

ABERDEEN OPEN SPACE AUDIT 2010

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the key findings of an audit of Aberdeen's open spaces and explains how these were obtained. The purpose of the project was to gain an understanding of the quantity and quality of the city's open spaces and how accessible they are to the communities who use them. Open Space Audits are required by national planning policy guidance and Aberdeen City Council committed to carry one out in the Aberdeen Local Plan 2008. In 2009 a small working group was set up to advise on, assist with and oversee the audit process. The group included external partners Aberdeen Greenspace and Scottish Natural Heritage. In total 479 sites across the city covering an area of 3471 hectares were audited.

The audit will help inform future decision making relating to the planning and management of the city's open spaces and will be used to develop an Open Space Strategy.

1.1 What is open space?

'Open space' is the open, usually green land within and on the edges of settlements. Parks, public gardens, allotments, woodland, play areas, playing fields, green corridors and paths, churchyards and cemeteries, natural areas, institutional land as well as 'civic space' such as squares or other paved or hard surfaced areas with a civic function are all forms of open space.

1.2 What is an open space audit?

An open space audit is an assessment of how much open space exists, how it is distributed and how accessible it is to the communities around it. An open space audit also measures the quality of open spaces.

1.3 Why have we done one?

The audit and assessment is being carried out to provide up to date information on open space within Aberdeen. Its purpose is to:

- develop a clear and robust understanding of open space in Aberdeen;
- see whether Aberdeen's communities have enough open space, or enough of the right types of open space;
- gather information on the quality of Aberdeen's open space.

The audit will be used to support the implementation of policies in the forthcoming Local Development Plan and also to inform the preparation of an Open Space Strategy, which will seek to maximise the contribution that open space can make to people's quality of life. The Open Space Strategy will provide a framework for the management and development of Aberdeen's open space which will enable the whole community - residents, businesses, community organisations, voluntary and statutory agencies - to work in partnership towards achieving the maximum benefit from our open spaces.

Evidence shows that quality, accessible open space delivers a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits, which are priorities for communities, the Council and the government. Open spaces can help communities to be: **healthier**, through opportunities to be physically active and supporting mental health and wellbeing; **safer and stronger**, through building skills, cohesion, confidence and pride in communities; **wealthier and fairer**, through providing places where people want to live and work, attracting and retaining

investment and sustainable growth; **smarter**, through opportunities for environmental education, lifelong learning and links with Curriculum for Excellence; **greener**, through green networks, supporting biodiversity, air quality, flood management and connecting people and places for sustainable travel opportunities.

Local and national policies provide a strong context for open space audits and the requirement for local authorities to take a strategic approach to open space. The key policies that are relevant to this project are explained further in appendix A.

1.4 How have we done it?

This Open Space Audit has been carried out according to national best practice guidance from Greenspace Scotland¹ and the Scottish Government². It combines the information collected by earlier relevant projects along with site assessments and community engagement carried out in 2009 and 2010. The quantity, quality and accessibility of Aberdeen's open spaces have been established through the following assessments:

- Greenspace Characterisation & Mapping Study 2007 – Funding was provided by Greenspace Scotland to develop a comprehensive digital map of all of Aberdeen's greenspace. The project involved analysing aerial photographs and identifying the land use category, or type (see Figure 2), of all of the urban land in Aberdeen plus a 500 metre buffer around the built up areas.
- Greenspace Audit 2007 – As a recommendation of Aberdeen's Parks and Open Space Strategy 2005 an audit of the city's parks and greenspaces was undertaken. The 2007 audit provided an assessment of publicly managed greenspace, at least 0.4 hectares in size.
- Open Space Audit 2009/10 – Site assessments, community engagement and a review of existing information took place in order to expand the 2007 data to fulfil the requirements of national guidance on Open Space Audits. This meant adding to the assessment the types of open space that are defined in Planning Advice Note (PAN) 65 that had not been part of the 2007 audit, such as churchyards, school grounds and private grounds, as well as incorporating the views of local communities. The biodiversity value of open spaces was another factor that was included in the 2010 assessment that had not previously been taken into account. In order to ensure that best use was made of information that was already available through other related studies and projects, a review was undertaken of relevant documents, such as Neighbourhood Community Action Plans and relevant local strategies and plans. Relevant information gathered through this review was incorporated into the audit.

¹ Greenspace Quality: A Guide to Assessment, Planning and Strategy Development; Greenspace Scotland & Glasgow & Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership <http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk>

² Planning Advice Note (PAN) 65: Planning and Open Space; The Scottish Government; 2008
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/05/30100623/0>

TABLE 1: DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED AS PART OF THE INFORMATION REVIEW

- Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan	- Aberdeen Local Plan 2008
- Community Plan Update 2008	- Core Paths Plan 2008
- Sports Pitch Strategy 2003	- Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2005
- Joint Health Improvement Plan 2006-08	- Landscape Strategy - Part 1
- Local Transport Strategy 2008-12	- Neighbourhood Community Action Plans
- Parks and Greenspace Strategy 2004-09	- Single Outcome Agreement
- Fit for the Future - Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2009-15	- Woodland In And Around Towns - Woodland Audit

1.4 How have local communities contributed?

Community engagement was undertaken as part of this project from December 2009 to January 2010. This was mainly done through a questionnaire and relevant results are referred to throughout this report. More information on this is available in appendix B.

2.0 THE QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF OPEN SPACE IN ABERDEEN

2.1 How has the quantity and distribution of open spaces been measured?

All of Aberdeen’s open spaces were identified and mapped digitally using a Geographic Information System (GIS). The PAN 65 land use typology of each individual piece of open space, or polygon, was added to the GIS, and verified through site surveys. This allows us to analyse the provision across the city – we can see the amount of open space on the whole, the amount in each area of the city, as well as the amount of each type of open space. There are limitations in looking purely at the quantity of open space, as this does not reflect how or whether people can access spaces, or the ‘fitness for purpose’ of the site. It is also important to take into account the quality of the space – how it is managed and maintained, the uses for the space and how the community values it.

TABLE 2: PAN 65: Types of Open Space

PAN 65 Type	Description
Public parks and gardens	Areas of land normally enclosed, designed, constructed, managed and maintained as a public park or garden.
Private gardens or grounds	Areas of land normally enclosed and associated with a house or institution and reserved for private use.
Amenity greenspace (Residential, Business and Transport-related)	Landscaped areas providing visual amenity or separating different buildings or land uses for environmental, visual or safety reasons and used for a variety of informal or social activities such as sunbathing, picnics or kickabouts.
Playspace for children	Areas providing safe and accessible opportunities for teenagers and children’s play, usually linked to housing areas.
Sports areas	Large and generally flat areas of grassland or specially designed surfaces, used primarily for designated sports (including playing fields, golf courses, tennis courts and bowling greens) and which are generally bookable.
Green corridors	Routes including river corridors and old railway lines, linking different

	areas within a town or city as part of a designated and managed network and used for walking, cycling or horse riding, or linking towns and cities to their surrounding countryside or country parks. These may link green spaces together.
Natural/semi-natural	Areas of undeveloped or previously developed land with residual natural habitats or which have been planted or colonised by vegetation and wildlife, including woodland and wetland areas.
Allotments and community growing areas	Areas of land for growing fruit, vegetables and other community growing plants, either in individual allotments or as a community spaces activity.
Civic space	Squares, streets and waterfront promenades, predominantly of hard landscaping that provide a focus for pedestrian activity and can make connections for people and for wildlife.
Burial grounds	Includes churchyards and cemeteries.

In addition to the amount of land covered by each type of open space, it is important to consider its distribution through measuring how far people must travel to reach certain types of open space. This has been done by identifying the maximum distance that people are likely to travel from home to each type of space. National guidelines, benchmarking against other local authorities and the results of the community engagement carried out as part of the audit have been used to establish these distances. These are applied to the GIS mapping to show where there may be deficiencies or over-provision.

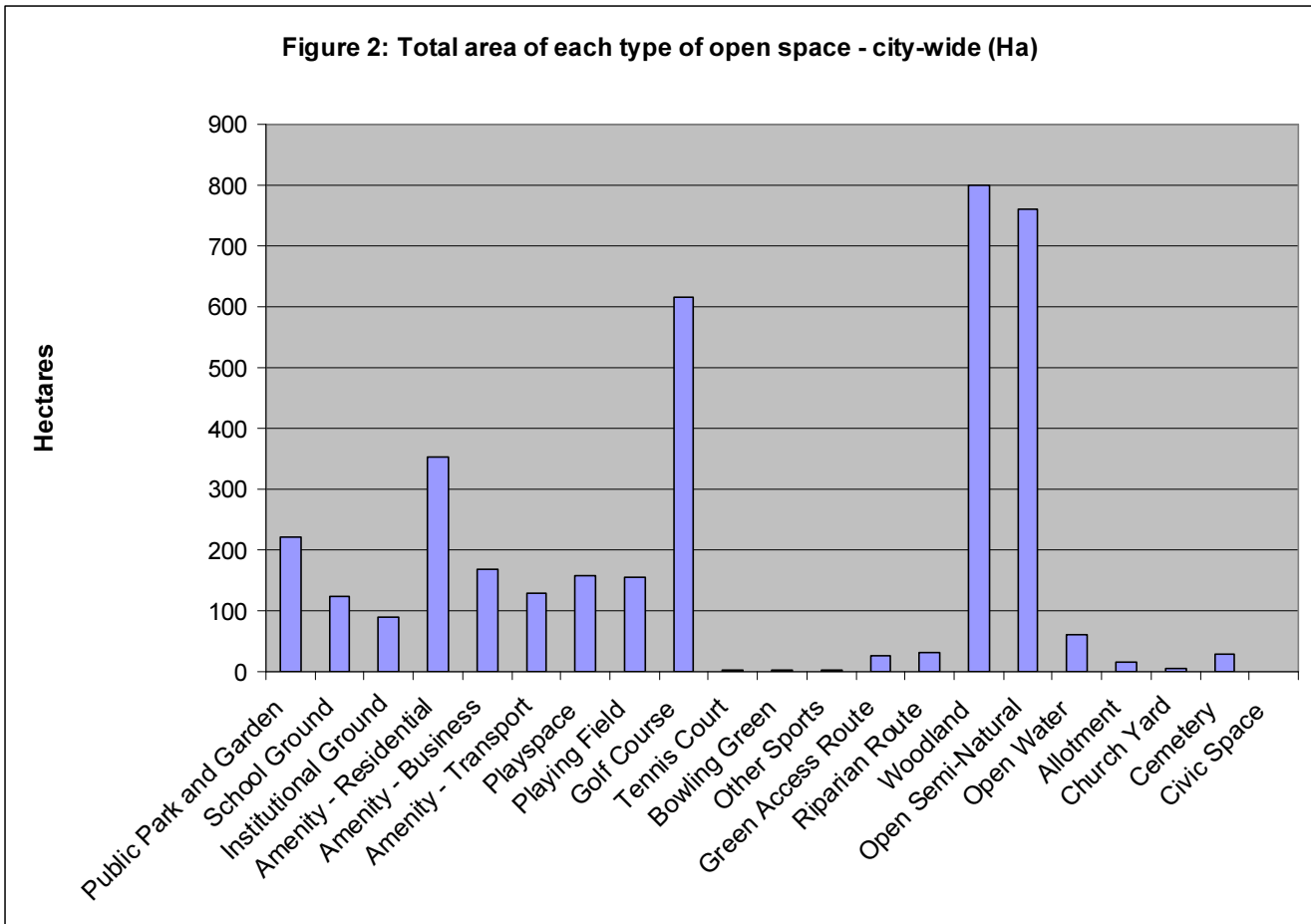
TABLE 3: MINIMUM ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

Type of Open Space	Distance Catchment (metres)
Major Park (Town / Heritage Park)	1500
Neighborhood Park	600
Local Park	400
Natural/ Semi-Natural Greenspace	500
Play Space for children & young people	400

3.2 Findings

The audit has identified 3471 hectares of open space (not including private gardens or sites under 0.2 hectares). This equates to 16.6 hectares per 1000 people (based on a population of 209,260 as estimated in 2007 by General Register Office for Scotland).

The figure below shows the overall provision of audited open spaces in Aberdeen according to the PAN 65-defined types of open space.

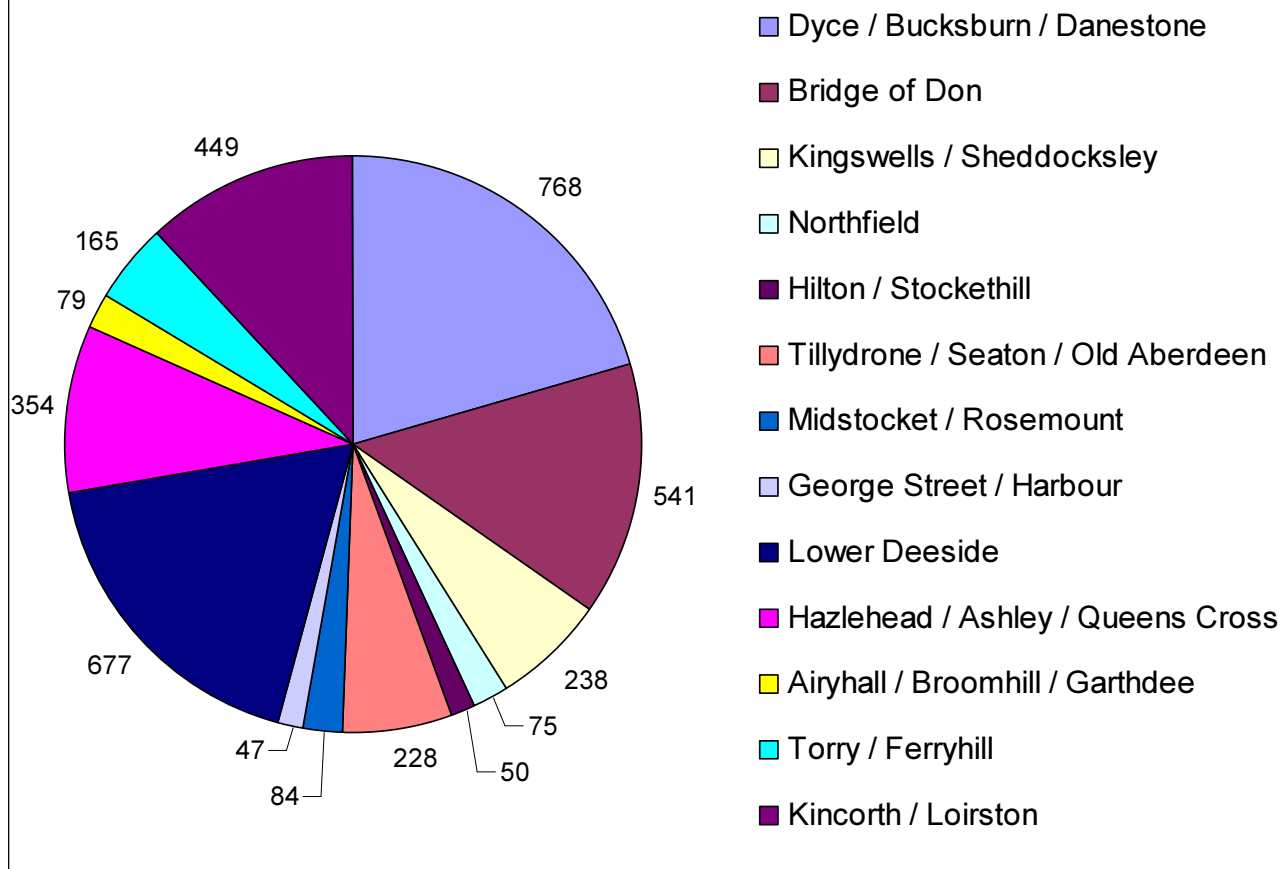


The largest categories of the city’s open spaces are woodlands (801Ha or 23%) and open, semi-natural grounds (760Ha or 22%). The third largest type is golf courses. However when the three types of amenity open space – residential, business and transport – are combined, they are third largest, covering 649Ha or 19% of the city’s open spaces.

A limitation to this information is where an open space site may serve more than one function. The data above is based on the primary function of each open space site. In some cases secondary functions are attached to a site, such as where a public park contains a play space or tennis court for example. The play space or tennis court will be identified as a secondary function and therefore will not be counted as such in the findings presented above.

See Appendix D for more detailed information on the quantity of open space.

Figure 3: Total Open Space per Ward (Ha)



The chart above shows that Dyce, Bucksburn and Danestone and Lower Deeside have the most open space while Hilton and Stockethill and George Street and Harbour have the least. The community engagement carried out as part of the audit showed that 14% of respondents felt that more open space is required in the city centre, which is largely made up of the George Street and Harbour ward. Of those respondents who indicated that more open space was required in their area, the second highest answer, after the city centre, was the Sunnybank / Froghall / Powis area, which falls within the Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen and George Street / Harbour wards.

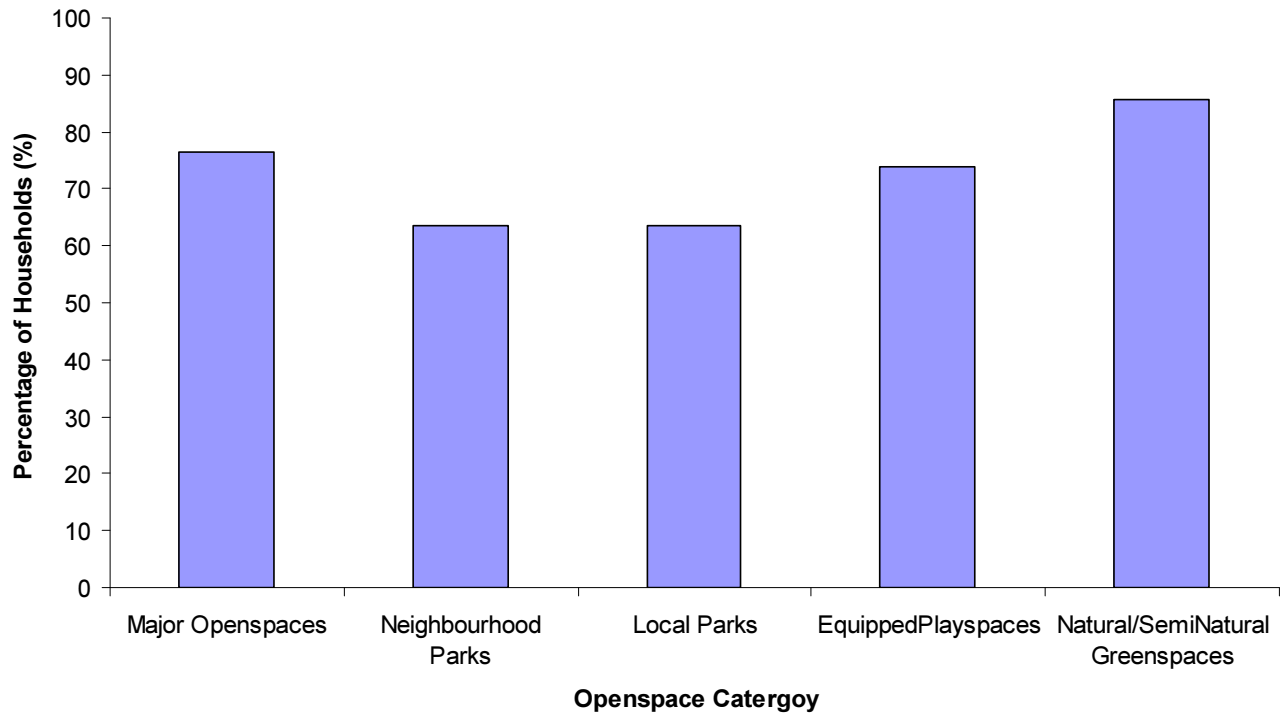
Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone has some large areas of woodland at Parkhill, Kirkhill and Craibstone, as does Lower Deeside, with Foggieton, Denwood and Countesswells Woods. Bridge of Don has the third highest amount of open space, which is largely made up of the golf courses along the coast and Scotstown Moor / Perwinnes Moss District Local Nature Reserve.

Although it is useful to consider the distribution of open space across each area of the city, a limitation with this is that the position of ward boundaries can lead to an incomplete picture. For example, the Northfield ward has the third least amount of open space of all the wards, however immediately outside this ward's boundary is a large area of playing fields, a community woodland, and golf course. Figures 6 to 10 provide an additional way in which to

consider the provision and distribution of open space, based on the minimum accessibility standards presented in Table 3.

The percentage of households meeting the minimum accessibility standards was determined for each key open space type across the city. Figure 4 below shows that 70% of households in the city are within the 1500 metres of major parks, 60% are within 600 metres of a neighbourhood park, 60% are within 400 metres of local parks, 70% are within the 400 m of play spaces and 90% are within 500 metre of natural / semi-natural open space.

Figure 4: Percentage of households within accessibility thresholds



The maps below show the distribution of and accessibility to each key category of open space.

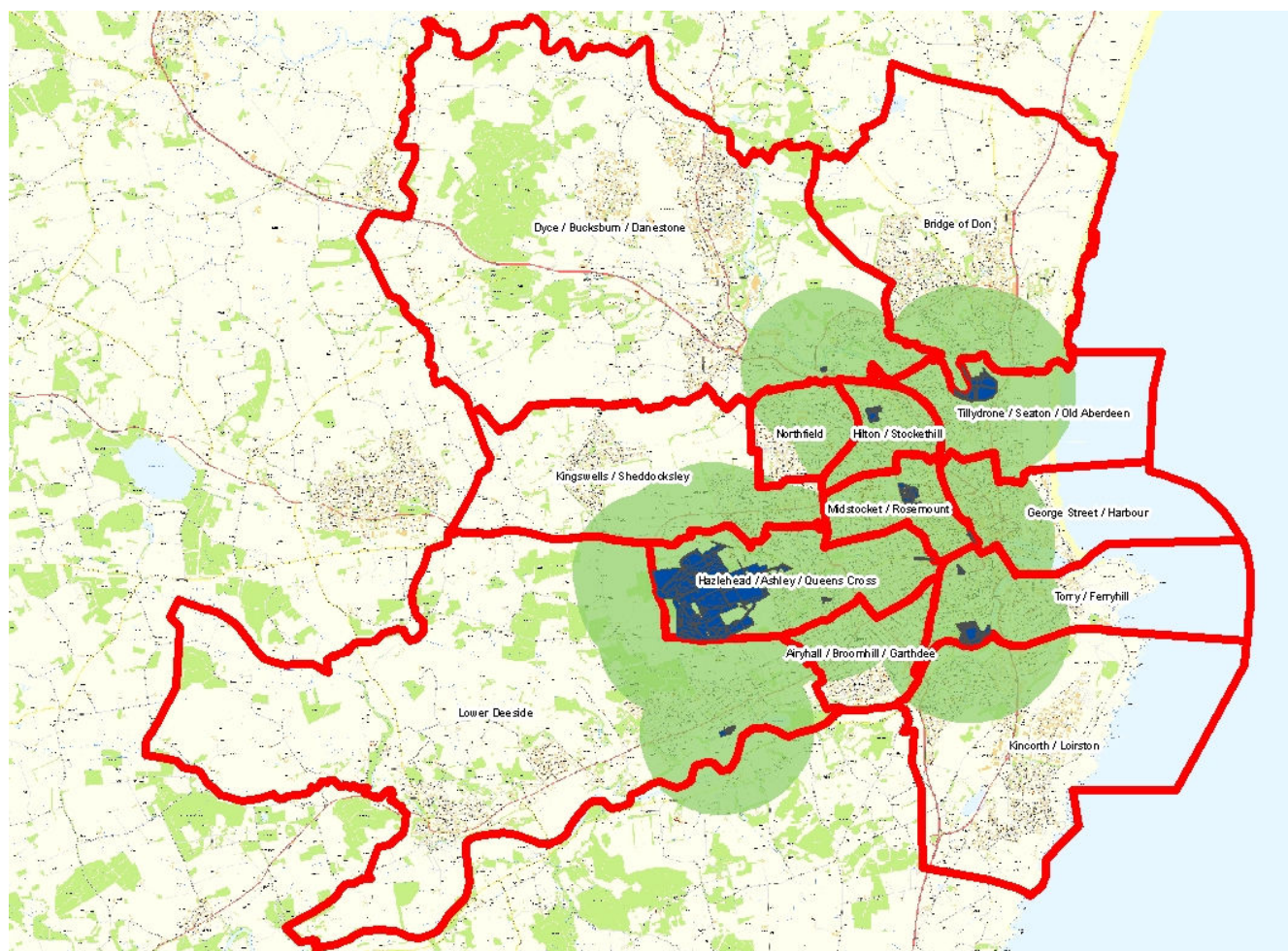


FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF MAJOR PARKS

The map shows that major parks such as Town and Heritage Parks are not equally distributed across the city. This distribution reflects the concentration of town and heritage parks around the older residential areas of the urban centre. Hilton / Stockethill, Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen, Rosemount / Midstocket, George Street / Harbour and Hazelhead / Ashley / Queens Cross have adequate provision of Town and Heritage Parks according to the recommended distance thresholds. Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone, Lower Deeside, Bridge of Don and Kincorth / Loirston are lacking in major parks, with only 33%, 43% and 43% of the residents living within the recommended 1500 metres respectively.

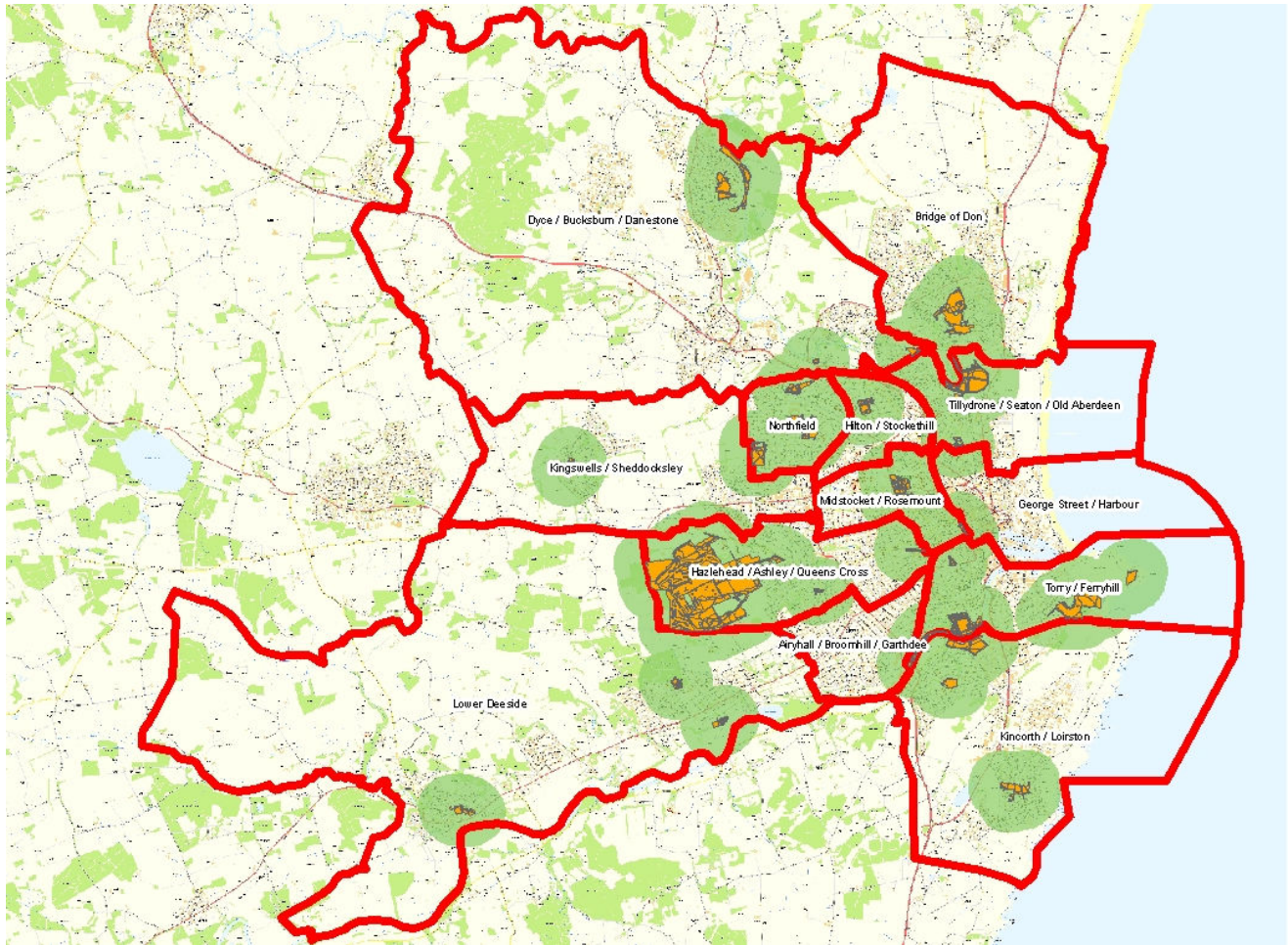


FIGURE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS

The map above shows that neighbourhood parks are not equally distributed across the city. Residents of Northfield, Midstocket / Rosemount and Torry / Ferryhill have the greatest level of provision of neighbourhood parks. Airyhall / Broomhill / Garthdee, Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone and Kingswells / Sheddocksley are lacking in neighbourhood parks, with only 30%, 43% and 52% of their residents living within the recommended 600 metres.

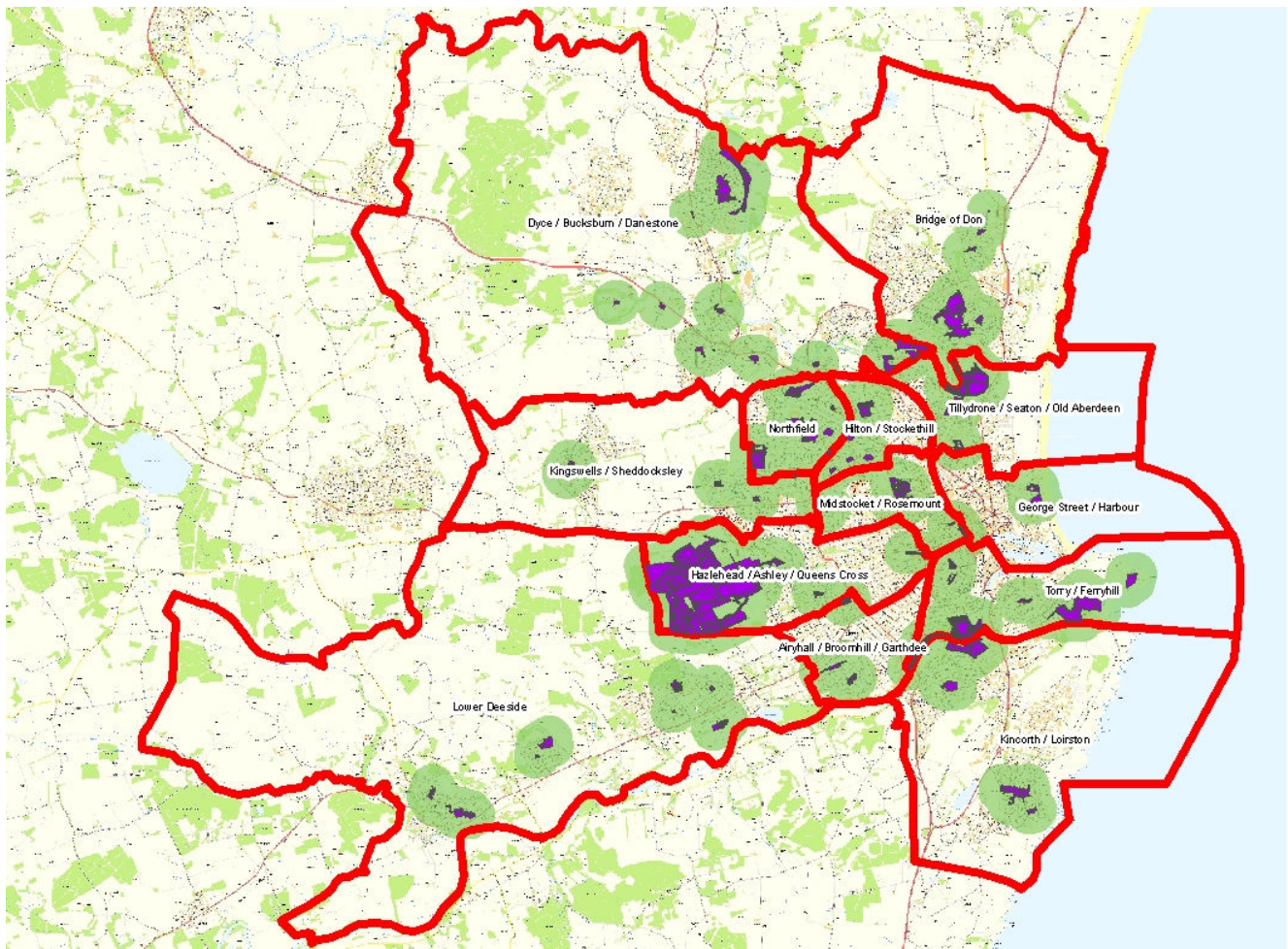


FIGURE 7: DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL PARKS

The audit shows that some areas are lacking in local parks. Northfield, Torry / Ferryhill and Midstocket / Rosemount have the greatest level of provision of local parks with 87%, 88% and 79% of their residents living within the recommended 400 metres. Large areas within the George Street / Harbour, Airyhall / Broomhill / Garthdee and Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone wards are outside of the 400 metres recommended for local parks.

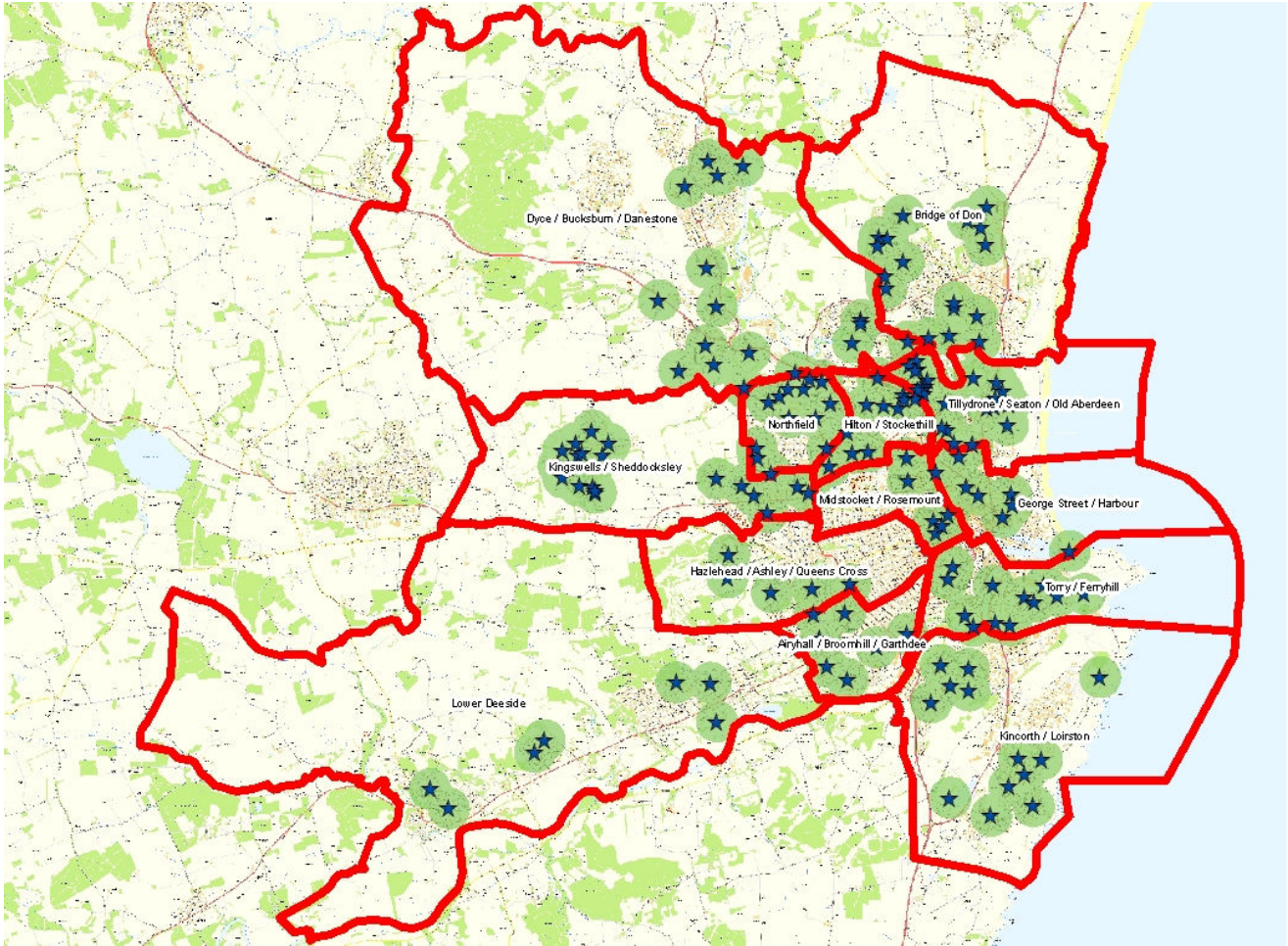


FIGURE 8: DISTRIBUTION OF EQUIPPED PLAYSPACES

There are 160 equipped play spaces across the city. Tillydrone / Seaton/ Old Aberdeen (91.8%) and Hilton / Stockethill (91.3%) have the greatest level of provision, with 92% and 91% of their residents within the recommended 400 metre threshold respectively. Hazlehead / Ashley / Queens Cross and Lower Deeside have the least access to equipped play spaces, with 29% and 46% respectively.

The wards around the outside of the built up area contain on average twice as many equipped play spaces as the more central wards. Many of the play spaces assessed in the audit are small sites containing very few items of play equipment.

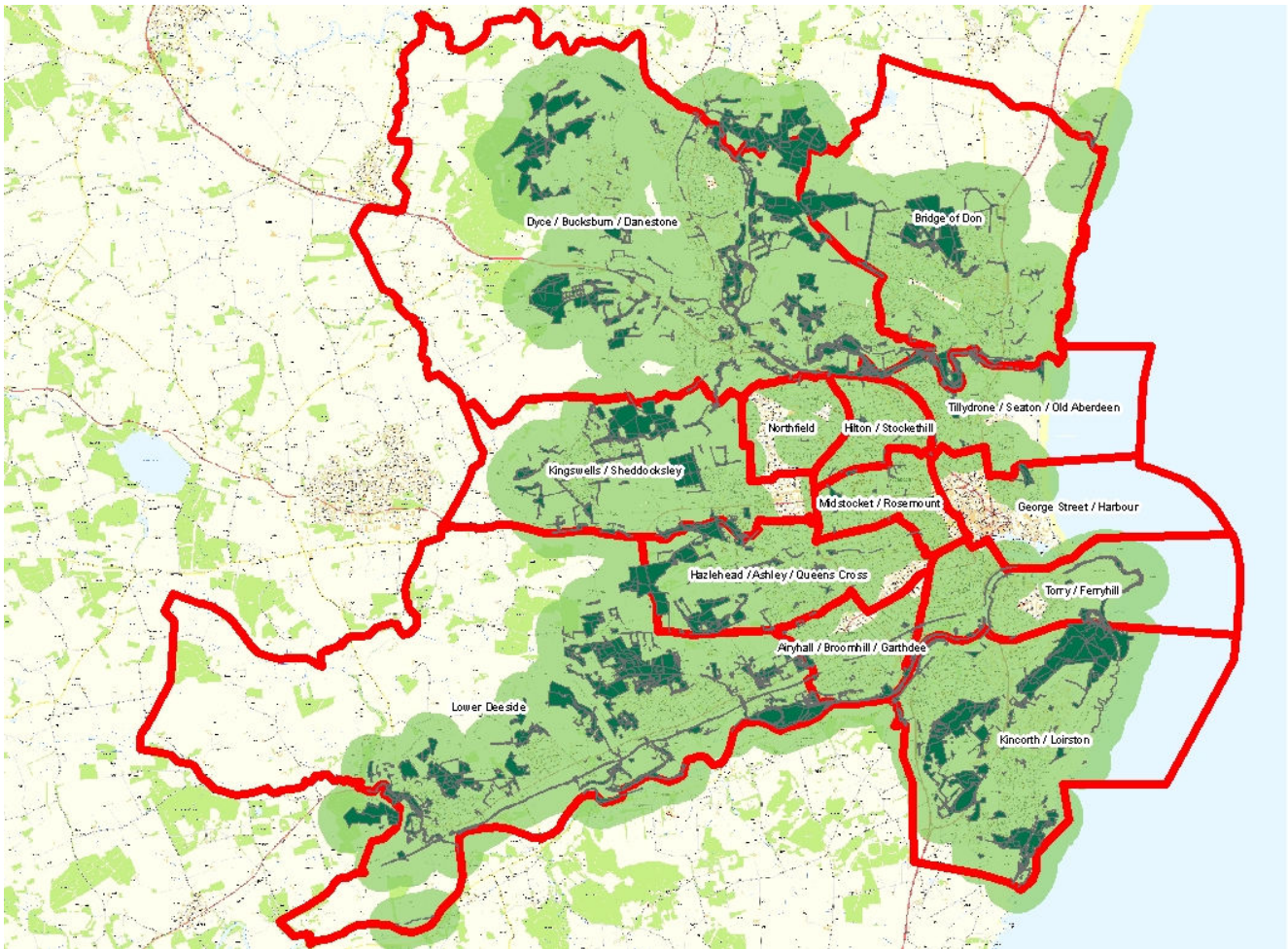


FIGURE 9: DISTRIBUTION OF NATURAL AND SEMI NATURAL OPENSACES

The map above shows that most of the city's residents are within 500 metres of natural open spaces. Hilton / Stockethill, Kincorth / Loriston and Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone have the greatest level of provision of natural open space, with close to 100% of their residents within the recommended distance. George Street / Harbour has the least access to natural open spaces with 45% of residents within 500 metres of these sites. It is important to note that while over 86% of all households in the city are with 500m of natural and semi-natural open space, not all sites are easily accessible to the public.

The community engagement exercise concluded that natural or semi-natural greenspace or woodland is the most well used type of open space, with 73% of respondents indicating that they use these spaces more than a few times a month. They were also rated second highest in terms of satisfaction, with 51% rating them good or excellent.

3.0 THE QUALITY OF OPEN SPACE IN ABERDEEN

3.1 How has the quality of open spaces been measured?

The quality of each of Aberdeen's open space sites has been assessed using a set of criteria based on guidance from Greenspace Scotland. The assessment criteria fall under the following headings:

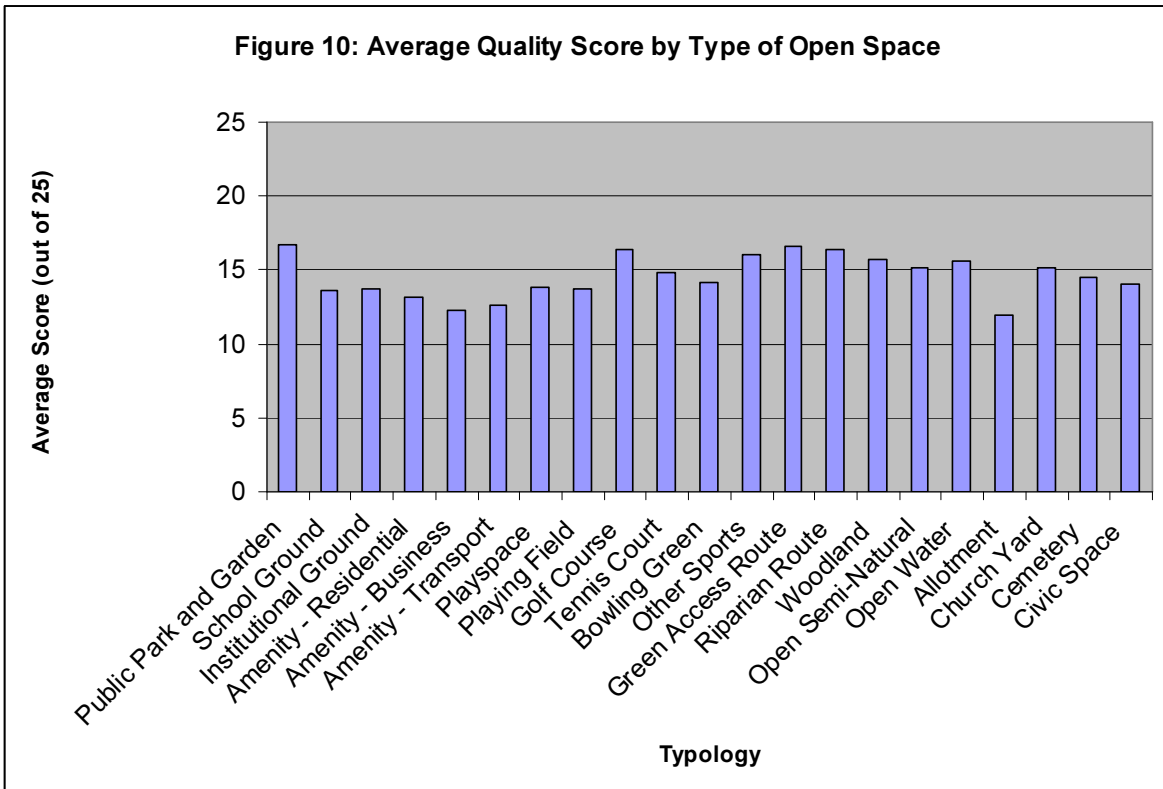
- Accessible and well connected,
- Attractive and appealing place,
- Active, supporting health and well being,
- Community support, or
- Biodiversity.

Each site was given a score out of five for each of these headings. There are limitations to this approach, such as the fact that the score is based on the surveyor's impression of the site on the day it was visited, but it should provide us with a consistent picture of the quality of open space across the whole city. An example of the survey sheet used in the assessments is available in appendix C. The Northeast Biological Records Centre (NESBREC) assisted with the assessment of biodiversity value.

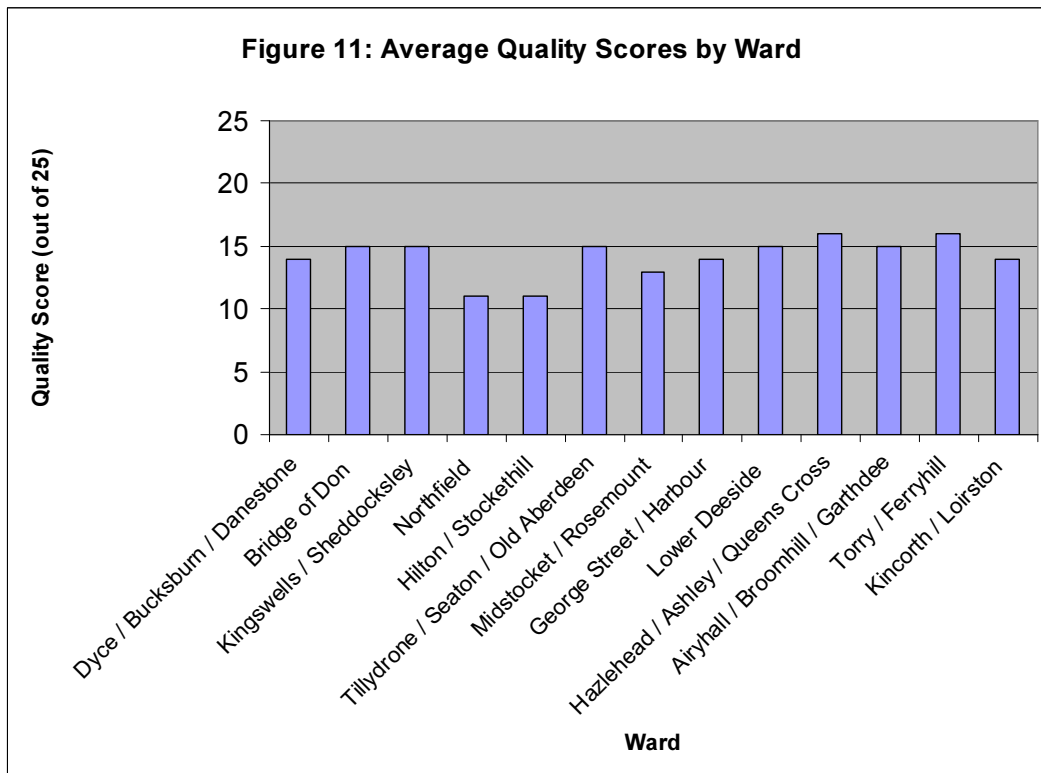
3.2 Quality Findings

The chart below shows the average overall quality scores across the city for each type of open space. The city's public parks and gardens and green access routes score highest in terms of quality (17 out of 25). This is reflected in the community engagement undertaken as part of the audit as respondents were most satisfied with the city's public parks and gardens, with 60% rating them as good or excellent. Natural green space and green corridors were rated second and third in terms of customer satisfaction.

Allotments and business amenity open space score most poorly (12 out of 25). When considering the three types of amenity open space – residential, business and transport – together, they also score poorly, with a total average score of 13 out of 25. The community engagement carried out as part of the audit broadly concurs with this conclusion – the type of open space that respondents were least satisfied with was amenity open space, with 35% of respondents rating it poor or fair.



The chart below shows that the average quality scores vary across the city. The audit found that Hazlehead / Ashley / Queens Cross and Torry / Ferryhill wards have the highest quality open spaces, both having an average quality score of 16 out of 25. Northfield and Hilton / Stockethill have the poorest quality sites with an average quality score of 11 out of 25.



4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The audit results show that open spaces across the city are not evenly distributed due to the historic and often random nature of open space provision. The poorest quality parks and open spaces tend to be found within the regeneration priority areas. Northfield and Hilton and Stockethill are lacking in provision of open space and the spaces that do exist in these wards have been assessed as poor quality.

While the central areas of the city are lacking in the amount of open space, often the higher quality, public parks and gardens are located in these areas. The areas lacking in open space tend to be densely developed areas where the scope for creating new open space is likely to be limited. However, in some areas there may be opportunities to enhance the quality of existing spaces.

The post-1960s residential developments around the outside of the city have the greatest quantities of open space. Much of this takes the form of amenity grounds. This type of open space scores poorly in terms of quality and achieves a low level of customer satisfaction. Amenity open space tends to consist of areas of grass and is costly to maintain. The Open Space Strategy may offer opportunities to increase the quality of open space in these areas, review the management of them and consider the possibilities for developing existing amenity open space into alternative, higher quality and more publicly desirable types of open space. Equipped play space provision and management could also be reviewed as part of the Open Space Strategy. The audit suggests that there are many small play spaces – consideration could be given to an alternative approach of providing fewer but bigger and better play spaces.

Revised standards for open space in new developments could encourage the development of more useful, publicly desirable and efficient types of open space, such as natural areas, green corridors, play spaces and allotments – demand for these was apparent in the community engagement. The Scottish Government's new Designing Streets policy statement may be of relevance in relation to the development of transport amenity open space.

The distribution of major and neighbourhood open spaces should also be addressed by revised standards for development. Such large open spaces may need to be taken forward through masterplanning, in line with the Local Development Plan.

Where it is not possible to increase the amount of open space in areas of the city where the audit has shown that the provision of open space is low for example, where land is densely developed, developer contributions from brownfield development should be sought to help enhance the quality of nearby open spaces.

5.0 NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Prepare an open space strategy and detailed action plan.
- b) Update the Open Space Audit database annually and carry out a full review five years from now.

c) Involve stakeholders in the development of the open space strategy and action plan, through workshops or other forums as appropriate.

d) Develop new standards for the provision of open space in future developments, including appropriate requirements for developer contributions where on-site provision is not possible.