

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee
DATE	11 June 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Draft Aberdeen Open Space Audit: 2024
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/24/162
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	David Dunne
REPORT AUTHOR	Guy Bergman
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the draft Aberdeen Open Space Audit Reports 2024. The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 requires planning authorities to carry out an audit of existing open space provision in their local authority area. The previous audit report can be viewed on our website <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/environment/open-spaces>.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:

- 2.1 approves the content of the draft Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2024: Main and Public Survey Reports;
- 2.2 instructs the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to finalise the Reports (including minor corrections, formatting and inclusion of remaining Ward and Theme information following the examples shown on pages 34 and 50 in the Main Report), circulate these finalised Reports via a Service Update to NZET Members and publish them on the Council’s website;
- 2.3 instructs the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning following consultation with Chief Officer Data Insights HDRCA to publish the Open Space Audit geographic information system (GIS) mapping on the Council’s website;
- 2.4 instructs the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to explore options for the development of an ArcGIS StoryMap version of the findings of the Aberdeen Open Space Audit Reports; and
- 2.5 instructs the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to proactively promote the Reports and findings with relevant stakeholders, including our communities.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

About the Open Space Audit & Reports

- 3.1 The Council, as a local authority, is required under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 to carry out a periodic audit of existing open space provision in our local authority area. This generally requires publicly accessible open space over 0.2 hectares or any other spaces the planning authority considers to be relevant to be surveyed, excluding agricultural and private land.
- 3.2 An Open Space Audit is an evidence gathering exercise used to assist with protecting and enhancing blue-green spaces both through the Planning process, by supporting blue-green infrastructure policies in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan and National Planning Framework 4, the spatial strategies for Aberdeen and Scotland. The Planning system plays an important role in protecting and enhancing open spaces for community use, sport and recreation as well as providing high quality new spaces. Open spaces, natural areas and green belt designations are used to protect our most important environmental assets and areas.
- 3.3 A periodic audit provides key information on the types, distribution, qualities and accessibility of open and blue-green spaces across Aberdeen. This information is also critical to directing green space policies, management of spaces and the interventions of partners. These Audit findings will inform various strategic outcomes for Aberdeen, for example through the Council's Climate Change Plans, the collective citywide Net Zero Aberdeen, Aberdeen Adapts and associated place based strategies, especially the Natural Environment Strategy and Place based outcomes in current and future Local Outcome Improvement Plans. The findings will also be of use to professionals across a range of fields, community organisations and city partners to aid in their own approaches to open space.
- 3.4 Qualitative indicators, for example ranking quality and condition of facilities, can also help to establish fitness for purpose.
- 3.5 Work is ongoing with the Data and Insights team regarding ongoing analysis of audit outputs and the development of future data sharing opportunities.

Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2024 Public Survey

- 3.6 The audit process should also identify community views on the value of open spaces and this was completed through an Aberdeen Open Space Audit Public Survey. This report also presents the findings from the Survey which sought to collect the views of residents and visitors on how they use and perceive Aberdeen's green and open spaces. The citywide survey received 580 responses, which reflects a high level of engagement compared to similar local surveys.

3.7 Open Space Audit Key Findings

Citywide Open Space

Aberdeen covers an area of 185.7 km² or 18,570 hectares. 3,902 hectares of open space was surveyed as part of the Open Space Audit equating to 21% of the total Aberdeen area.

The citywide average is 300 hectares of open space per ward, ranging from a high of 698 hectares and a low of 47 hectares.

The average citywide open space quality score in Aberdeen was 14.3 out of 25.

Public parks and gardens, amenity greenspace and **sports areas** which are typically the most accessible public spaces used in daily life equate to 5%, 23% and 20% of citywide open space respectively.

Natural / semi natural greenspaces are the largest category of open space with 1796 hectares equating to 46% of open space.

Amenity greenspaces are the second largest open space type (895ha 23%).

Sports areas (798ha 20%) are the third largest open space type.

Public parks and gardens equate to 5% or 204 hectares of open space and this is followed by private gardens or grounds, which includes school grounds and institutional ground areas. These are not always fully accessible at all times but can still be important functional and usable spaces.

Burial grounds, allotments and **play spaces** cover relatively small areas with a combined total of 59 hectares or 2% of open space.

Citywide Open Space Satisfaction

A total of 580 responses to the citywide survey were received.

79% of respondents reported being satisfied, fairly satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of Aberdeen's greenspace and open space areas however some open space types had a lower satisfaction rating than others.

Allotments and community food growing spaces, walking/cycling routes and amenity spaces had the lowest citywide satisfaction rates reported by respondents:

- Allotments and community food growing spaces: 65%
- Walking/cycling routes: 64%
- Amenity spaces: 64%

Parks, woodlands and natural or semi-natural areas had the highest citywide satisfaction rates reported by respondents:

- Parks: 86%
- Woodlands: 82%
- Natural or semi-natural areas: 82%

75% of respondents were satisfied, fairly satisfied or very satisfied with children's play areas.

Managing Spaces for Nature

- 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to see more greenspaces managed in a more natural way for the benefit of wildlife and nature.
- 49% of respondents said they would be encouraged to visit spaces more often if they were managed for wildlife and nature.

Value of Open Space

Respondents were asked the top three reasons why they use, visit or enjoy the city's open spaces. The most common reasons given were:

1. Physical exercise or health reasons (e.g. walking or jogging etc.)	75%
2. To be in nature	71%
3. To meet friends or family or to socialise	53%
4. To get out of the house or office (e.g. for a break)	47%
5. For mental health reasons	31%

Improving Open Space

When asked what would encourage respondents to use or visit Aberdeen's greenspace or open spaces more often the most common reasons given were:

1. If they had better facilities (e.g. benches or toilets)	49%
2. If they were better managed for wildlife (e.g. wildlife enhancements such as tree and wildflower planting, long grass, wetlands, shrubs etc.)	45%
3. If there were more adequate paths for walking or cycling	36%
4. If they had less or no dog fouling	30%
5. If they were better connected to other spaces	25%

6. If they had less or no litter	25%
7. If there was better information about them (e.g. information panels or signage)	20%
8. If they had better lighting	19%

Food Growing

- 54% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to see more food-growing opportunities within green and open spaces across Aberdeen.
- 65% of respondents reported being satisfied with the quality of allotments and community food growing spaces.

This is the third lowest satisfaction rate of all the open space types and could be attributed to the current high demand and long waiting lists for allotments.

Open Space Use

- On average 41% of respondents visited greenspace and open space areas several times a week, 19% visited once a day and 15% visited once a week.
- 59% of people stayed on average for 1-2 hours, 26% for less than one hour and 15% for more than 2 hours.

Ward Information

A worked example of ward level information is available on page 50 of the Open Space Audit Main Report, information in this format will be provided for all wards in the final published version.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The report provides a broad overview of open space provision for the city.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Failing to complete a periodic Open Space Audit would result in the Council not meeting its duties under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Biodiversity, open space & trees

- 6.1 Open Space and Green Space Networks are important for both people and wildlife, providing a range of social, health, economic and environmental benefits. An Open Space Audit can have a positive impact as it is used to

assist with protecting and enhancing green spaces through the Planning process and by supporting blue green infrastructure policies in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan and National Planning Framework 4, the spatial strategies for Aberdeen and Scotland. An up to date Open Space Audit is critical to directing green space policies, management of spaces and directing the interventions of partners.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <i>*taking into account controls/control actions</i>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Failing to complete a periodic Open Space Audit would result in a lack of up-to-date information to appropriately inform future strategy documents.	Open Space Audit is completed and published.	L	Yes
Compliance	Failing to complete a periodic Open Space Audit would result in the Council not meeting its duties under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.	Open Space Audit is completed and published.	L	Yes
Operational	No significant risks identified		L	Yes
Financial	No significant risks identified		L	Yes
Reputational	Failing to complete a periodic Open Space Audit would result in the Council not meeting its duties under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.	Open Space Audit is completed and published.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified		L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u>	
Impact of Report	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with communities to review the management of council-managed open spaces to create more sustainable and safer green areas and open spaces and develop a Community Environmental Improvement Fund, for communities to access, to implement their own small-scale local environmental improvements. • Protect and enhance Aberdeen’s Green Belt, green spaces and open spaces so they can be enjoyed for purposes of leisure, sport and environmental wellbeing, and investigate the creation of new pocket parks.
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The Open Space Audit supports the Prosperous Economy section of the LOIP. Open Spaces have multiple economic benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the image of a place • Helping developers get the most out of the site by combining uses, e.g. open space + SUDS, helping development viability • Attracting businesses and inward investors by creating attractive settings • Making it cheaper and easier to deal with surface water by keeping it on the surface
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The Open Space Audit support the Prosperous People section of the LOIP.</p> <p>Open space provides opportunities for sport and recreation, helps to promote active and healthy lifestyles, and can improve mental health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging exercise and physical activity by providing quality green spaces for walking, cycling, sports and play • Providing better opportunities for active travel and physical activity • Improving mental well-being by providing access to nature and attractive green spaces and breathing spaces

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities for growing food locally and healthy eating
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	<p>The Open Space Audit support the Prosperous Place section of the LOIP.</p> <p>Open spaces have multiple health and well-being, economic, and environmental protection benefits. They improve health and wellbeing while also giving us opportunities to connect with nature and people, tackle the global climate-nature crisis, promote nature recovery, and make positive environmental changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing health, environmental and economic benefits. Blue and green infrastructure delivers multiple functions including climate mitigation, nature restoration, biodiversity enhancement, flood prevention, and water management • Green networks and corridors linking spaces promotes biodiversity and enables movement of wildlife • Communities benefit from accessible, high-quality blue, green and civic spaces • Reduce CO² emissions by providing non-vehicular travel routes encouraging walking and cycling • Provide carbon storage and sequestration in vegetation • Managing flood risk: living roofs, large trees and soft landscape areas absorb heavy rainfall • Provide for storage of surface water in times of peak flow in SUDS and other water features • Clean and cool the air, water and soil, countering the 'heat island' effect of urban areas
Regional and City Strategies	A refreshed Open Space Audit Strategic supports objectives in a range of regional and city strategies including: Strategic and Local Development Plans, Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Aberdeen Adapts, Net Zero Routemap and Natural Environment strategy for the City.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	No assessment required as this report is limited to reporting findings from the Open Space Audit. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with David Dunne, Chief Officer Strategic Place Planning on 08/05/2024.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Only non-identifiable data is included in this report therefore a DPIA is not required.

Other	N/A
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10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 -
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/13/section/3/enacted>

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2024: Main Report
11.2 Appendix 2 – Draft Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2024: Public Survey Report

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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