

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

PART 5: NATURAL AND SEMI-NATURAL GREENSPACES

Introduction

5.1 The typology of natural and semi natural greenspaces, as set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide includes woodland (coniferous, deciduous, mixed) and scrub, grassland (e.g. downland, meadow), heath or moor, wetlands (e.g. marsh, fen), open running water, wastelands (including disturbed ground), and bare rock habitats (e.g. cliffs, quarries, pits). These provide 'wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.'

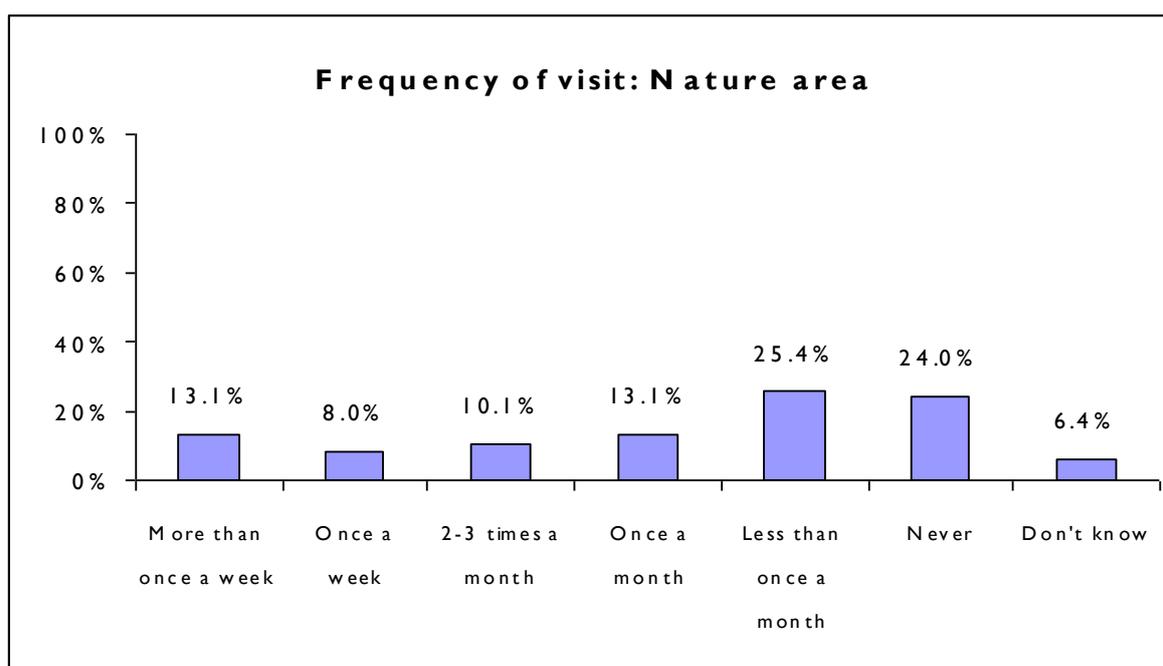
5.2 Natural and Semi-natural Greenspaces are largely a feature of the environment in which they are located. They are supply or opportunity-led and not necessarily derived from the use of standards.

Context

5.3 This section outlines findings from the survey of residents in relation to their use of and attitudes towards the provision of natural and semi-natural greenspaces 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 5.1: Frequency of usage of nature areas in the previous 12 months

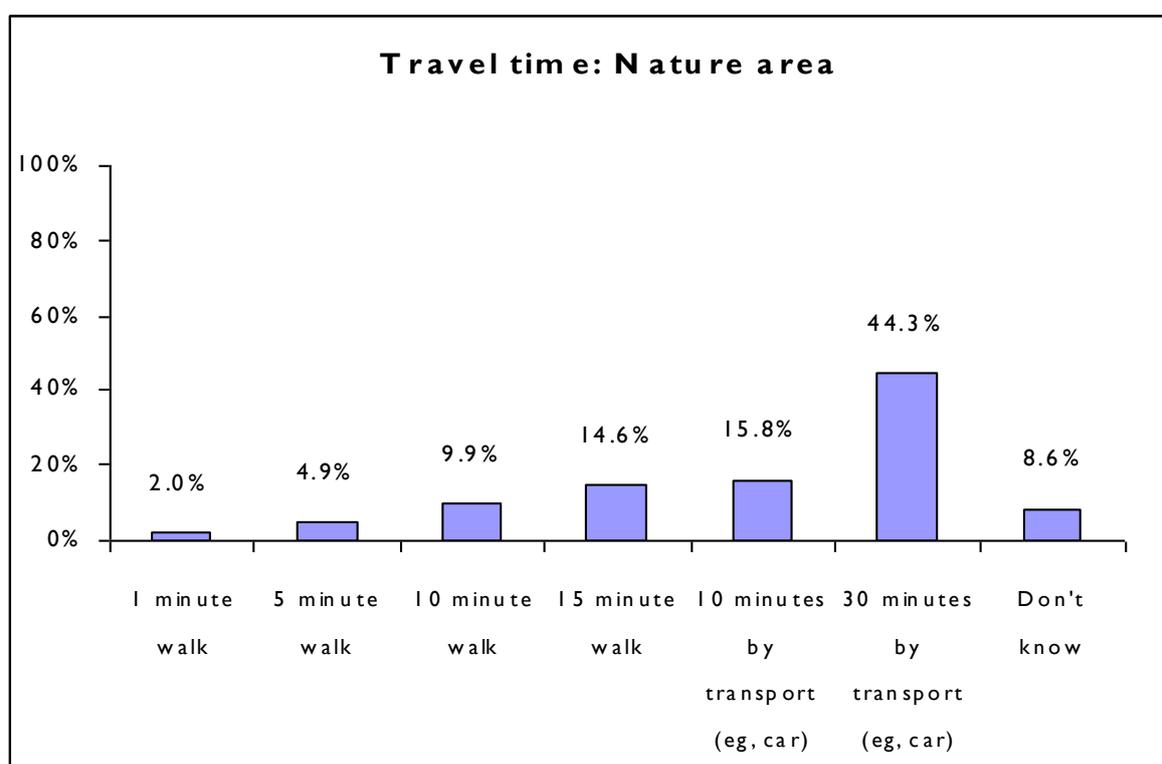


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- 5.4 Overall, over two-thirds (69.6%) of residents in Malvern Hills District have visited a nature area in the previous 12 months. Just over a fifth (21.1%) visit nature areas once a week or more. A similar proportion (24.2%) visits them once a month or more. Just over a quarter (25.4%) visit this typology less than once a month.
- 5.5 There is a slight variation in usage levels, the rate being higher in rural areas (74%) and slightly lower in Upton and Hanley area (64.1%). Despite this, Upton and Hanley area has the highest frequency of visits, with 24.3% visiting a nature area at least once a week. There is only a slight variation in overall usage and frequency of usage by age and gender.

Travel time

Figure 5.2: Time prepared to travel to reach a nature area



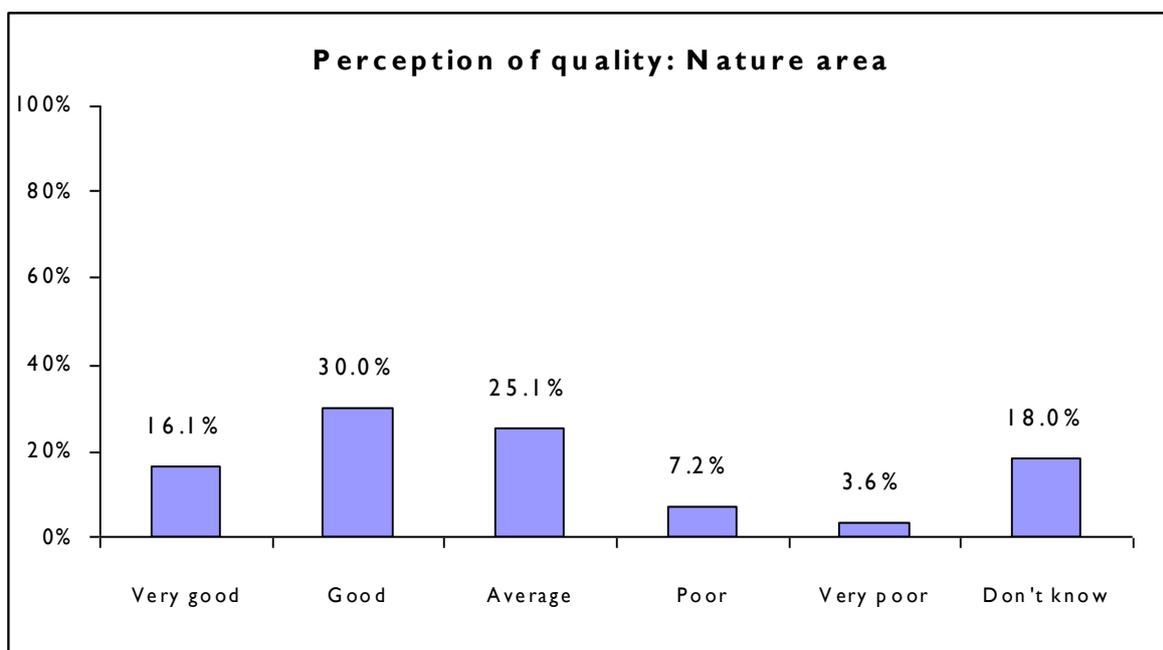
- 5.6 Reflecting the availability and distribution of provision, nearly two thirds (60.1%) of residents would be willing to travel up to 30 minutes via the use of transport to this typology. A third (31.4%) are prepared to walk up to 15 minutes to access such provision. There is no significant variation by area. However, older residents are generally more willing to travel longer distances/times to access a nature area (52.2% of 55 – 64 year olds would travel for 30 minutes by transport, compared to 36.6% of 25 – 34 year olds).

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Quality of provision

5.7 Just under half of residents rate the quality of nature areas in Malvern Hills District to be good or very good (46.1%). A much smaller proportion (10.8%) rates it as poor or very poor. A small, but significant, proportion (18%) is unable to comment on quality, and a quarter (25.1%) rate it as average. Perceptions of quality are higher in the rural areas (51.1%) and Malvern Town area (50.3%) and particularly low in Tenbury Town area (31.6%). However, this is more a reflection of those unable to comment than a perception of low quality provision. There is some variation by age, the proportion rating provision as good or very good dropping from 50.4% amongst the 35 – 44 age group to 40.7% in the 55 – 64 age group. This results from reducing usage.

Figure 5.3: Quality of provision of nature areas

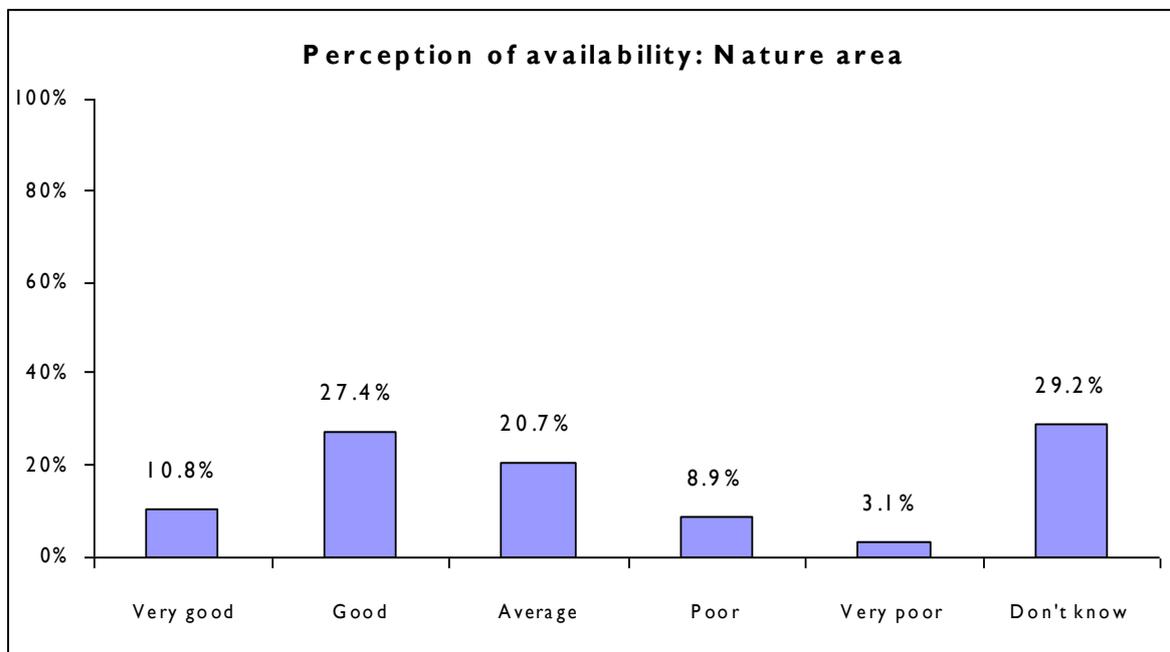


Availability

5.8 The pattern for availability of nature areas in Malvern Hills District is similar, with nearly two fifths (38.2%) of respondents rating it as good or very good and only 12% as poor or very poor. Nearly a third (29.2%) could not comment and a fifth (20.7%) rate it as average. A similar pattern for that seen for quality emerges, with the rating of availability as good or very good higher in Malvern Town area (40.8%) and the rural areas (40.4%) and lowest in Tenbury Town area (30.7%). Again, this results from usage levels as opposed to quality issues.

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Figure 5.4: Availability of natural and semi-natural greenspaces



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Key issues

Current provision

- 5.9 In total, there are 28 open spaces classified as natural and semi-natural greenspaces in the District, totalling 616¹ hectares. There are 17 Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (WWT) nature reserves in the District. In total, five of the reserves, including the Knapp and Papermill and Ravenshill Wood, are open access with the remainder being accessible through a permit issued by WWT. Small nature reserves, below 0.2 ha, have not been included in the assessment and have therefore not received a site visit. Also five of the larger nature reserves, which are included within the open space database, have not received a site visit due to them having restricted access.

Table 5.1: Distribution of natural and semi-natural greenspaces sites by analysis area

Analysis area	Natural/semi greenspaces	
	Number	Size(ha)
Malvern Town area	11	109.85
Rural areas	16	504.87
Tenbury Town area	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	1	1.29
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	28	616.02

- 5.10 Malvern Hills District has a large proportion of locally and regionally important semi-natural sites many of which lie within the Malvern Hills AONB. There are many sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) throughout the District, including the Malvern Hills, and one site, St Wulstans, designated as a local nature reserve (LNR). In 1996, English Nature (now Natural England) recommended that there should be one hectare of designated LNR per 1,000 population. To put this into local context, with a population of 72196 (2001 census data), Malvern Hills District should have at least 72.196 ha of LNR. However, to date only St Wulstans, covering 21.3ha, has been designated, leaving a shortfall of some 50.9 hectares. Consultation with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (WWT) identifies Crews Hill Wood as a potential site for future LNR designation. The site, which is ancient woodland and totals 7 ha, is a WWT reserve and is open at all times.
- 5.11 Consultation with Madresfield Parish Council highlights plans to renovate a pond on a site located on Madresfield Road, which will provide a focal point in the Village. Madresfield Estate owns part of the site; funding will be sourced from Breathing Spaces (Big Lottery Fund).

¹ Figures rounded up



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Accessibility

5.12 The effective catchments of natural and semi-natural greenspaces has been identified using the approach shown in Table 2.2¹. The following catchments are used to identify the coverage of current provision:

- District-wide significance (site more than 10ha) – 1,600 metres.
- Settlement significance (site between 1ha and 10ha) – 900 metres.
- Neighbourhood significance (site between 0.66ha and 1ha) – 600 metres.
- Local significance (site up to 0.66ha) – 120 metres.

Settlement hierarchy

5.13 The settlement hierarchy for natural and semi-natural greenspaces is set out below. The categorisation of settlements in Malvern Hills District is set out in the appendices document.

Table 5.2: Settlement hierarchy – natural and semi-natural greenspaces

Category	Minimum provision
Category 0	All residents to be within 1,600 metres of natural/semi-natural provision
Category 1	All residents to be within 1,600 metres of natural/semi-natural provision
Category 2	No minimum provision
Category 3/4	No minimum provision

Table 5.3: Gaps in provision of natural and semi natural greenspace across Malvern Hills District (as assessed against settlement hierarchy)

Analysis area	Catchment gaps
Malvern Town area	<input type="checkbox"/> No catchment gap
Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/> Clifton on Teme <input type="checkbox"/> Great Witley <input type="checkbox"/> Hallow <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Broadheath
Tenbury Town area	<input type="checkbox"/> Tenbury Wells
Upton and Hanley areas	<input type="checkbox"/> No catchment gap (Hanley Swan served by Brotheridge Green Nature Reserve)

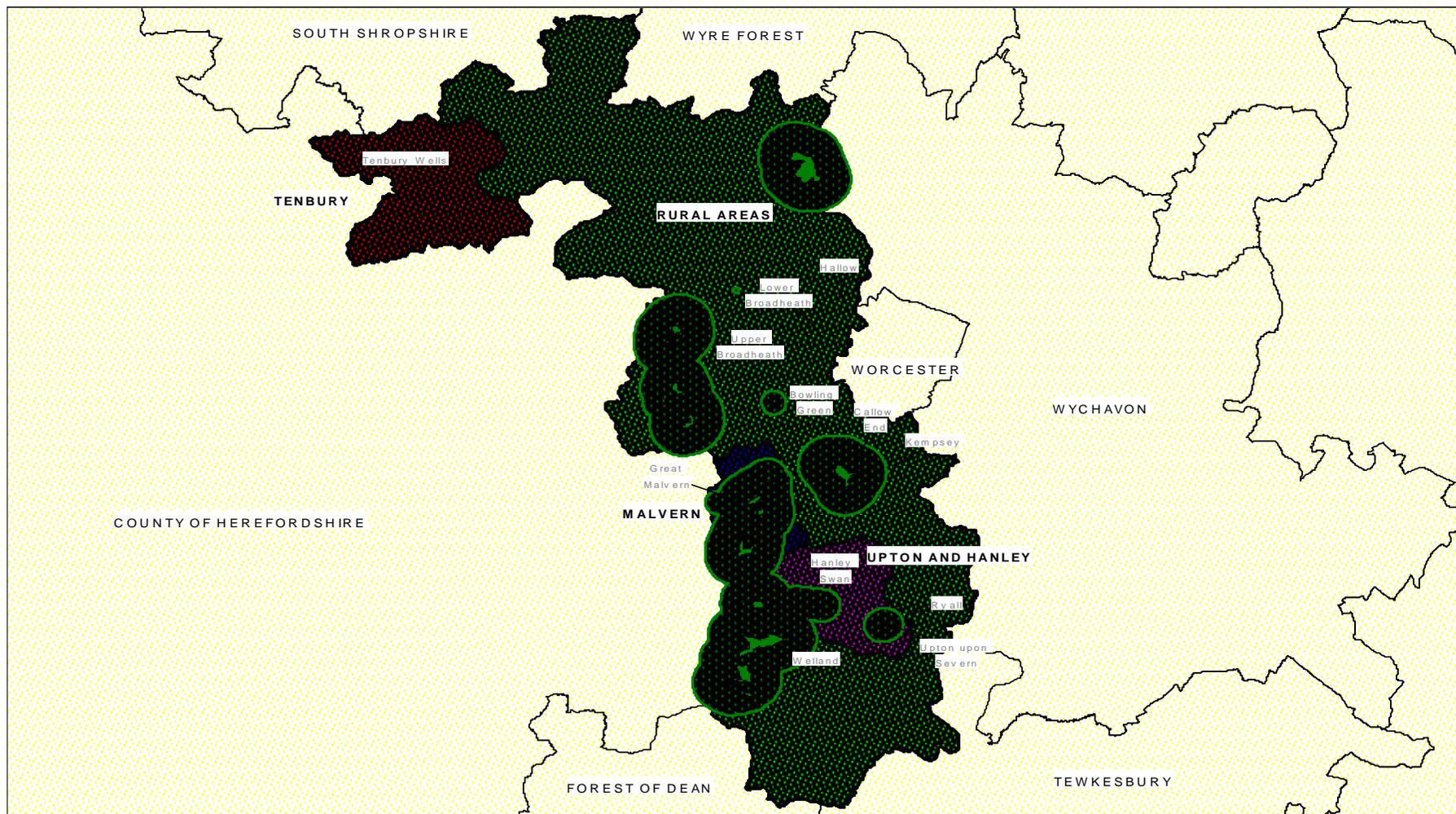
5.14 There is good coverage of natural and semi natural sites across Malvern Hills District. Assessment against the hierarchy shows that the Category 1 settlements of Clifton on Teme, Great Witley, Hallow and Lower Broadheath (in the Rural Areas analysis area) and Tenbury Wells do not have access to the agreed level of provision.

¹ Greater London Authority (2002): Guide to preparing open space strategies



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Figure 5.5: natural and semi-natural greenspaces mapped against settlement areas with catchment areas applied



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- 5.15 The Malvern Hills are the most popular attraction for visitors to the District. The Malvern Hills Conservators has undertaken improvements to improve access for all to the Hills. An easy access trail, with a gentle gradient to the ridge of the Malvern Hills, has been constructed to enhance access for wheelchair users and users with pushchairs. Consultation indicates that the trail is well used.
- 5.16 To facilitate access to the Hills and surrounding areas and promote sustainable transport, a 'Hills Hopper' bus service is provided during summer weekends. The service follows a circular route connecting Malvern Town with the Wyche Cutting, Castlemorton Common Upton-upon-Severn, the Three Countries Showground and Hollybush on the Malvern Hills. There are five journeys a day which encourages both residents and visitors to stop at open spaces such as Castlemorton Common while on the way to visit the Hills.

Management

- 5.17 There is a wide range of land ownership/management of the natural/semi-natural open space provision throughout Malvern Hills District, including WCC, MHDC, Malvern Hills Conservators and WWT.
- 5.18 The Malvern Hills Conservators owns 1,214 hectares of publicly accessible open space, consisting of the Malvern Hills and Commons. The Conservators' duties include preserving the natural aspect of the Hills and keeping the land (including the commons) open and undeveloped for the benefit, recreation and enjoyment of the public. There are employed and volunteer wardens that undertake land management and ensure that the Hills and Commons are responsibly used and enjoyed.
- 5.19 The Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) covers the Malvern Hills District. MHDC is a partner in the Worcestershire BAP and a MHDC representative sits on the steering group to deal with issues relevant to Malvern Hills District. The BAP is due a review and consultation identifies the need for habitats offered in urban environments, e.g. parks and gardens, to be identified in the updated BAP.
- 5.20 Officer consultation identifies the need for strategic tree management within MHDC to improve the quality and safety of natural and semi-natural and other open spaces and to work towards increasing tree cover. There are aspirations to establish the resource and skill base to bring tree management in-house and a portfolio of public open spaces containing trees under the responsibility of MHDC is currently being produced. This will help MHDC work towards improved management and maintenance of the tree resource in the District. There is potential to develop a tree management strategy or to produce a section within a general open space management plan that covers the management and maintenance of trees.

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5.21 WCC has developed a network of tree wardens as part of the National Grid Tree Warden Scheme. The tree wardens within Malvern Hills District work on a parish basis, gathering information, liaising with landowners and undertaking practical work where needed, with permission from the landowner. The tree wardens are a good resource for feeding tree information back to WCC and MHDC or any other relevant landowner.

Quality

5.22 The methodology for assessing quality is set out in Part 2 (Methodology). The table below summarises the results of the quality assessment for natural and semi-natural greenspaces in Malvern Hills District. The threshold for assessing quality has been set at 60%; this is based on Green Flag criteria. Individual site summaries can be found at the end of this section.

Table 5.4: Quality scores for natural and semi-natural greenspaces 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 area	109	9%	30%	64%	55%	9	1
Rural areas	109	17%	34%	65%	49%	9	1
Tenbury Town area	109	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	109	36%	36%	36%	-	1	-
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	109	9%	32%	65%	56%	19	2

5.23 Although catchment mapping demonstrates only a small number of deficiencies in the provision of accessible natural and semi-natural open space, the site assessments highlight that provision of high quality natural and semi-natural open spaces is lacking. There is little variation in the mean quality scores across the analysis areas (from 30% to 36%) for natural and semi-natural greenspaces. The average quality score sits well below the threshold set at 60%. Sites are therefore generally of poor quality. The vast majority (90%) of sites have been assessed as low quality with only St Wulstan's LNR and Ravenshill Nature Reserve receiving high quality scores. The high quality score for St Wulstan's reflects that the site is a designated LNR which has been the focus of Liveability funding for the last two years. There is also good community involvement at the site with an established 'friends of' group, which works to ensure the site is well managed, maintained and accessible.

5.24 Consultation identifies that natural and semi-natural open spaces are one of the more popular types of open space for dog exercise. Local residents and users raise the issue of uncontrolled dogs and the resultant issue of dog foul as a key concern

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as it impacts on quality and usage of natural and semi-natural open spaces. In particular, the issue of dog foul affects a number of WWT nature reserves, the Malvern Hills and the commons throughout the District. There is user demand for greater enforcement and education to tackle the issue. This is recognised by both WWT and the Malvern Hills Conservators, both of which are working to resolve the problem through signage and polite reinforcement.

- 5.25 Site assessments identify that dog foul bins will be of benefit at nine out of the 21 natural and semi-natural open spaces across the District, including Castlemorton Common and Ankerdine Common Nature Reserve. However, as dog foul is no longer classified as hazardous waste it can be disposed of using general waste litterbins. Awareness of this can be raised to encourage responsible dog ownership.

Value

- 5.26 The methodology for assessing value is set out in Part 2 (Methodology). The table below summarises the results of the value assessment for natural and semi-natural greenspaces in Malvern Hills District. A score of 20% or less is considered to indicate that a site has low value. This is lower than other typologies as the scoring system tends to discriminate slightly against natural and semi natural greenspaces. A list of low value sites and an indication of their position relative to the threshold can be found in Part 33.

Table 5.5: Value scores for natural and semi-natural greenspaces by analysis area

Analysis area	VALUE Scores					Number at:	
	maximum score	lowest score	MEAN score	highest score	spread	below 20%	above 20%
Malvern Town area	110	6%	24%	52%	45%	6	4
Rural areas	110	11%	25%	47%	36%	4	6
Tenbury Town area	110	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	110	15%	15%	15%	-	1	-
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	110	6%	24%	52%	45%	11	10

- 5.27 The importance of natural and semi natural greenspaces in Malvern Hills District is reinforced by the fact that half of the sites have been classed as high value. In fact the mean score lies above the 20% threshold. All the nature reserves assessed, as would be expected, have high value scores. The majority of sites score highly for ecological/biodiversity value but lack value for environmental education opportunities.

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Community involvement

- 5.28 There is high community involvement in the management of the Malvern Hills. Conservation volunteers undertake practical conservation tasks and volunteer wardens patrol the Hills. Malvern Hills Conservators has aspirations to utilise volunteers for environmental education provision. The Hills offer great opportunity for environmental education but this is, at present, limited to resource limitations. Malvern Hills Conservators has aspirations to improve the provision of environmental education activities offered on the Hills. Resource limitations mean that volunteers will have to be relied upon to achieve this.
- 5.29 There is an established 'friends of' group associated with St Wulstan's LNR. The volunteer group works in partnership with WCC Countryside Service to manage the reserve both for wildlife and the local community. The Group undertakes many activities such as recording plants and animals, making links with local schools and providing guided walks and talks. It also assists WCC with planning and leading conservation volunteer days, which engage members of the local community in conservation tasks at the site. Conservation volunteers assist WWT in the practical maintenance of a number of reserves by undertaking basic improvement works such as coppicing, erecting signage and repairing stiles.
- 5.30 WWT also operates an environmental education programme that utilises a number of nature reserves in Malvern Hills District, in particular the Knapp and Papermill Nature Reserve.
- 5.31 Powick Primary School, in conjunction with Powick Village Playing Field Association is in the process of developing a woodland area with over 250 trees and a 100 metre walkway for public access. There are plans for educational links with the primary school and children will be involved in the development of the site through undertaking tree planting.

Summary of site consultation

- 5.32 This section collates issues raised during consultation regarding provision of natural and semi-natural greenspaces 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
Ravenshill Woodland Reserve	65%	47%	This is a good quality, highly used site. There is an active 'friends of' group which assists in the practical maintenance of the site. The site has links with local schools, colleges and disabled groups offering environmental education opportunities and interpretation.

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Site	Quality score	Value score	Comments
St Wulstan's (LNR)	64%	52%	<p>The site is owned by MHDC but is managed, through a service level agreement, by WCC Countryside Service. It has been allocated monies from the 'Liveability Fund' which is being used to improve access. The site is currently managed by WCC in accordance with the site action plan. This incorporates requirements to meet the service level agreement and also to meet criteria set out by the Liveability Fund, the main of which is to improve access.</p> <p>There are plans to produce a circular self guided walk around the site using interpretation panels, along with providing a map of the site at the car park entrance.</p> <p>The service level agreement, which originally covered the period until April 2007 has now been extended for a further three years.</p>
Stocksyats meadow	36%	16%	<p>Owned by Upton Town Council but there is an agreement with WCC to retain for biodiversity. However consultation finds that it is felt to have little biodiversity value.</p> <p>The area is considered to be a good open space for recreational walkers and is used mainly by dog walkers. This has led to a problem with dog foul and there is demand for dog foul bins to be provided at the entrances to the site.</p> <p>Consultation highlights potential to enhance the site through the introduction of wildflowers. It is also felt that if the site is improved, in terms of biological value, local schools can be encouraged to utilise the site for environmental education.</p>

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Natural and semi-natural greenspace summary

Current provision

- ❑ There are only 28 open spaces classified as natural and semi-natural greenspaces in the District, totalling 616 hectares. Of those, 19 sites are identified as low quality and two sites identified as high quality. In terms of value, ten sites are identified as high value, reinforcing the importance of these sites, and 11 are identified as low value.

Future provision

- ❑ Additional provision is required in Clifton on Teme, Great Witley, Hallow and Lower Broadheath (in the Rural Areas analysis area) and Tenbury Wells as these areas do not have access to the agreed level of provision (as measured by the settlement hierarchy)
- ❑ Of the low value sites, four require their value and/or quality to be increased; two require further investigation to determine ways of improving quality and value and one – Craig Lea Estate – investigation to determine ways of improving quality and value or whether an alternative typology may be more appropriate

Other issues

- ❑ There is demand to raise the profile of semi-natural sites for the potential recreational benefits. Some sites will benefit from additional facilities such as interpretation boards.
- ❑ There is demand to address the quality issue of dog foul through greater enforcement and awareness of the problem.
- ❑ There are opportunities for the development of environmental education and schools involvement.