



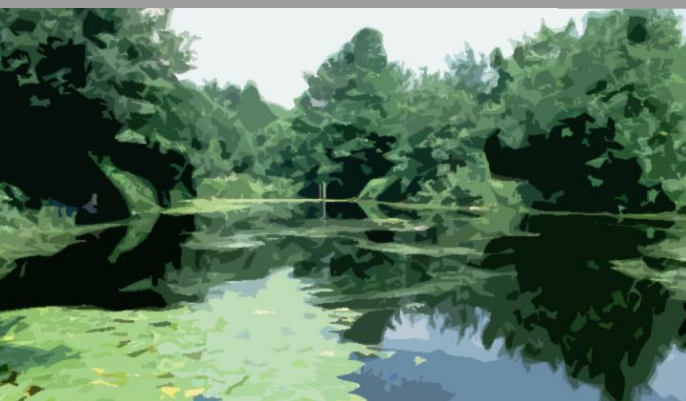
Bury Local Plan

Topic Paper 10:

Open space, sport and recreation



June 2026



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1. Introduction

1.1. This Topic Paper is one of a series that has been prepared as part of the process of evidence gathering to support Bury's emerging Local Plan. It sits alongside a range of other Topic Papers covering the following:

- Climate change and carbon reduction
- Housing
- Economy
- Centres
- Tourism and culture
- Communities
- Transport
- Built Environment and Design
- Green infrastructure
- Green Belt
- Water and flood risk
- Air quality, pollution and hazards
- Other infrastructure

1.2 The principal aim of the Topic Paper is to set out current key policies, plans and strategies relating to this topic area that forms the framework for the development of the Local Plan and to present a profile of the Borough that will highlight key issues, problems and challenges that the Local Plan should seek to address and which have helped to shape and influence the direction and focus of the Local Plan's policies and designations.

2. Background

2.1. Recreation facilities offer spaces for people to relax, socialise, and lead healthier lifestyles. They support active travel, informal play, sport, and everyday interaction with the natural environment. Providing opportunities for sport and physical activity is essential for supporting the health and wellbeing of communities.

2.2. The key characteristics of recreation provision are that it forms a connected network of spaces and facilities, rather than a collection of isolated elements,

and that it is multi-functional, delivering multiple benefits at once. These benefits can include:

- supporting people's mental and physical well-being.
- encouraging active and healthy lifestyles.
- enhancing the attractiveness of places and contributing to economic vitality.

3. Context

- 3.1. One of the key early stages in the process is to review other policies, plans and strategies which are of relevance to this particular topic area and which help to inform and influence the direction of the Local Plan. There is a need for the Local Plan to be consistent with planning policy at different levels.
- 3.2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out Government policy in respect of planning matters and this is supported by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This sets out the broad planning framework within which development plans are produced.
- 3.3. Sub-regionally, the Places for Everyone Plan joint plan (PfE) establishes strategic policies and site allocations across nine of the ten Greater Manchester districts. Following its adoption in March 2024, PfE is now a key part of Bury's development plan that sits alongside the Local Plan.
- 3.4. There are also a range of other plans and strategies that, whilst not being policy, are of relevance to the Borough from a green infrastructure perspective.

National Planning Policy

- 3.5. All development plans must be prepared within the context of the Government's planning policies. These are primarily set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The NPPF provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

¹ [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

- 3.6. The NPPF is supported by separate policy documents related to waste² and traveller sites³ as well as more detailed information in Planning Practice Guidance⁴.
- 3.7. The NPPF 2024 transitional arrangements set out in paragraph 234c apply to the Bury Local Plan, because it is a plan which includes policies to deliver the level of housing and other development set out in a preceding local plan (such as a joint local plan containing strategic policies) adopted since 12 March 2020. As a result, the Bury Local Plan will be examined under the relevant previous version of the Framework (i.e. the NPPF December 2023).
- 3.8. Central to the NPPF is the Government's objective of achieving sustainable development and it highlights that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways:
- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
 - **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
 - **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 3.9. Chapter 8 of the NPPF considers promoting healthy and safe communities. It states that planning policies should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings which:
- promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each

² [National Planning Policy for Waste](#)

³ [Planning policy for traveller sites](#)

⁴ [Planning Practice Guidance](#)

other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;

- are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of beautiful, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and
- enable and support healthy lifestyles, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

3.10. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF states that to provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies should pursue a range of measures, including:

- planning positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments; and
- taking into account and supporting the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community.

3.11. Specifically with regard to open space and recreation, the NPPF outlines that access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.

3.12. Paragraph 104 is clear that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

3.13. Paragraph 105 states that planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.

Greater Manchester Strategy 2025-2035

3.14. The Greater Manchester Strategy 2025–2035⁵, titled “Together We Are Greater Manchester”, sets out a shared vision for the next decade: to create a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life. It is built on the principle that economic success and social progress must go hand in hand, so growth should benefit all people and communities across Greater Manchester.

3.15. The strategy focuses on two interconnected priorities:

- Growing the economy by attracting investment, supporting businesses, creating high-quality jobs, driving innovation, and building on Greater Manchester’s strengths in sectors such as technology, advanced manufacturing, research, culture, and the visitor economy; and
- Ensuring people can live well by improving the foundations of everyday life, including housing, safety, transport, education, health, and support services. The strategy aims to tackle inequalities, strengthen communities, and improve wellbeing across the city region.

3.16. To create a thriving city region where everyone can have a good life, the Strategy focuses on seven key workstreams:

- Healthy homes for all
- Safe and strong communities
- A transport system for a global city region

⁵ [Greater Manchester Strategy 2025-2035](#)

- A clear line of sight to high quality jobs
- Everyday support in every neighbourhood
- A great place to do business
- Digitally connected places and people

Places for Everyone

3.17. Places for Everyone (PfE) was prepared as a Joint Development Plan Document of nine of the ten Greater Manchester local planning authorities (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan). The plan was formally adopted in March 2024.

3.18. PfE is the strategic spatial plan that sets out a collective planning policy framework for the nine constituent boroughs. All policies within the plan are ‘strategic policies’ and it forms a key part of Bury’s wider development plan and is used to determine individual planning applications. As such, Bury’s Local Plan will need to be consistent with PfE.

3.19. As a strategic plan, Places for Everyone does not cover everything that Bury’s Local Plan would. Therefore, Bury’s Local Plan will set out more detailed policies reflecting local circumstances.

3.20. One of the strategic objectives within the Places for Everyone Plan is to improve the quality of our natural environment and access to green spaces through:

- Enhancing special landscapes, green infrastructure, biodiversity and geodiversity;
- Improving access to the natural environment and green spaces (including parks)

3.21. PfE Policy JP-P7: Sport and Recreation, states that a network of high quality and accessible sports and recreation facilities will be protected and enhanced, supporting greater levels of activity for all ages including by:



Places for Everyone

Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan
2022 - 2039

Adopted 21 March 2024

1. Creating a public realm that provides frequent opportunities for play and that all ages can enjoy together;
 2. Where appropriate setting out more comprehensive and detailed recreational standards and standards for provision for designated play areas in district local plans, having regard to existing and future needs;
 3. Requiring new development to provide new and/or improved existing facilities commensurate with the demand they would generate. The provision of sports facilities will be determined by individual local authorities through an evidence-based approach;
 4. Locating and designing recreation facilities in relation to housing so as to ensure that they are accessible but also minimise the potential for complaints due to disturbance to residential amenity from recreational activity;
 5. Protecting and enhancing the public rights of way network, including to:
 - a. Provide safe and attractive routes to sports and recreation facilities;
 - b. Improve access to, and connections between different parts of, the green infrastructure network across Greater Manchester and beyond;
 - c. Expand the network of strategic recreation routes offering longer distance opportunities for walking, cycling and horse-riding;
 - d. Provide everyday options for green travel;
 6. Encouraging the incorporation of a sports facilities mix in all education settings, that meet both curriculum and local community sport needs as identified by an up-to-date Local Authority Sports Needs Assessment, and made available for community use where possible;
 7. Enabling the continued development of major sports facilities and events, which can further enhance Greater Manchester's international sporting reputation
- 3.22. PfE Policy JP-G2 Green Infrastructure Network states that a strategic approach will be taken to protecting, managing and enhancing Green Infrastructure. While this includes ecosystem services such as flood management and climate adaptation, the policy also recognises that enhanced green infrastructure brings wider public health benefits by supporting active travel, food-growing and a range of recreational opportunities.

- 3.23. In making planning decisions and carrying out other associated activities, Policy JP-G2 seeks to deliver the following priorities relating to open space, sport and recreation:
- Promote public enjoyment of the river valleys, including as key recreational corridors connecting urban areas to the countryside, supporting both active travel and leisure activities;
 - Increasing recreational walking and cycling along canals and watercourses, where compatible with commercial uses, by improving towpaths and rights of way to expand access to natural green space; and
 - Ensure that development relates positively to nearby rivers and other waterways, taking advantage of opportunities to integrate green infrastructure through:
 - High-quality frontages to the water; and
 - Public realm alongside the water for both recreation use and maintenance access.
- 3.24. PfE Policy JP-G6: Urban Green Space states that to ensure there is an appropriate scale, type, quality and distribution of accessible urban green space that can support a high quality of life and other important green infrastructure functions:
- existing urban green space will be protected and enhanced in balance with other considerations; and that
 - we will work with developers and other stakeholders to deliver new high quality urban green spaces.
- 3.25. It also states that development should be designed to support the positive use of nearby green spaces, such as by offering a high-quality setting, providing natural surveillance, and facilitating easy access by walking and cycling.

Bury's 'Let's Do It!' Strategy

3.26. The Let's Do It! Strategy is Bury's long-term vision for the borough up to 2030, developed with residents, businesses, community groups and public services. Its aim is to make Bury a place with strong economic growth, lower levels of deprivation, and better life chances for everyone, while putting communities at the heart of decision-making.



3.27. At its core, the strategy is based on the belief that everyone has a role to play in improving the borough. Rather than focusing solely on council services, it promotes community power, partnership working and shared responsibility, encouraging residents, organisations and public services to work together to tackle inequality and improve outcomes.

3.28. The strategy is built around four key themes:

- Locally – strengthening neighbourhoods and townships, supporting prevention and early intervention, and helping communities become more resilient.
- Enterprising – creating jobs, supporting businesses, investing in regeneration, improving skills, and growing a sustainable local economy.
- Together – integrating services and strengthening partnerships between the council, NHS, voluntary sector, businesses and residents.
- Strengths-Based – building on the strengths, assets and capabilities of people, communities and organisations rather than focusing on problems alone.

3.29. Overall, the Let's Do It! Strategy aims to create a healthier, greener, more prosperous and more inclusive Bury, where residents have greater opportunities, stronger communities, and improved quality of life.

3.30. Bury's Local Plan will play a key role in delivering the vision and aims of the Let's Do It Strategy and, as such, it is important that there is alignment between these two key local strategies.

Bury Open Space Assessment (2026)

- 3.31. The Bury Open Space Assessment (2026)⁶ reviews open space sites across the borough and has concluded that, overall, Bury has a strong network of parks, natural greenspaces and amenity areas, with 65% of assessed sites meeting quality standards and 97% meeting value standards.
- 3.32. Key findings of the Open Space Assessment include:
- Residents are generally satisfied with open spaces, with parks, woodlands and country parks being the most popular.
 - Natural and semi-natural greenspace exceeds national benchmarks, providing the largest share of open space.
 - Parks such as Clarence Park, Close Park, Nuttall Park and Burrs Country Park are among the highest-quality and most valued sites.
 - Accessibility is generally good, with most gaps covered by other nearby open space types.
 - The main areas for improvement identified by residents are better maintenance, more wildlife habitat, greater attractiveness and improved facilities.
 - Allotment provision is below recommended levels, with evidence of unmet demand and waiting lists.
- 3.33. Overall, the assessment concludes that Bury has a well-valued and largely accessible open space network, but investment should focus on maintenance and addressing specific provision shortfalls.

Bury Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sports Strategy & Action Plan (2023)

- 3.34. The Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS) prepared by Knight Kavanagh & Page provides a clear strategic framework in relation to the provision of playing pitch and outdoor sport facilities.
- 3.35. The PPOSS Assessment shows that all currently used outdoor sports sites require protection and therefore cannot be deemed surplus to requirements because shortfalls would occur both now and, in the future, if they were lost. Consideration should also be given to the protection of underused and poor-

⁶ The Bury Open Space Assessment forms part of the wider evidence base for the Local Plan and can be viewed at www.bury.gov.uk/burylocalplan.

quality sites from development or replacement as they may offer potential to meet shortfalls, particularly for football and rugby, in the future.

- 3.36. Although there are identified shortfalls of match equivalent sessions i.e., for cricket, rugby union and football pitches, most of these shortfalls can be addressed through quality improvements as demonstrated in the scenarios. It is therefore, not recommended as a priority to identify 'new' sites for provision although there may be a need to provide new pitches if quality improvements aren't achieved.

4. Local Profile

- 4.1. Bury benefits from a diverse and extensive network of open spaces, parks, countryside sites and recreational facilities that make a significant contribution to the borough's environmental quality, health and wellbeing, biodiversity, and community life.
- 4.2. The borough's open space network ranges from strategic destinations such as Burrs Country Park and the Irwell Valley corridor to local parks, recreation grounds, amenity greenspaces, allotments, play areas, woodlands and nature reserves. These spaces provide opportunities for informal recreation, walking, cycling, outdoor sport, community events, nature conservation and environmental education.
- 4.3. Bury has a strong reputation for the quality of its parks and green spaces. The borough currently holds 15 Green Flag Awards, the highest number of accredited sites in Greater Manchester, reflecting consistently high standards of management, maintenance, accessibility and community involvement. Several sites, including Burrs Country Park, Close Park, Nuttall Park and Whitehead Park, have retained Green Flag status for more than two decades.
- 4.4. The borough's open space resource is extensive. Bury Council manages 13 principal parks, 14 recreation grounds, 45 countryside sites, approximately 837 hectares of open land, and around 180 hectares of managed woodland. The River Irwell and its tributaries form important green corridors, linking urban and rural areas while supporting biodiversity, recreation and active travel opportunities.
- 4.5. Sport and recreation provision is distributed throughout the borough and includes a wide range of formal and informal facilities. Council-managed provision includes 62 play areas, 24 tennis courts, 24 ball zones, 8 outdoor gyms, 2 skate parks and 3 full-size 3G football pitches. In addition, there are numerous community-managed and privately operated sports clubs, playing

fields and recreational facilities that contribute to local participation in sport and physical activity.

- 4.6. Access to the countryside is a defining characteristic of Bury. Large areas upland landscapes toward the Pennine fringe, provide opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding and nature-based recreation. The borough is also served by an extensive network of public rights of way, cycle routes and recreational trails, including connections along the Irwell Valley and neighbouring districts.
- 4.7. A key part of the evidence base supporting the Local Plan is the Bury Open Space Assessment 2026 undertaken by Knight, Kavanagh and Page Ltd. The purpose of an open space assessment is to recognise the role of open space provision as a resource to Bury. The report helps understand both the quality/value and quantity of open space across the authority, if there are any shortfalls/surpluses and where there may be opportunities for improvements to ensure that residents can benefit from accessible and high-quality open space facilities. The Open Space Assessment is available on the Council's web site at www.bury.gov.uk/burylocalplan.
- 4.8. The Assessment shows that there are a total of 393 sites equating to 1,111 hectares of open space. The largest contributor to provision is natural/semi-natural greenspace (800 hectares), accounting for 72% of open space in Bury.

Open space typology	Number of sites	Total amount (hectares)
Allotments	30	16
Amenity greenspace	68	124
Cemeteries/churchyards	30	50
Civic spaces	12	1
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	96	800
Parks and gardens	44	111
Provision for children and young people	93	9
Total	393	1,111

- 4.9. New housing development within the Borough brings with it an increase in population and a subsequent increase in demands for open space, sport and recreational facilities. If the increase in demand for recreation is not met through the new development, then this is likely to place excessive demands on existing facilities which, in turn, may have an adverse impact on quality.

5. Summary of Key Issues

- 5.1. This Recreation Topic Paper has highlighted a number of Key Issues that need to be considered in taking the Local Plan forward. These Key Issues are considered to be as follows:

- The need to retain an adequate supply of good quality and accessible open space, sport and recreational assets.
- The need for developers of new housing to make provision for new or enhanced open space, sport and recreation to meet the needs of the prospective residents.
- The need to establish a network of designated recreational routes to provide access for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

Bury
Council