area. Improving performance would require the creation of new play areas in areas of identified deficit. In the face of challenging budget constraints aiming to significantly improve performance is probably unachievable.

4.2 As noted in the "delivering the vision" section of this Strategy, the consultative draft strategy has chosen to seek to reduce the overall number of separate play areas we maintain, allowing capital and revenue budgets to be released to enable investment in a more modern portfolio of play facilities which have a higher overall play value. A review of the play space accessibility standard is a key action of the modernising our parks and open spaces theme.

4.3 The table below shows the performance of the different parts of the Council area against different walking distance thresholds:

Settlement Area	Households with access to an open space containing a playspace within 400m	Households with access to an open space containing a playspace within 600m	Households with access to an open space containing a playspace within 800m
Bo'ness	57.7%	82.7%	93.8%
Bonnybridge and Banknock	75.1%	90.8%	96.2%
Denny	73.3%	94.5%	98.9%
Falkirk	68.2%	88.0%	97.6%
Grangemouth	76.1%	90.2%	96.4%
Larbert and Stenhousemuir	86.9%	96.3%	98.7%
Polmont Area	71.9%	89.3%	94.1%
Rural North	73.8%	84.9%	88.3%
Rural South	68.5%	87.3%	96.5%
Council Wide	72.6%	89.9%	96.6%

4.4 There are significant parts of the Council area which do not have access to an open space containing a playspace within 400m. Maintaining a 400m standard would result in the need to create many new playspaces and very few opportunities to remove playspaces without adversely affecting the number of households with access to an open space containing a playspace. Maintaining the 400m standard would not therefore meet the Council's proposed aspiration to reduce the number of playspaces and enable the play value of the remainder to be improved.

4.5 Increasing the standard to a 600m threshold would mean a much larger percentage of households across the Council area would have access to an open space containing a playspace within an "acceptable" walking distance. There would still be a number of areas where creation of new playspaces would be needed. Analysis has indicated that approximately 20 new playspaces would be needed to address identified deficiencies but there would also be approximately 22 playspaces which could be removed without adversely affecting the number of households with access to an open space containing a playspace. Adopting this standard would allow the Council to make some savings, however, much of the money saved would be needed to go towards creating new playspaces so there is not likely to be a significant amount of money left to go towards increasing the play value of existing playspaces.

4.6 Increasing the standard to an 800m threshold would mean there were very few parts of the Council area which did not meet this standard. Although there would be a few places where new playspaces were needed it would be much fewer than if a 600m or 400m threshold were adopted. There would also be more opportunities to remove play areas without adversely affecting the number of households which had access to an open space containing a playspace within an "acceptable" walking distance. Consequently there would be likely to be a larger amount of money available to invest in improving the play value of existing playspaces, however, the amount of local opposition to loss of playspaces would be likely to increase.

4.7 Increasing the standard to an 800m threshold is likely to be the only option which would allow the Council to meet its proposed aspiration to reduce the number of playspaces and enable the play value of the remainder to be improved.

5. Access to a sports area within 800m

5.1 The second open space audit reveals that Council wide, 78.1% of households are within 800m of an open space containing a sports area. Performance varies across different parts of the Council area with as low as 45.4% meeting this standard in Bonnybridge and Banknock and as high as 92.5% meeting this standard in the Denny area.

5.2 There are a number of ways to improve overall performance including:

- creation of new sports areas in areas of identified deficit;
- negotiating public access to privately managed sports areas in areas of identified deficit; and
- promoting the creation of new sports areas within development sites in areas of identified deficit.
- Creating new entrances to open spaces to shorten the walking distances to them;
- Increasing the acceptable walking distance to sports areas above 800m

5.3 Although improving performance would be challenging there is likely to be significant scope to improve performance through a small number of minor interventions. It would be reasonable to retain this standard for the time being with a further review in a future open space strategy if it appears that attaining the standard in the majority of our communities is unachievable, however, as the Council is aiming to reduce the number of sports areas it manages and maintains so that it can concentrate resources on a smaller number of better quality facilities, the best way of achieving this would be to increase the acceptable walking distance to open spaces containing a sports area. The table below shows performance against a 1200m walking distance threshold.

Settlement Area	Households with access to an open space containing a sports area within 800m	Households with access to an open space containing a sports area within 1200m
Bo'ness	80.0%	95.7%
Bonnybridge and Banknock	44.5%	71.9%
Denny	92.5%	97.8%
Falkirk	71.8%	91.8%
Grangemouth	89.8%	99.0%
Larbert and Stenhousemuir	89.3%	97.0%
Polmont Area	72.1%	91.8%
Rural North	79.1%	86.3%
Rural South	86.9%	93.6%
Council Wide	78.1%	92.9%

5.4 Under an 800m walking distance threshold there are 6 sports areas which are potentially surplus to requirements across the Council area, this rises to 15 under a 1200m walking distance threshold.

6. Access to a natural/semi natural open space within 1200m

6.1 The second open space audit reveals that, Council wide, 93.2% of households are within 1200m walk of a natural/ semi natural open space. Performance varies across different parts of the Council area with as low as 74.8% meeting this standard in the Rural area and as high as 99.5% meeting this standard in Bo'ness and Denny.

6.2 Such a high level of performance reflects the nature of the Council area. There are relatively few places more than 15 minutes walk from a settlement edge and the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative has been hugely successful in developing a network of accessible countryside on the urban fringe. It seems appropriate to retain this standard. Opportunities to improve performance will be highlighted within the various area strategies in section 5 of the Strategy.

New Standards

Accessibility Standards:

People should live no more than 400m (5 minutes walk) from a surveyed open space which is good quality.

People should live no more than 400m (5 minutes walk) from a public park, garden or amenity space of greater than 2000m².

People should live no more than 800m (10 minutes walk) from an open space containing a playspace.

People should live no more than 1200m (15 minutes walk) from an open space containing sports area.

People should live no more than 1200m (15 minutes walk) from a natural/semi natural open space.

Accessibility Policy: The Council will make investment decisions which aim to increase the percentage of households which meet the various accessibility standards set out in the Open Space Strategy.