

MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT COUNCIL OPEN SPACE, SPORT & RECREATION STUDY: ASSESSMENT REPORT

PART 4: PARKS AND GARDENS

Introduction

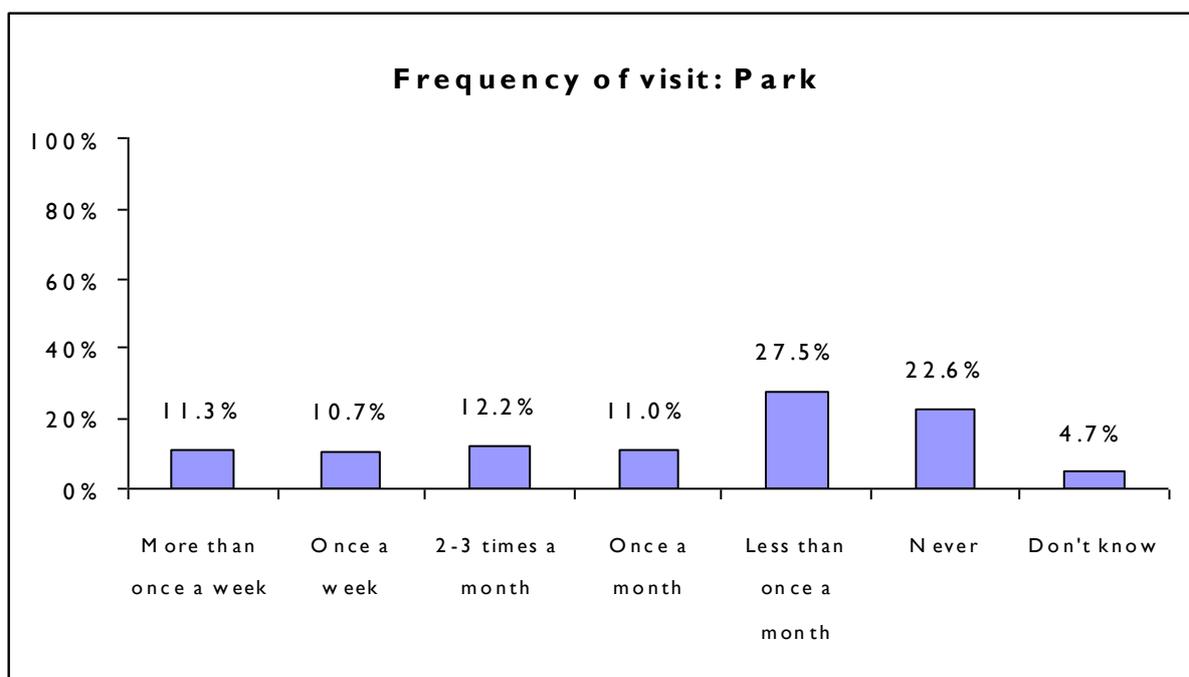
- 4.1 The typology of Parks and Gardens, as set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide, covers urban parks, country parks and formal gardens (including designed landscapes), which provide 'accessible high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events.'
- 4.2 Parks and Gardens, are largely a feature of the environment in which they are located. They are supply or opportunity-led and not necessarily derived from the use of standards.

Context

- 4.3 This section outlines findings from the survey of residents in relation to their use of and attitudes towards the provision of parks and gardens in Malvern Hills District. It provides a context for the subsequent sections, which address the quantity, quality and accessibility of provision. Results are provided for the descriptions used in the survey itself.

Usage

Figure 4.1: Frequency of usage of parks in the previous 12 months

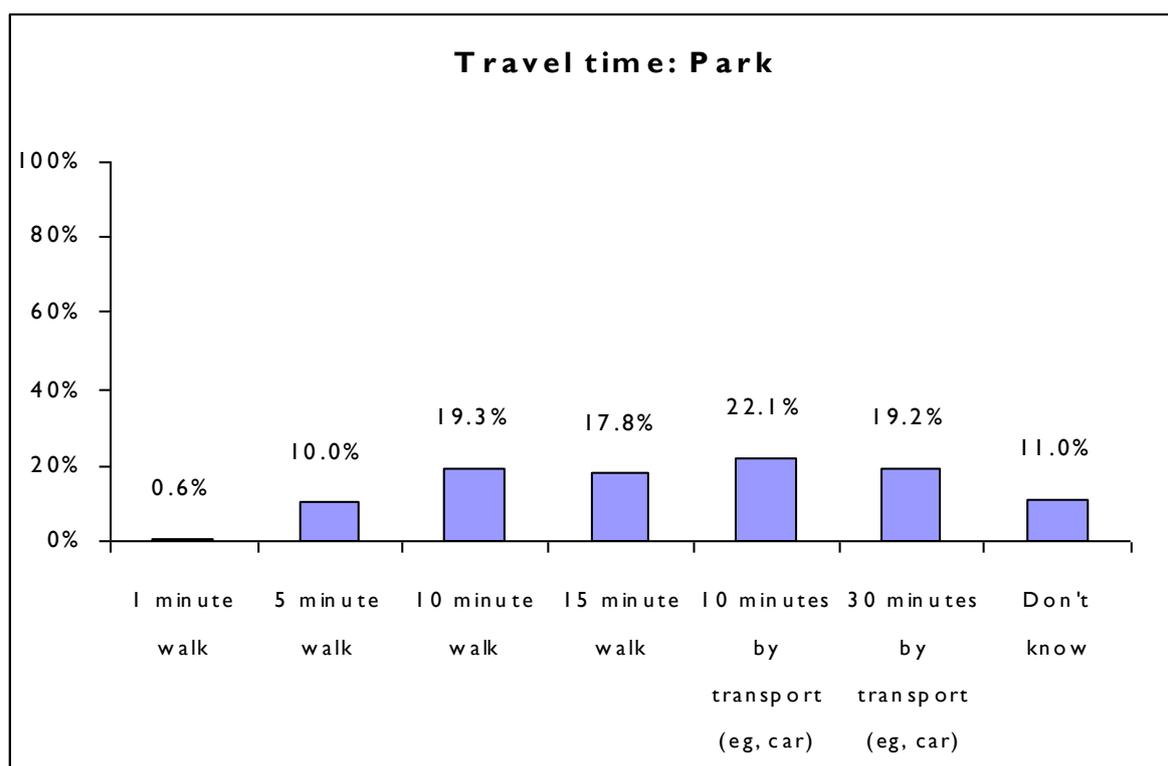


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- 4.4 Overall, just under three-quarters (72.7%) have visited a park in the previous 12 months. Just over a fifth visit parks once a week or more often, with a similar proportion (23.2%) visiting once a month or more. There is a significant proportion of users (27.5%) that visit parks less than once a month.
- 4.5 Unsurprisingly, overall usage is slightly higher in the Malvern Town area (79.2%) as most of the provision is located here. Frequency of use is also higher in Malvern Town area, with 28.5% visiting parks once a week or more often. Usage decreases with age, falling from 83% for 25 – 34 years olds and 81.5% for 35 – 44 year olds to 69.3% amongst 45 – 55 year olds and around 61% thereafter. This pattern is also reflected in the frequency of 25 – 34 year olds use for example, 41.4% visit a park at least on weekly basis, dropping to 16.7% for 45 – 54 year olds.

Travel time

Figure 4.2: Time prepared to travel to access a park



- 4.6 There is a split in patterns of travel for parks. Nearly half (47.7%) of the residents would be willing to walk up to 15 minutes compared to 41.3% of respondents who would be willing to travel up to 30 minutes via the use of transport.
- 4.7 There is little variation by area, although a smaller proportion of residents in Upton and Hanley areas (35.6%) and Tenbury Town area (33.8%) should be willing to travel by transport to access provision. Younger residents are much more likely to



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be only willing to walk a short distance to access a park (28.6% of 19 – 24 year olds would walk no further than 5 minutes and 86.7% no more than 15 minutes).

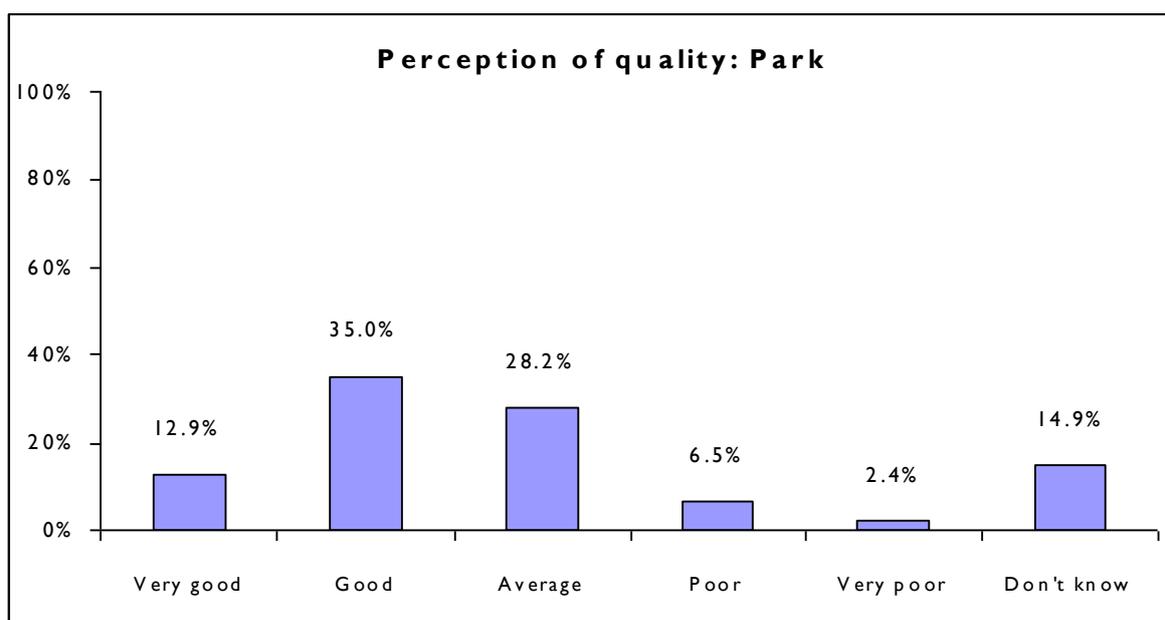
Quality of provision

- 4.8 Almost half (47.9%) of residents rate the quality of parks in the area as good or very good. A much smaller proportion (8.9%) rates the quality as poor or very poor. Quality is most highly rated in Malvern Town area (65%). The proportion rating it as good or very good hovers around two-fifths elsewhere. Only in Tenbury Town area, however, is this the result of a greater number rating provision as poor or very poor (16.9%). There is no significant reduction in the rating of quality by age, although the proportion unable to comment increases by age reflecting overall usage levels.

Availability

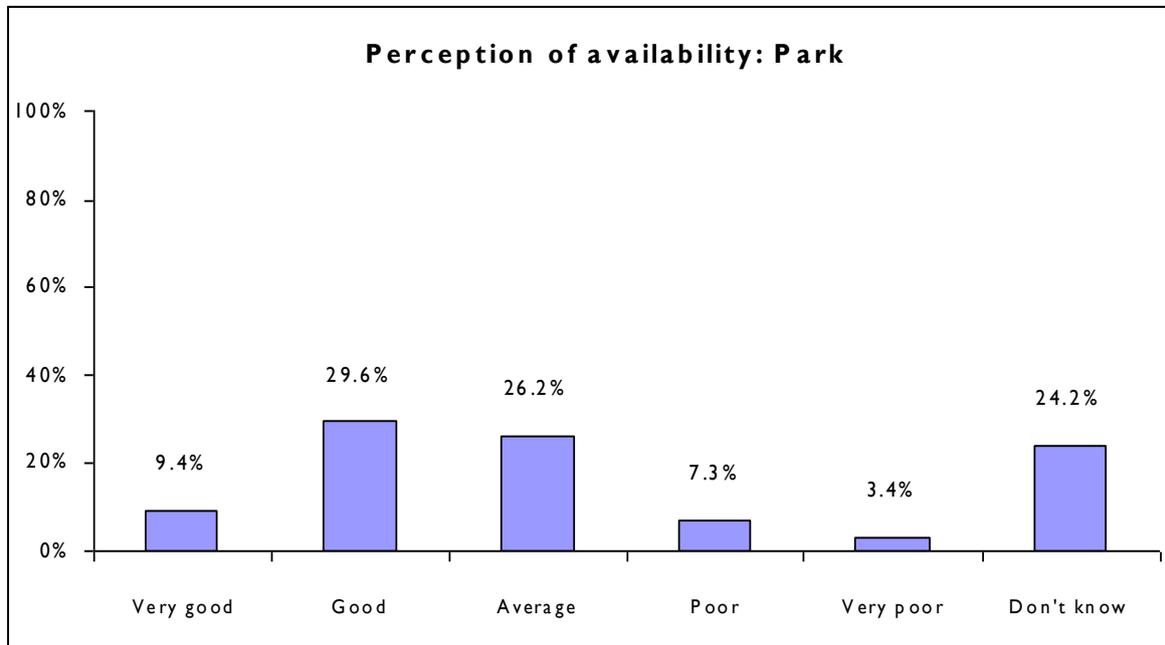
- 4.9 Just under two-fifths (39%) of respondents rate the availability of parks in Malvern Hills District as good or very good. Although sizeable proportions rate availability as average (26.2%) or are unable to rate provision (24.2%), only a tenth (10.7%) rate it as poor or very poor. Unsurprisingly the availability of parks is rated as good or very good by over half of Malvern Town area residents (53%). This undoubtedly reflects the location of provision in the District. It is rated lowest in Upton and Hanley areas (28.2% rating it as good or very good.). There is a slight reduction in the rating of availability by age (from 48.7% rating it as good or very good for 25 – 34 year olds to 34.5% for the 65+). As with quality, this reflects levels of usage with an increasing proportion unable to comment.

Figure 4.3: Quality of provision of parks



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Figure 4.4: Availability of parks



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Key issues

Current provision

4.10 There are six sites classified as parks and gardens totalling ten¹ hectares. Parks and gardens have been classified in the following ways to identify their effective catchment:

- District park – sites between 2 and 20 ha, areas that attract a significant proportion of users from particular parts of the local area, designed principally for passive recreation, serving the recreational needs of the local population.
- Local park – sites of 2 ha or less, smaller areas that attract almost all users from a particular area, normally located on the edge of housing estates and serve the immediate population.

Table 4.1: Distribution of parks and gardens sites by analysis area

Analysis area	Local park		District park		TOTAL provision	
	Number	Size(ha)	Number	Size(ha)	Number	Size(ha)
Malvern Town area	4	2.08	2	7.40	6	9.49
Rural areas	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tenbury Town area	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	-	-	-	-	-	-
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	4	2.08	2	7.40	6	9.49

4.11 There is only one site within the District, Priory Park, which can be considered as traditional park provision. This is reflected in the high quality and high value score awarded to the site. The further five sites classified under this typology are either garden or sport/recreation focused.

¹ Figures rounded up

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Accessibility

4.12 The effective catchments of parks has been identified using the approach shown in Table 2.2. The following catchments are used to identify the coverage of current provision:

- Local parks – 400 metres.
- District parks – 1,200 metres.

Settlement hierarchy

4.13 The proposed settlement hierarchy for parks and gardens is set out below. The categorisation of settlements in Malvern Hills District is set out in the appendices document.

Table 4.2: Settlement hierarchy – parks and gardens

Category	Minimum provision
Malvern Town	All residents to be within 1,200 metres of parks and gardens provision
Category 1	Settlements of Upton and Tenbury only – all residents to be within 1,200 of parks and gardens provision All other settlements – no minimum provision
Category 2	No minimum provision
Category 3/4	No minimum provision

Table 4.3: Gaps in provision of parks and gardens across Malvern Hills District (as assessed against settlement hierarchy)

Analysis area	Catchment gaps
Malvern Town area	<input type="checkbox"/> Dyson Perrins <input type="checkbox"/> West Malvern Town <input type="checkbox"/> Malvern Wells
Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/> None
Tenbury Town area	<input type="checkbox"/> Tenbury Wells
Upton and Hanley areas	<input type="checkbox"/> Upton upon Severn

4.14 Assessment against the hierarchy shows that there are small gaps in the Malvern Town area that need to be addressed to ensure all residents live within 1,200 metres of a park and garden. As there is no current provision in either Tenbury or Upton and Hanley, there is a shortfall against the hierarchy in these areas. All the provision is located in the Malvern Town analysis area. This supports the consultation findings that Malvern Hills District has a lack of formal park provision.



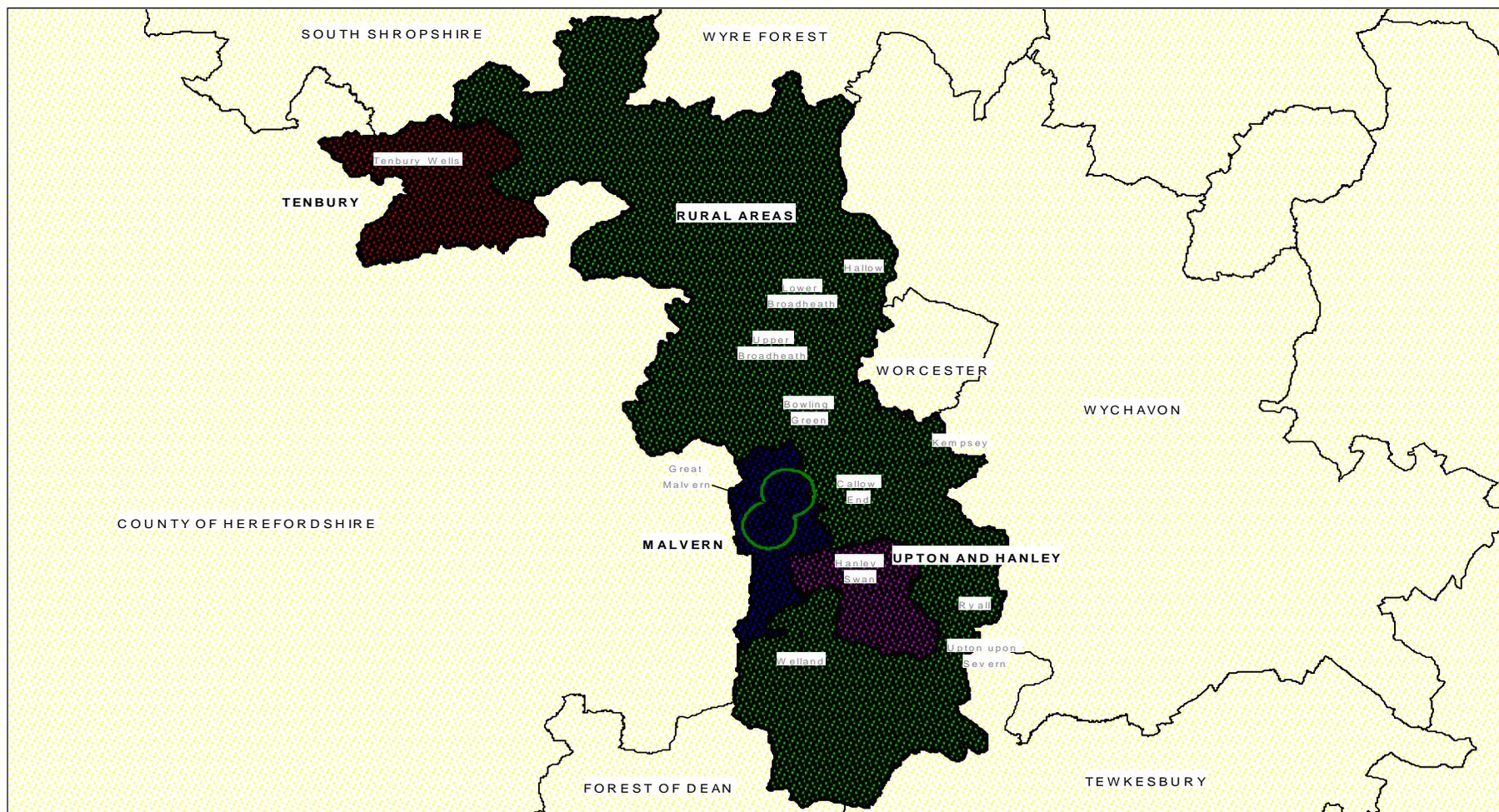
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- 4.15 As the mapping shows there is no park and garden provision in Upton-upon-Severn. Upton Sports Ground/Playing Fields on Old Street (Collinghurst Meadow) provides the largest recreational opportunity in the Town. Although consultation finds that the playing fields are well used as an open space, the function of the site is informal recreation due to the lack of facilities. There is local demand for the provision of a formal open space serving the Town offering seating areas, constructed footpaths, attractive planting/landscaping and features of interest e.g. play area, formal gardens.
- 4.16 Since the open space provision in Upton-upon-Severn is informal, e.g., Collinghurst Meadow and Stockyats Meadow there is a lack of fully accessible open space provision with good quality paths to facilitate wheelchair users or users with pushchairs.
- 4.17 The physical accessibility of parks and gardens is considered, by users, to be adequate. However, wheelchair users highlight difficulty in fully accessing Priory Park. There is demand for ramp provision from the Malvern Theatres into the Park. MHDC recognises the need to improve ramped access within the Park and also the need to refurbish the bridge taking into account requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).



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Figure 4.5: Parks and gardens mapped against settlement areas with catchments applied



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Management – strategic

- 4.18 Management of parks and gardens within Malvern Hills District is split between WCC, MHDC and Malvern Town Council.
- 4.19 Currently, no parks or gardens have a full written management plan. However, consideration is being given to the future entry of Priory Park and Victoria Park for the Green Flag Award. In starting to work towards achieving Green Flag the production of written management plans should be considered. Working to a written management plan will ensure that relevant policies and regimes, required to be successful in achieving the Green Flag Award, are in place for each site.

Management – operational

- 4.20 Grounds maintenance is carried out in-house for sites managed by WCC, MHDC and Malvern Town Council. MHDC's grounds maintenance team works to the specifications utilised under compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). Although this does not appear to impact on the overall cleanliness and maintenance of sites, with Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens both scoring 4 out of 5 for cleanliness and maintenance on site assessment, CCT specifications are restrictive and can prove inefficient. The drafting of management plans will provide an opportunity for MHDC to move away from current (CCT-driven) practice towards more efficient and good practice maintenance regimes.
- 4.21 The issue of maintenance regimes has been raised as an issue by a number of consultees who believe that hedge-cutting regimes should be reconsidered to take account of the nesting season. It is reported that there have been occasions when maintenance regimes have interred with wildlife.

Security

- 4.22 A number of parks and gardens in Malvern Hills District are popular socialising places for groups of young people. Although the congregation of young people itself is not classed as anti-social behaviour, the gathering of large groups can create an intimidating environment for other users of open space, often presenting a barrier to use. MHDC Street Scene wardens are working to provide a highly visible presence within parks and engage with children and young people congregating with sites to break down the barriers between them and other users.
- 4.23 The installation of CCTV may resolve issues surrounding fear of crime and is a proven tool to tackle anti-social behaviour. Where feasible this should be considered, along with improved lighting. Street Scene identifies a need for CCTV and improved lighting to be installed in Priory Park as the site is often used during the evenings as an access route to the Malvern Theatres. Consultation also suggests that additional lighting would be of benefit in Rose Bank Gardens. However, this is not identified by the site assessment.

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4.24 The sheltered seating areas in Priory Park are a magnet for vandalism and graffiti and attract undesirables. This in turn inhibits genuine use, according to consultation. Although the seating area is valuable to the Park the future of the shelters should be considered by MHDC.

Quality

Table 4.4: Quality scores for parks and garden sites by analysis area

Analysis area	QUALITY Scores					Number at:	
	maximum score	lowest score	MEAN score	highest score	spread	below 60%	above 60%
Malvern Town areas	151	26%	46%	62%	35%	5	1
Rural areas	151	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tenbury Town areas	151	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	151	-	-	-	-	-	-
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	151	26%	46%	62%	35%	5	1

4.25 A large proportion of sites are assessed as low quality. The local authority mean score lies below the threshold set at 60%. The low quality sites generally fail against criteria such as toilet provision, car parking and lighting. Imperial Road Gardens has been assessed as low quality. However, MTC is currently undertaking enhancement work at the site, including path upgrading and landscape improvements. This will improve the visual quality of the site.

4.26 The Green Flag Award Scheme, managed by the Civic Trust, provides a national standard for parks and greenspaces across England and Wales. Public service agreements identified by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) highlight the importance placed on working towards Green Flag status as an indicator of high quality parks. The Green Pennant Award, also a part of the Green Flag Award Scheme, recognises high quality green spaces that are managed by voluntary and community groups.

4.27 Linked to Local Area Agreement outcomes consideration is being given to the entry of Priory Park for future entry for the award. Consultation and site assessments indicate that, if infrastructure improvements are undertaken at the site, interpretational signage installed and community involvement generated, the site is likely to be successful in the field assessment of the award. However, in order to enter the Park for Green Flag a written management plan is required.

4.28 Rose Bank Gardens is a valuable open space, situated at the forefront of the Hills. A site assessment of the area shows that the top path at its rear is overgrown and inaccessible. The panoramic views from the site are hindered by the number of

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overgrown trees. The Gardens experiences problems with occasional anti-social behaviour due to the secluded nature of some sections within the site. There is local resident and user demand for the vegetation clearance and thinning to create an open site to deter incidents of anti-social behaviour.

- 4.29 Dog fouling has been highlighted, through consultation, as a common issue afflicting parks and gardens in Malvern Hills District. There is user demand for increased enforcement and education through raising awareness of the associated health issues and penalties that can be incurred to combat the problem.
- 4.30 The majority of seating provision within parks is wooden benches, which are easily vandalised. This is recognised by MHDC, which now follows a policy to replace current wooden provision, as and when required, with metal seating provision offering greater resistance to vandalism.

Value

- 4.31 The methodology for assessing value is set out in Part 2 (Methodology). The table below summarises the results of the value assessment for parks and gardens in Malvern Hills District. A score of 20% or less is considered to indicate that a site has low value. A list of low value sites and an indication of their position relative to the threshold can be found in Part 33.

Table 4.5: Value scores for parks and garden sites by analysis area

Analysis area	VALUE Scores					Number at:	
	maximum score	lowest score	MEAN score	highest score	spread	below 20%	above 20%
Malvern Town areas	110	11%	18%	43%	32%	4	2
Rural areas	110	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tenbury Town areas	110	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	110	-	-	-	-	-	-
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	110	11%	18%	43%	32%	4	2

- 4.32 In terms of value, the average score across Malvern Hills District is 17%, ranging from 43% for Priory Park, the only site to lie above the threshold, to just 11% for Rose Bank Gardens, Promenade Gardens, Imperial Road Gardens and the Library Memorial Garden. Currently these gardens offer little social and health value to the local community. Through this study, it is recognised that there is opportunity and need to increase community involvement, educational benefits and ecological value at all of the park and garden sites.

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Community involvement

- 4.33 There is a lack of community involvement in the management and operation of parks and gardens in Malvern Hills District. There is currently no 'friends of groups' associated with any of the parks and gardens. Community engagement is particularly important in sustaining high quality and well-used sites. The Green Flag award recognises the importance of community involvement and it is a criteria against which the quality and management of parks is assessed against as part of the award.
- 4.34 As noted earlier, there is community interest associated with the need to enhance Rose Bank Gardens. MHDC is working closely with the local community group to ensure that its ideas are taken on board and implemented, where feasible. This will create community ownership over the site and increase the relevance of Rose Bank Gardens to the surrounding residents.

Events

- 4.35 The bandstand in Priory Park is adequately used to host events such as music shows. However, local users report that the deposit of £500 limits use of the bandstand by local groups and musical bands.
- 4.36 With the absence of a focal civic space within Great Malvern the focus for events is currently Priory Park. Consultation identifies resident demand for more comprehensive events programme at the site. However, electricity points are required to facilitate this. Also, site assessment and consultation identifies potential for the functionality of the Library Memorial Garden to be increased through the use by street entertainers and or market stalls/event.
- 4.37 The poor quality of Rose Bank Gardens currently limits opportunities for events to be held within the site. However, once improved, it could potentially host community events such as musical groups. MHDC aspires to utilise the site for community events alongside Priory Park. Electricity points will be required to facilitate this.

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Summary of site consultation

4.38 This section collates issues raised during consultation regarding provision of parks and gardens in Malvern Hills District. This is presented alongside site visit quality and value scores for comparison. It is not a comprehensive list of sites and only covers sites raised during consultation.

Site	Quality score	Value score	Comments
Imperial Road Gardens	40%	11%	Malvern Town Council is currently undertaking enhancement work at the site, including path upgrading and landscape improvements. This will improve the visual quality of the site.
Library Memorial Garden	56%	11%	<p>The poor quality site assessment score supports the consultation findings that the Garden projects a negative image which is not in keeping with the impressive library building for which it provides an entrance.</p> <p>The Garden is under used due to the neglected appearance. Site assessment identifies that the majority of planting appears to be untended and there is a need for path improvements to enhance the site.</p> <p>There is potential for the functionality of the site to be increased through the use by street entertainers and or market stalls/event.</p>
Priory Park	62%	43%	<p>Consultation identifies concerns regarding vandalism to seating provision within the shelter area and also of the bandstand.</p> <p>It also supports the need for a main entrance to the Park to be identified and better defined to raise awareness of the site. Currently all the entrances are felt, by users, to be informal.</p> <p>Opportunity has also been identified for the provision of interpretational signage throughout the Park to highlight habitat information and site history.</p>

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Site	Quality score	Value score	Comments
Rose Bank Gardens	29%	11%	<p>Residents and users are of the opinion that the site is neglected. This is supported by the site assessment findings. Unmanaged trees and overhanging vegetation result in obscured view lines, which creates a perception of seclusion. This, together with poor site design, attracts anti-social behaviour, which further discourages genuine usage of the site.</p> <p>A local interest group has highlighted the issues to MHDC and the possibility of enhancement is currently being investigated with the aim of increasing usage. The site is locally important as it is considered a 'gateway' to the Hills, via the '99 steps'.</p> <p>Improvement discussions between local residents and MHDC focus upon the possible installation of a sculpture to add a feature if interest. MHDC recognises the need to create a more 'open' environment within the Gardens through the clearance of overgrown shrubs and the cutting back of trees to improve view lines and open up secluded areas.</p> <p>Both consultation and site assessment identify a lack of signage and the need for path improvements at the site. There is opportunity for interpretational signage to be installed to explain the history of the site and encourage visitors to explore the Hills from the site.</p>

Parks and gardens summary

Current provision

- There are six sites classified as parks and gardens totalling 10ha¹ across Malvern Hills. Of those, five sites are identified as low quality and low value with only one site, Priory Park, identified as high quality and high value.

Future provision

- Additional provision is required in the Malvern Town area to meet catchment gaps (against the hierarchy) in Dyson Perrins, West Malvern Town and Malvern Wells.
- Additional provision is required in the towns of Upton and Tenbury as there is no formal park or garden site in these areas.
- Increase the quality and value of all sites where below agreed threshold.

Other issues

- There is a recognised requirement to submit one site for Green Flag submission in the near future. KKP site visit scores reinforce that Priory Park could be eligible for the site assessment part of Green Flag. However, prior to entry, some infrastructure improvements and a written management plan are required.
- There is a recognised need to continue increasing community involvement and ownership in parks through the establishment of 'friends' groups in order to help combat anti social behaviour and to improve the quality of sites.