

Update to the Sevenoaks District Council Open Space Study (June 2018)

July 2026

Summary

The Sevenoaks District Council Open Space Study (the Study) was published in June 2018 and has been reviewed to ensure it remains an appropriate and up-to-date evidence base document to support the emerging Local Plan.

The review has identified no fundamental changes that would undermine the conclusions of the Study. The key findings regarding the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space across Sevenoaks District (the District) remain relevant and continue to provide a robust evidence base for plan-making, informing the policies for the emerging Local Plan. Where more recent evidence has been required, updated assessments have already been prepared, including the Sevenoaks District Council Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2024.

Background

The objectives of the Study were to:

1. Provide an audit of existing provision of different types of open space facilities in terms of quantity, quality, accessibility and wider value to the community;
2. Identify local needs and recommend standards of provision for all types of open space up to 2035; and
3. Identify deficiencies in provision together with strategic options/policies for addressing any shortfalls in provision (either current or future).

The Study focused on the assessment of parks and gardens, amenity green space, facilities for children and young people, land associated with outdoor sports facilities, natural and semi-natural green space and green corridors, allotments, cemeteries and churchyards. It also included information on facilities related to golf, outdoor gym equipment and multi-use games areas.

For land associated with outdoor sports, golf, outdoor gym equipment and multi-use game areas, updated assessments were made through the Sevenoaks District Council Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2024. This is the most up-to-date piece of evidence for these facilities and should be used in planning for them.

National Policy and Guidance

Whilst the National Planning Policy Framework has been revised several times since 2018 (2018, 2019, 2021, 2023 and 2024), its approach to planning for open space has remained broadly consistent. Successive amendments have largely retained the established policy framework of assessing need, safeguarding existing open space and resisting its loss unless specific exceptions are met. Changes since 2018 have been

evolutionary rather than representing a substantive shift in policy direction. Planning Practice Guidance continues to support the preparation and use of local assessments of open space need and provision. The methodology of the Study therefore remains consistent with current national policy and guidance.

Changes to Open Space Provision

Since publication of the Study, there has been no significant loss of designated open space across the District, and the overall pattern of provision remains substantially unchanged. The District continues to benefit from an extensive network of parks, recreation grounds, natural green space, allotments and other open spaces that contribute to health, wellbeing, biodiversity and recreation. Whilst some sites may have been developed, experienced minor changes, enhancements or management improvements, a review of planning permissions and allocated sites has not identified any extensive areas of open space assessed within the Study that have been developed or lost to alternative uses.

Furthermore, whilst the District's population and development needs have continued to evolve since 2018, there is no evidence that these changes have fundamentally altered the spatial distribution of identified deficiencies and surpluses or rendered the Study's conclusions unreliable for strategic plan-making purposes.

Consequently, the baseline assessment of open space quantity, accessibility and distribution remains valid, and the evidence relating to areas of deficiency, surplus provision and accessibility continues to provide a reliable and appropriate basis for plan-making.

Emerging Local Plan Context

The Study continues to support the preparation of policies relating to open space, green infrastructure, recreation, biodiversity and healthy communities within the emerging Local Plan. Increased emphasis on biodiversity enhancement, nature recovery, green infrastructure and Biodiversity Net Gain reinforces the importance of protecting and enhancing the District's network of open spaces and green corridors.

The Study was prepared using the Fields in Trust standards and guidance that were current at the time, which provided a recognised framework for assessing open space needs and provision. Although Fields in Trust published updated standards in 2024, these represent an evolution of the same established approach rather than a fundamental change in methodology. The updated standards do not invalidate the baseline evidence contained within the Study. Nevertheless, the emerging Local Plan requires new development proposals, including on sites allocated for development, to be assessed against the most up-to-date standards and guidance applicable at the time of determination, including the latest Fields in Trust standards where relevant.

The proposed growth identified within the emerging Local Plan does not alter the existing baseline assessment of open space provision. Site-specific open space requirements arising from new development will be addressed through Local Plan

policies and assessed against current standards and evidence at the planning application stage.

Conclusions

The review has identified no fundamental changes that would affect the overall findings of the Study. National policy objectives relating to open space, recreation, green infrastructure and healthy communities remain broadly consistent with those in place when the Study was prepared. Furthermore, there has been no significant loss of designated open space within the District since publication of the Study, meaning that the baseline assessment of quantity, quality and accessibility remains substantially unchanged. More recent evidence has also been prepared where appropriate, including the Sevenoaks District Council Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2024, ensuring that the evidence base has been updated in those areas where a refresh has been necessary.

The methodology remains consistent with national guidance and the Study continues to provide a comprehensive assessment of open space provision across the District. Accordingly, the Sevenoaks District Council Open Space Study (June 2018) remains a robust, proportionate and fit for purpose component of the Council's evidence base for the emerging Local Plan. The Council will update the Study as and when national policy changes are more substantial or when the pattern of open space across the District changes such that it requires a full re-assessment.