



Bristol Open Space provision standards

Introduction

In 2008, the council's Parks and Green Space Strategy adopted minimum standards for publicly accessible open spaces for recreation in Bristol. These standards help to ensure that there is sufficient open space to meet the needs of Bristol's population, and helps to guide decisions by setting out city-wide provision and showing areas where the focus is on ensuring quality of open spaces is enhanced to meet the demands placed on them by higher levels of population.

The standards adopted relate to:

- Quality: What is the quality residents should expect from open spaces
- Distance: How far individuals travel to open space
- Quantity: How much open space is available

The provision standards of 2008 have proven to be undeliverable, and so the standards outlined in the 2024 Parks and Green Spaces Strategy have been proposed to maintain ambitious targets for open spaces while being grounded in realistic delivery. They reflect how the city has changed over the last 15 years and changes made to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Summary of proposals:

- The strategy retains but revises provision standards for quality and quantity. The strategy retains the existing standards for distance (access), ensuring citizens will have access to a variety of different types of Open Space and be no more than a 10-minute walk from a children's play area.
- We will introduce a Bristol Parks quality standard that aligns with the national Green Flag assessment criteria while ensuring community views are represented when quality is determined and assessed.
- Our quantity standard has been refreshed to better account for how the city looks now and how the population is likely to grow over the next 15 years. A city-wide minimum standard will apply alongside the introduction of specific minimum standards for a 'Central Zone' and 'Inner Urban Zone'. These standards are based on our ambition to deliver new green space in two zones where significant regeneration is taking place.
- We have set out that new green spaces should be a minimum size of 0.2 hectares to be included in our quantity standards. This is to ensure they are good quality and provide adequate space for recreation, and to prevent a large amount of incidental green space. However, we realise that smaller spaces can add value if more substantial open spaces are also available locally.
- We will seek financial contributions from development to raise the quality of green spaces through the CIL mechanism, through S106 agreements and through land agreements. We will operate an updated quality cost model to inform this process.

Open space: Definition and supply

Definition

The standards for open space for recreation are applicable to defined types of space. The definition is not always clear cut but open spaces for recreation include the city's public parks, playing fields and children's play spaces and formal spaces which have become recreational such as historic burial places. They are open spaces which are always publicly accessible and available for use by everyone in the city; to sit and experience nature or a visual attraction, for informal and formal sports activities, children's play, events and cultural activities. Open space for recreation would be focussed primarily on recreation and activity – whether it be passive use or active use and ideally would allow for more than one use at any given time and those uses should be able to take place independently. It is open spaces of this sort to which the strategy relates and which form the basis for open space standards.

Space that is public realm, in contrast, is primarily to provide an attractive outdoor environment in a way that directly responds to a built environment's primary function or use. Public realm is not included in this strategy as it not considered to be open space for recreation, as it generally provides an attractive outdoor environment in a way that directly responds to a built environment's primary function or use.

Open space supply

Current position

Open space provision standards only apply to sites identified within the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy as defined above. Open spaces that are included are considered to meet the definition set out.

Rationale for change

A review of parks, green spaces and civic spaces in the city has demonstrated that certain spaces have taken on new functions over the last 15 years and can legitimately be included as spaces factored into the provision standards.

Proposal

Some council-owned and operated cemeteries are proposed to be identified as open space for provision standards purposes. These sites are no longer used for new burials and there is a clear opportunity to manage these sites going forward to accommodate appropriate and respectful recreational use, particularly to experience nature.

An overview of types of space not considered as open space for recreation by the Parks and Green Space Strategy is provided in **Appendix 1**.

Discounted options

Some guidelines for accessible green space provision standards suggest more green space could be included than we propose to recognise. Natural England's [Accessible Green Space Standards](#) for example can apply to blue space (rivers etc) if connected to vegetation set within a landscape or townscape. While the addition of blue space – such as the Floating harbour –

would increase the supply of open space across the city (especially in the central zone), they have not been included because they were assessed not to provide the same benefits we would expect from open spaces being considered for inclusion elsewhere.

The continued exclusion from the open space standards of green space within Bristol’s City Council’s housing estate reflects that their primary function is to provide for a very local community or housing area and not all citizens would feel within their rights to enter and make use of these spaces.

Open space provision standards: Quality, Distance and Quantity

The purpose of setting standards is to help to ensure that residents across the city have sufficient and equitable access to high quality open space that meets their needs. Like all cities with a densely populated urban centre, it is not realistic to expect equal supply of green space across the whole of Bristol. These standards help to guide decisions by setting out city-wide provision, while also highlighting areas where the focus should be on ensuring enhanced quality of open spaces to meet the demands placed on them by higher levels of population.

This section outlines the proposals for updating or maintaining the Quality, Distance and Quantity standards respectively.

Quality provision standard

Current position

Research undertaken for our 2008 strategy, and engagement to shape our new strategy, has consistently identified that quality is the most important factor for people visiting our parks and green spaces, as represented in the graphic below.



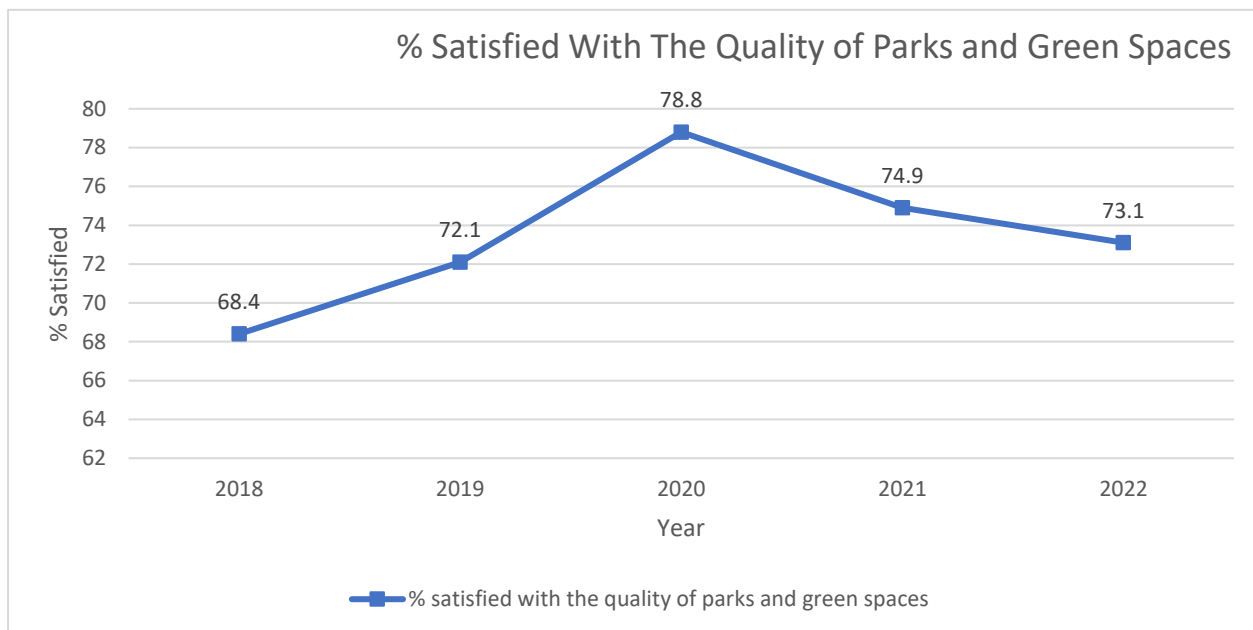
Quality is the overriding factor affecting the public’s satisfaction with green space, which in turn affects people’s satisfaction with the quantity and accessibility of green spaces. Improving the quality of parks and green spaces is key to raising overall satisfaction.

A quality Parks Service should seek to provide different types of spaces – from informal semi-natural green space to busy, multifunctional, formal parks. The spaces must also deliver an environment that feels safe, inclusive and welcoming and must be clearly well cared for and regularly maintained.

The 2008 Parks and Green Space Strategy defined four quality standards: Poor, Fair, Good and Excellent. The accompanying cost model set out the revenue and capital investment required to

raise quality. In 2008, the average quality of parks was considered to be Fair, but the standard we were aiming for was Good. A sample audit of sites in 2017 concluded that quality was still Fair, and little had changed from a 2010 assessment.

The Bristol Quality of Life survey provides an annual snapshot of the quality of life in Bristol across 50 priority indicators. In 2022, 73% of people were satisfied with the quality of their park or green space (by ward). This is up from 68% in 2018, but down from 79% in 2020 (when Covid-19 limitations saw a marked increase in use of parks for outdoor recreation).



However, the data demonstrates marked differences in satisfaction with parks and green spaces between wards, ranging from 24.6% at the lowest in Hartcliffe and Withywood, to 91.8% at the highest in Clifton Down. There is also a marked difference in satisfaction with parks and green spaces between communities living in deprived areas at 46% satisfied versus the city average at 73%.

Rationale for change

The new Parks and Green Space Strategy sets out an ambition for more community ownership, management and control over green spaces in the city and it recognises that delivering better quality can only be achieved by working with communities and partners.

There is now a need for us to gather the views of the community to find out what they think a quality park is, and make sure they participate in our approach to assess quality and to guide investment going forward.

Proposal

Our new strategy aims to establish a city-wide network of quality parks and green spaces, where communities have shaped their future. We will assess quality using Green Flag criteria and be guided by the One City ambition to have an excellent quality park within a 10-minute walk from home. However, our strategic priority is to raise the quality of Open Space for communities in

areas of higher deprivation and where satisfaction with quality is unacceptably lower than in other areas of the city.

Our new Bristol Quality Park Standard will use the Green Flag Standard to combine an objective assessment of features and facilities in parks with user-defined and user-measured quality criteria. Reflecting the scale of resources required to audit all spaces, the Bristol Quality Park Standard will:

- Reflect Green Flag award criteria with priority sites (to be defined) submitted for Green Flag accreditation.
- Promote 'snapshot' park user quality assessments to compliment full Bristol Quality Park standard assessments.
- Invite communities to undertake Bristol Quality Park assessments in partnership with Parks Service staff and other organisations, as appropriate.

Further, the Bristol Quality Park Standard, will:

- Provide a basis for assessing the quality of individual sites against a consistent methodology.
- Enable the quality of sites to be gauged in relation to one another.
- Enable an overview of all sites' quality to be collectively considered, across the city or, within specified areas.
- Enable relative priorities for the attraction of investment and improvement through planning, design or management (in conjunction with the Quantity and Access standards).
- Provide a basis for ongoing monitoring and review.

The new Bristol Quality Park Standard will reflect the Green Flag criteria and scoring method across the following eight categories:

- A Welcoming Place
- Healthy, Safe and Secure
- Well Maintained and Clean
- Environmental Management
- Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage
- Community Involvement
- Marketing and Communication
- Management

We will develop a Bristol Quality Park user guide – this will embed elements from the existing Parks Quality Assessment guide and best practice from others who have already in place clear and good guidance – based on Green Flag Criteria.

A rolling programme of quality assessments will be established, creating an initial baseline and re-assessing sites on a rolling three-year cycle accompanied by a tri-annual State of Parks report.

Distance provision standards

Current position

Distance standards seek to ensure equal access to a variety of different open spaces. The standards set a maximum distance citizens should have to walk to an open space and also to different types of space that have a specific function. Distance Standards are set for Children's Play and Young People's Space, Formal Green Space, Informal Green Space and Natural Green Space.

Distance standards do not apply to sports space as provision is dictated by the characteristics some parks happen to have and the council's Playing Pitch Strategy determines provision based on a detailed calculation of supply and demand.

Table 1: The Distance Standards by type of Open Space

Distance to the nearest:	Minimum Standard
Green Space	400m (9 minutes' walk)
Children's Play and Young Peoples Space	450m (10 minutes' walk). Minimum size 0.06ha
Formal Green Space	600m (15 minutes' walk)
Informal Green Space	550m (13 minutes' walk)
Natural Green Space	700m (18 minutes' walk)

Proposal

It is not proposed to adopt revised distance standards and the existing standards will be retained.

See Appendix 2 for the Distance Standards applied to Bristol.

Since adoption in 2008, the standards have provided a useful tool for the council, communities and decision-making bodies such as Area Committees, particularly for decisions to invest in children's play areas.

The new proposed Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and a new Tree Strategy for Bristol have used the different types of green space and the definitions that lie behind them to identify opportunities that help meet city aspirations to increase the area of land managed for nature to 30% - an objective in our Ecological Emergency Action Plan, and to double the city's tree canopy cover, a One City objective.

A review of the options concluded that maintaining the distance standard would provide important continuity over a 30-year period and continues to maintain an ambitious target for access to the right range of spaces.

Discounted options

Options discounted relate to the Natural England Accessible Green Space (AGS) Standards and the Fields in Trust Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play. Both standards establish different types of spaces to apply standards to and set varying distances as the minimum standard. Details of the two national standards can be found below:

- Natural England [Accessible Green Space Standards](#)
- Fields in Trust [Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play](#)

Quantity provision standards

Current position

The 2008 standard is set as a minimum amount of green space a citizen should have access to and therefore is expressed in m²/person. There are two main components that combine to produce a minimum standard for the city:

1. Locality component – 18 m² per person
This is applied to Neighbourhood Green Space Areas which are defined by the boundaries of two or three political wards. The purpose is to allow comparison of the supply of green space by population in each area.
2. City-wide component – Destination Parks – 9.8 m² per person
This is a sum of the green space supplied in the city's Destination Parks – The Downs, Blaise and Kingsweston Estate, Oldbury Court/Snuff Mills Estate, Hengrove Play Park and the area of Ashton Court that sits within the city's boundary.

The combined standard for Bristol is 27.8 m² per person.

Rationale for change

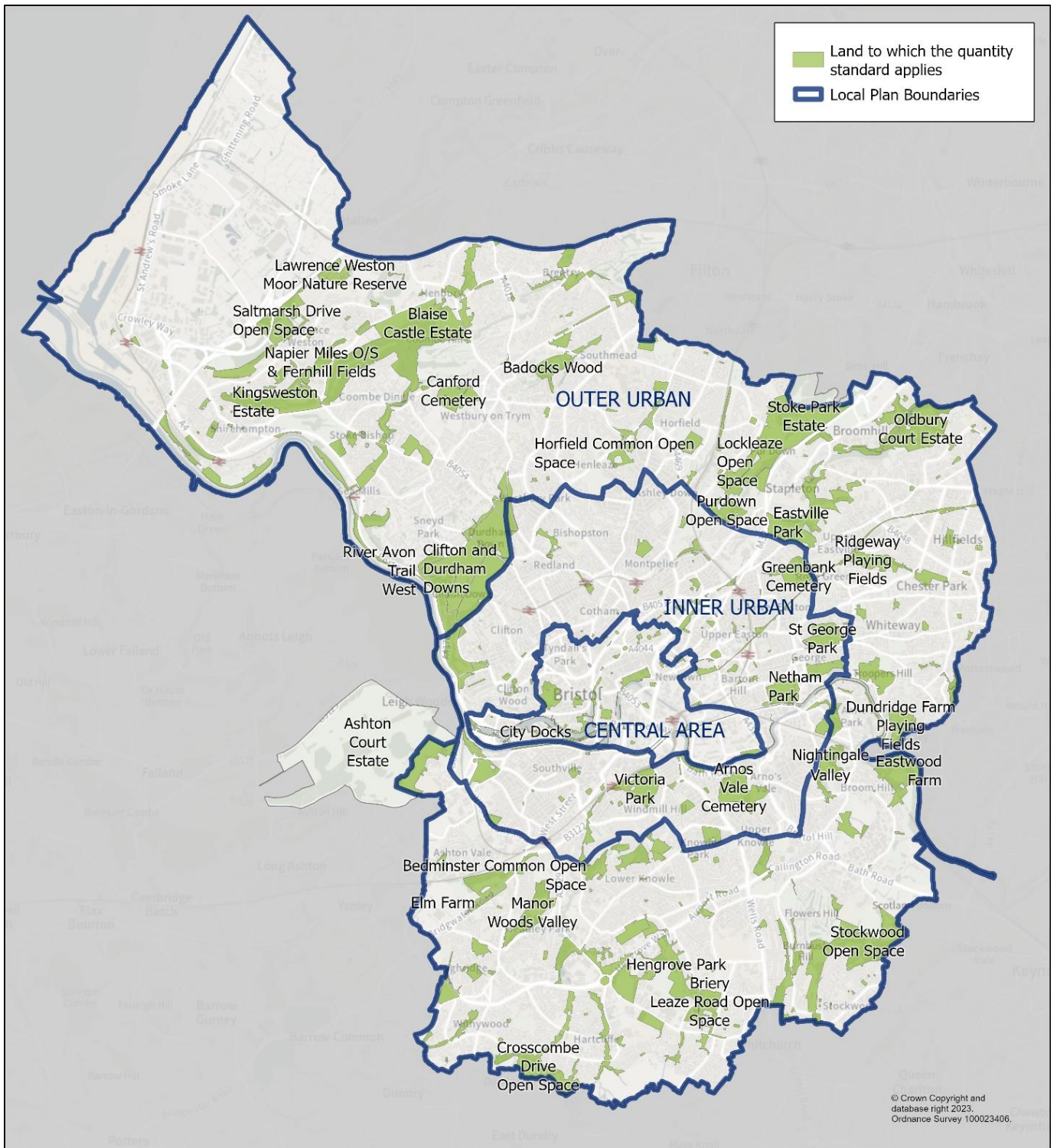
The city currently exceeds the 27.8 m² per person standard. However, from the existing pattern of provision and distribution across the city, not all neighbourhoods have access to the 18 m² per person recommended locality standard.

It is clear that our 2008 quantity standards were undeliverable and so there is a need to plan delivery in closer relationship with the way the rest of the city develops to ensure Bristol grows sustainably and fairly up to 2039. The additional estimated population within the lifetime of the revised strategy would generate a demand for 122 hectares of new green space in order to meet the existing locality standard – an area equivalent to at least 22 Castle Parks.

Proposal

The proposed provision standards for quantity will align with Local Plan policies that ensure the effective and efficient use of land, and are a realistic target which will support the delivery of new green spaces in the areas that need them most. There will be a Citywide standard and provision guidelines to guide potential new open space provision in the Central and Inner Urban areas of the city.

Map: Land to which the Quantity Standard applies



Our provision standard will directly relate to the population density of these urban areas and closely reflect and respond to the likely population uplift generated by the planned provision of new housing and employment in those areas, as Bristol seeks to deliver the revised Local Plan.

Our approach to setting and applying the proposed quantity standard:

- **We are proposing a net uplift in the area of open space for recreation as a result of the standards and guidelines.** This reaffirms our commitment to providing quality green spaces in light of significant population increases within the city.
- **New open space for recreation is provided in the Central and Inner Urban areas of the city.** The standard reflects a consideration of the opportunity for new open space in areas of regeneration, where delivery is more credible. We are proposing the following targets for the Central and Inner Urban zones respectively:
 - Central Zone: At least 2.9 hectares of new open space to be delivered within the regeneration areas of Mead Street, City Centre, Temple Quarter and St Philips areas.
 - Inner Urban zone: At least 1 hectare of new open space to be delivered within the Frome Gateway regeneration area. This reflects the less obvious opportunities for new development within this zone.

The Strategy does not specify where new green space should be delivered to reach the proposed minimum provision. It will be for Development Frameworks and Development Briefs within the regeneration areas to approach this, where area-specific opportunities and constraints can be properly identified, assessed and public consultation can help determine the right place-making options. Need will therefore be assessed through these processes and at a more local scale.

Table 2: Open Space supply quantity 2023 and 2038 and Proposed Quantity Standards

Area/Zone	Supply of open space with current population (m2 per person)	Supply of open space because of predicted population increase (m2 per person)	Minimum provision standard (m2 per person)
Central	12.02	7.28	7.75
Inner Urban	13.13	11.48	11.53
Citywide	33.37	29.17	29.25

The draft Local Plan policy sets out that where *new* open space for recreation is created as part of a development, it will be expected to be of an appropriate minimum size. Our guideline is that the minimum size of open space for new provision should be 0.2 hectares (about the size of a mini football pitch) with no dimension being smaller than 20m. This approach avoids a proliferation of small amenity spaces or public realm improvements which have limited recreational function. A space of 0.2 hectares has more potential to offer multifunctional use, to support ecology if providing for nature is the primary function, and to respond to the need for urban parks to promote mental and physical health.

Discounted options

As with the distance standards, we assessed the merits of using either the Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards and the Fields in Trust Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play as the basis for revised quantity standards. A short summary of both national standards are contained below:

1. Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards

The standards essentially combine quantity and distance with both acting together. This removes the need to set and justify boundaries between areas of the city which is the case now and with the proposed Bristol option. However, as with the current Bristol approach to provision standards, there are insufficient practical opportunities to create the new spaces that would be needed to meet minimum provision and this does not align for the city's wish to adopt provision standards that can realistically be delivered. Comparisons can be made for open space supply in the city but as all approaches to standards enable this, in itself it is not an incentive to move to this approach.

2. Fields in Trust Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play

Whilst there are many good aspects of the updated Six Acre standard and that it has been used as the de-facto standard in the Local Plan of a number of authorities, there remains the issue of achievability related to quantity and distance. This is particularly the case in the city centre and inner urban areas where the lack of land available for recreational space is a key issue.

Planning contributions: Hierarchy of provision standards

In the Outer Urban zone investment obtained from development will focus on raising quality and providing access through application of the distance standards, reflecting that the provision of green space is much higher than the Central and Inner Urban zones.

In the Central and Inner Urban zones, relevant development will need to contribute towards the need to meet the quality, distance and quantity standards in that order of hierarchy. We recognise in these zones, given the developed nature of Bristol, achieving the desired quantity of open space for recreation, within the appropriate distance, may not always be possible due to limiting factors such as scale of development, land availability or scheme viability. In such circumstances, quality improvements to nearby open spaces can assist in addressing open space provision. Investment in quality will be primarily driven by planning contributions like the Community Infrastructure Levy or S106 agreements. Our cost modelling sets the provision and maintenance of quality space over a 15-year period at £984 per m².

The exception will be in the Regeneration Areas identified in the Local Plan where new open space for recreation may be a higher priority – with any new space provided expected to be of high quality. We expect Development Frameworks and/or Development Briefs for these areas and subsequent development to respond to all of the provision standards.

Contributions through planning from developers can be generated by the Community Infrastructure Levy mechanism set out in the Local Plan but also by S106 agreements or land agreements where this is deemed appropriate.

Appendix 1: Overview of sites not considered as open space for recreation Open Space by the Parks and Green Space Strategy

the following categories are not included as open space for recreation in this strategy (although it is acknowledged that they contribute to the overall green space resource in the city):

1.1 Allotments:

These are not defined as open space for recreation. They are subject to statutory protection and specific policies in the Bristol Local Plan.

1.2 School Grounds:

Except where land acts as public open space outside of the school day.

1.3 South Bristol Cemetery:

This is a functioning cemetery and is not defined as an open space for recreation. The cemetery is located within the Green Belt as defined by the Bristol Local Plan.

1.4 Church Yards associated with churches for active worship:

Church yards which remain associated with churches/ buildings for active worship and continue to be owned and managed by the appropriate church. Other churchyards are deemed to be publicly accessible where the maintenance of these spaces is carried out under the Closure of Burial Grounds Act.

1.5 Grazing Land and City Farms:

Generally, the function of grazing land is such that it is unsuitable for public use.

1.6 Incidental Residential Green Space:

Green space that is associated with housing, but which is publicly accessible and maintained.

The 'test' for what is publicly accessible is one that involves a gauge of whether a non-resident user of that space would feel to be intruding into residents 'defensible space'. If a site fails this test, it will fall outside the scope of this typology.

1.7 Residential land without legitimate public access:

Includes:

- Residential communal gardens, for shared resident use,
- Sheltered gardens, associated with sheltered residential accommodation, and
- Formal, equipped play areas within or associated with public or private sector housing.

1.8 Land that is not publicly owned and which does not support legitimate ready public access:

Land which is only accessible to the public on certain days in each year. e.g. Goldney House Garden, Clifton, owned by Bristol University.

Land which is used primarily for outdoor sports provision that is the subject of a charge. e.g. Coombe Dingle Sports Complex, owned by Bristol University. This category also includes golf courses, where public access may occur but is not promoted.

1.9 Highway Landscape:

Verges, traffic islands, central reservations, and the interstices of junctions are not normally locations where public access is encouraged. Their purpose is generally visual, including softening and screening, although it is accepted that some areas may be used by walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.

Note there are some exceptions for larger highway landscapes which act as open space for recreation.

1.10 Development associated landscaped areas:

The value to the local community of some areas of greening that may be publicly enjoyed is recognised. However, they are typically not of a size, shape, or form conducive to physical use, their role being simply one of providing visual amenity, softening, or screening.

1.11 No Right of Public Access:

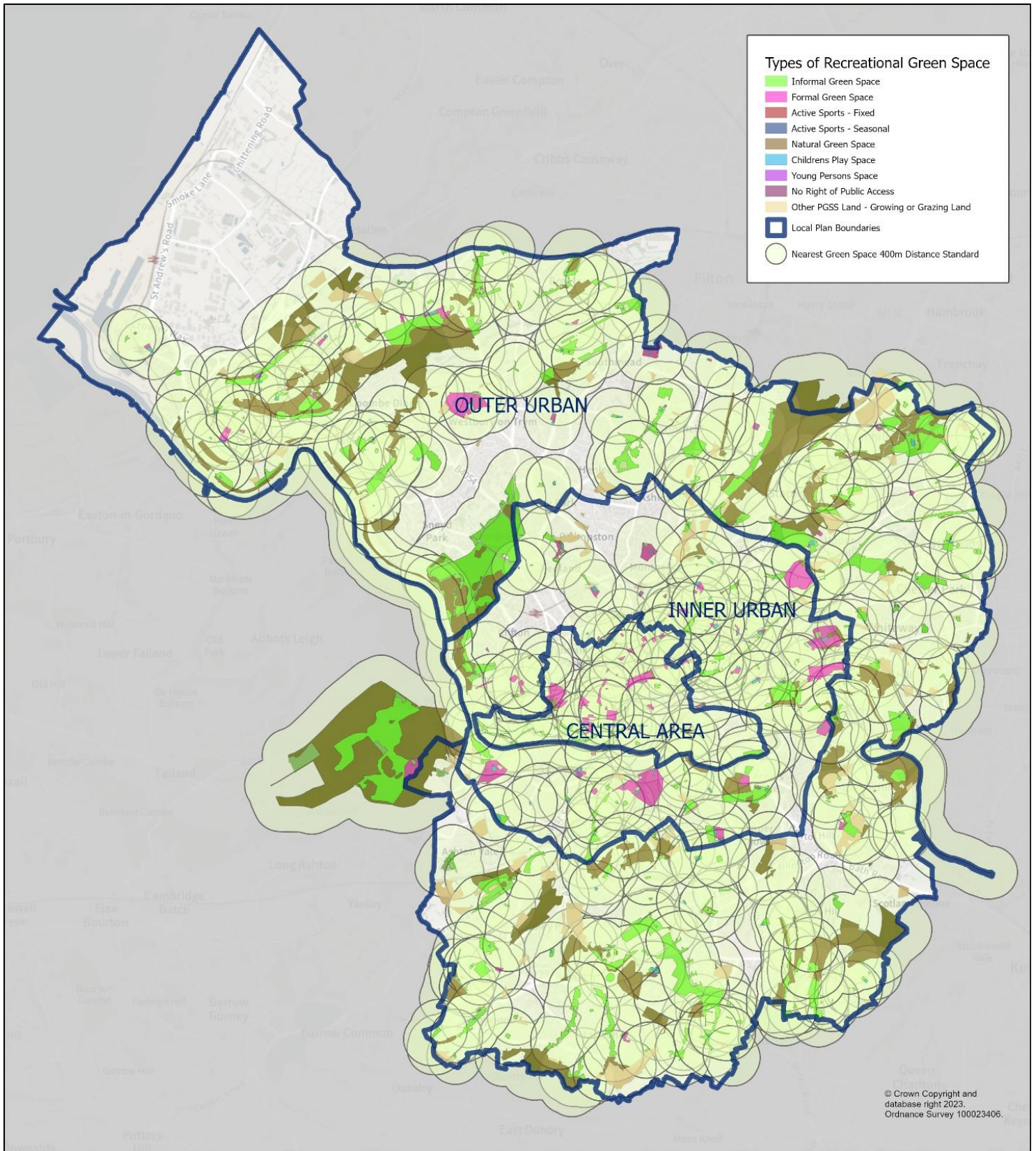
These are areas within a park and green space where the public is excluded. These will normally be depot facilities, leased buildings not servicing a parks and green space function or staff housing / park lodges.

1.12 Areas of open water:

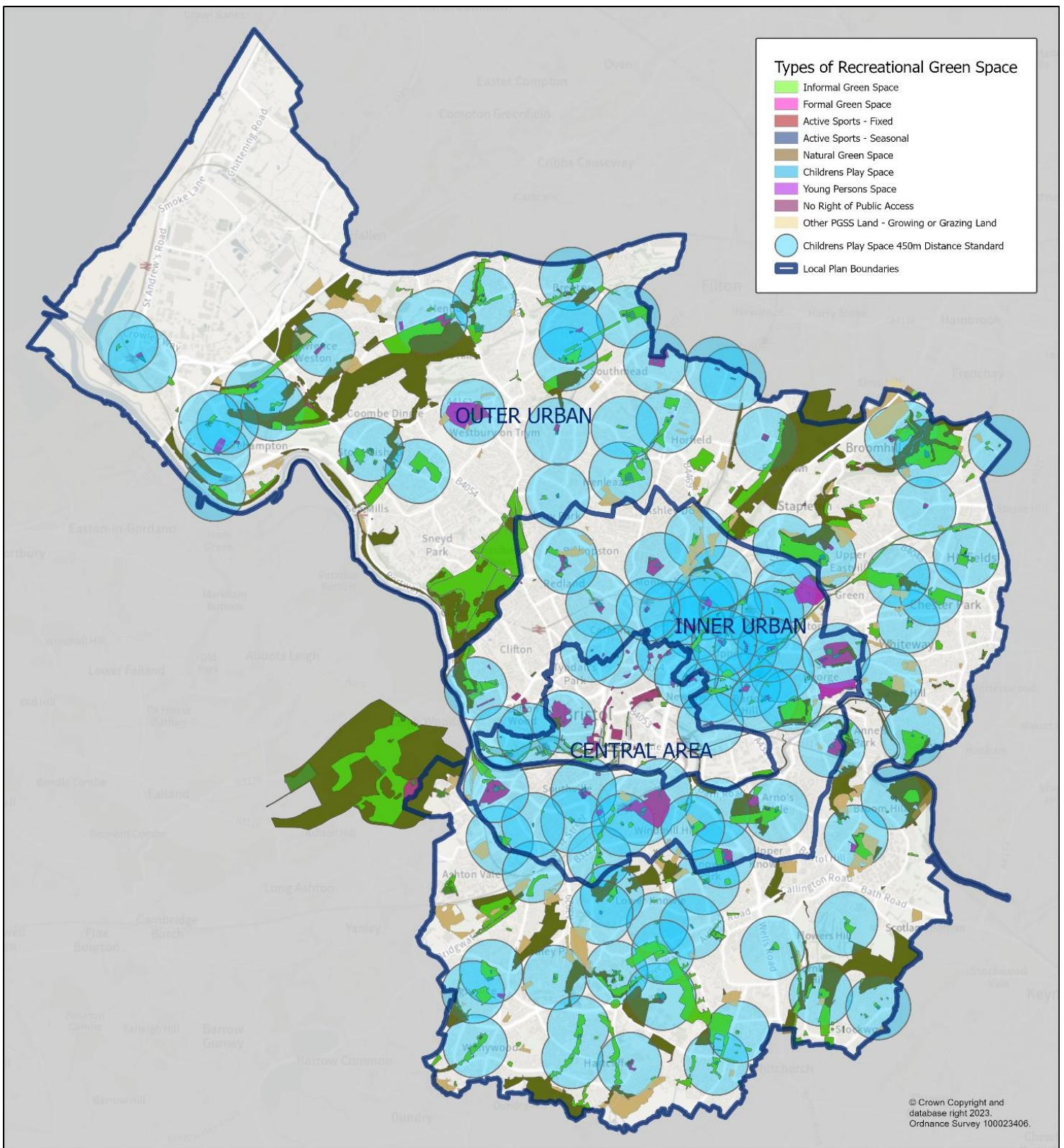
Ponds, lakes and streams which are integral to parks are included.

Appendix 2: The Distance Standards applied to Bristol.

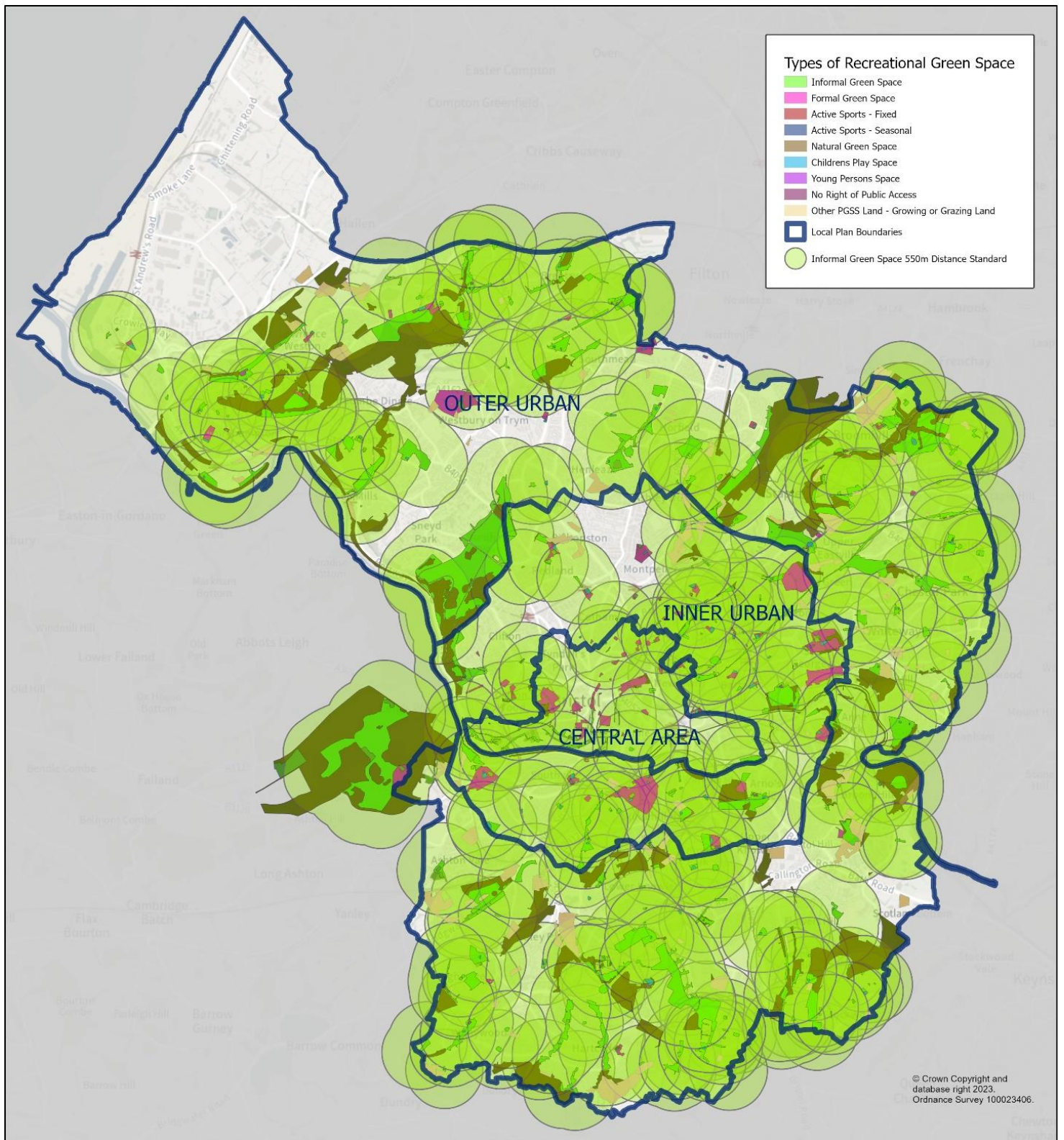
Map 1: Nearest Green Space 400m distance standard



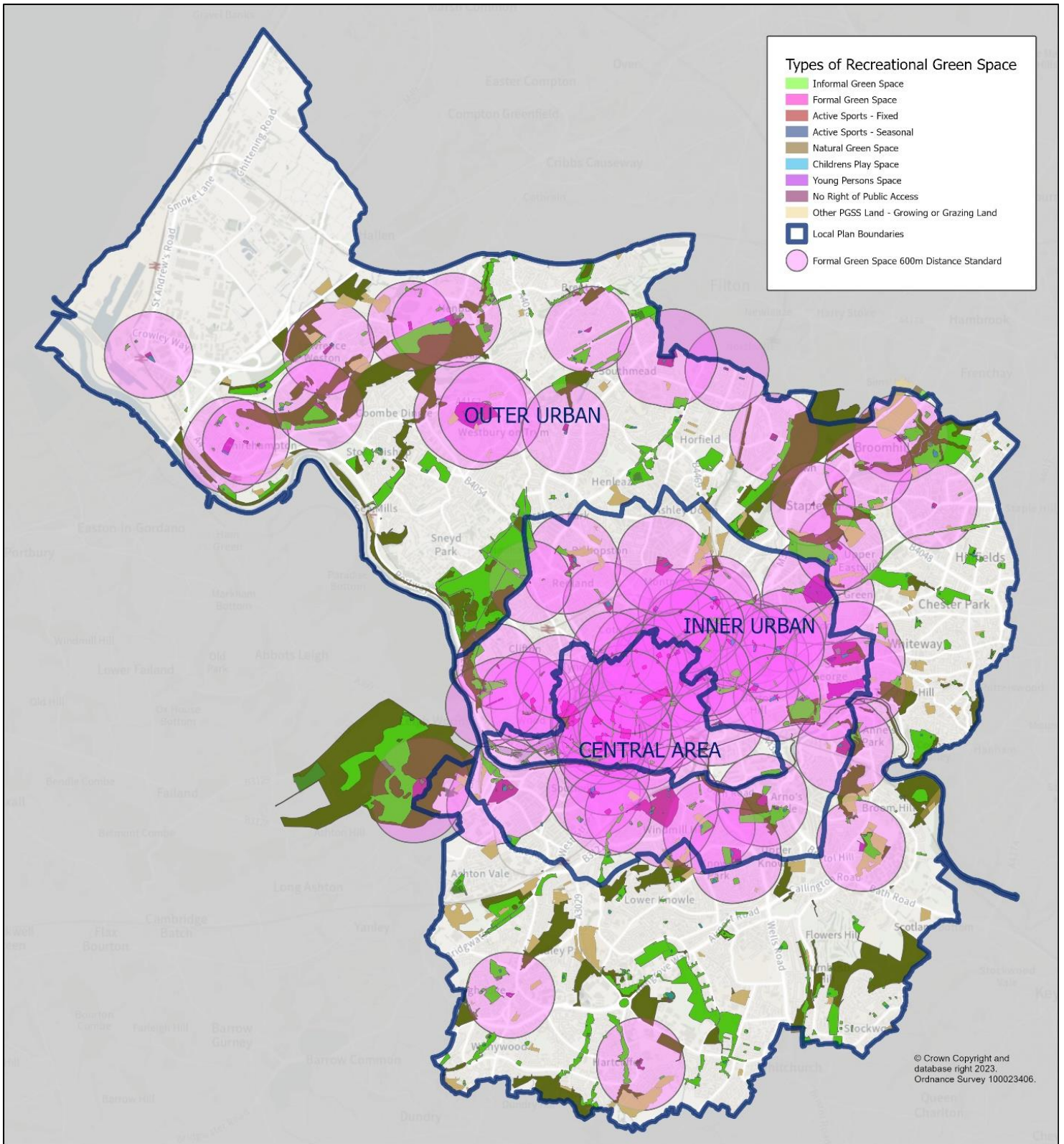
Map 2: Children's Play Space 450m distance standard



Map 3: Informal Green Space 550m distance standard



Map 4: Formal Green Space 600m distance standard



Map 5: Natural Green Space 700m distance standard

