



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 citywide 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 adopted 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 Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2024-2039 retains 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 are introducing 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 accounts for how the city looks now and how the population is likely to grow over the next 15 years. A city-wide minimum standard applies alongside 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.
- 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

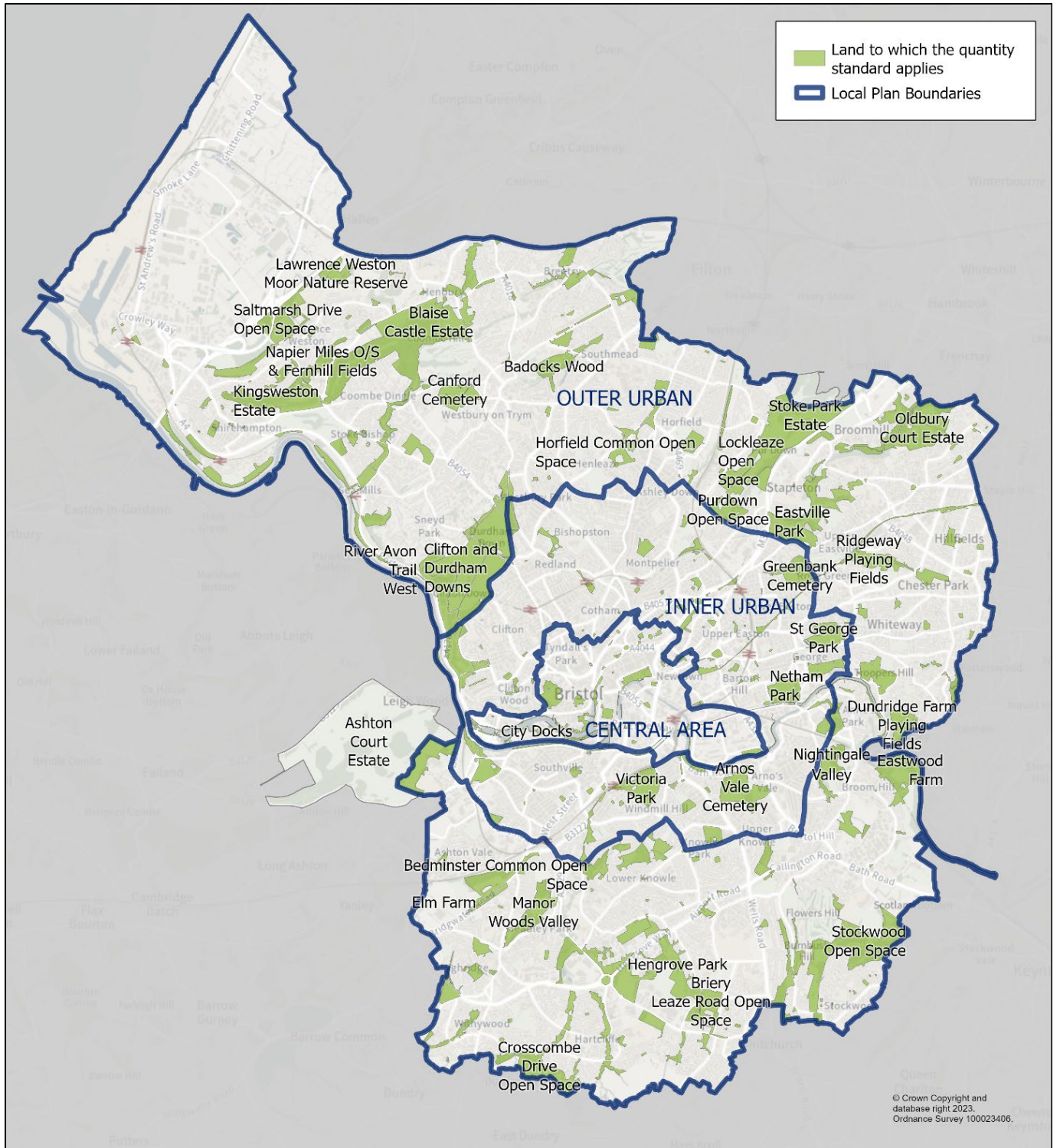
Some council-owned and operated cemeteries are now to be identified as open space for provision standards purposes. These sites are no longer used for new burials and there is a clear opportunity to manage these sites going forward to accommodate appropriate and respectful recreational use, particularly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

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.

An overview of types of space not considered as open space for recreation by the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy is provided on pages 9 and 10.

A map identifying the space considered as 'open space for recreation' in the city to which the provision standards apply is provided below:

Map identifying the space considered as 'open space for recreation' in the city to which the provision standards apply.



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

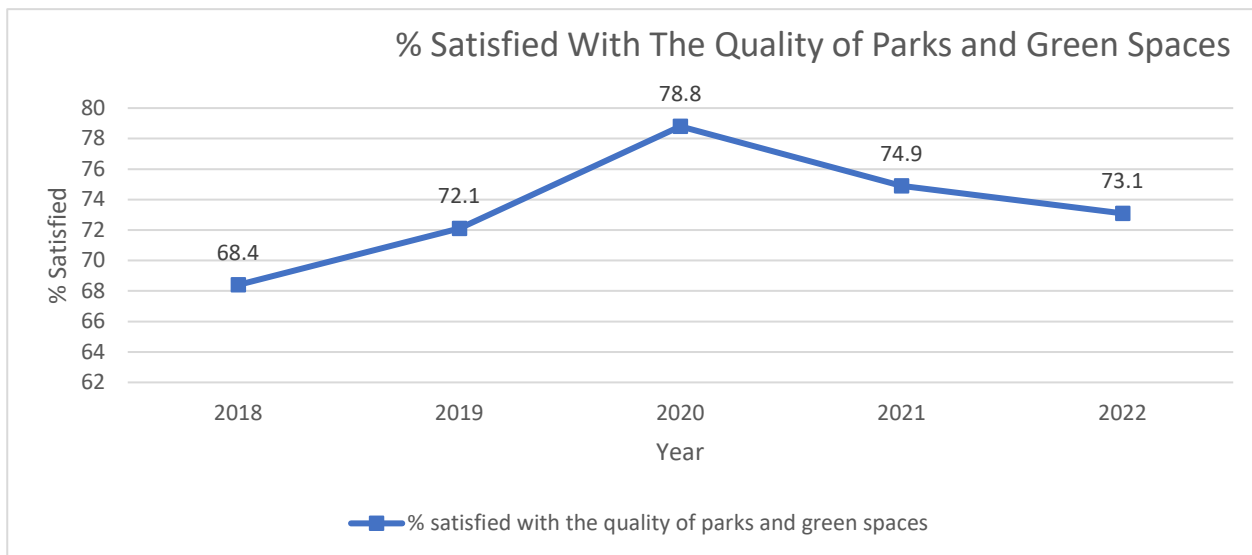
Research undertaken for our 2008 strategy, and engagement to shape our new strategy, has consistently identified that quality is the most important factor for people visiting our parks and green spaces, as represented in the graphic below.



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. These spaces must also deliver an environment that feels safe, inclusive and welcoming and must be clearly well cared for and regularly maintained.

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%.

The Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2024-2039 sets out an ambition for more community participation, 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.

The 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 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

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)

A review of the options concluded that maintaining the distance standard from 2008 would provide important continuity over a 30-year period and continues to maintain an ambitious target for access to the right range of spaces.

See pages 11-15 for a view of the distance standards applied to Bristol.

Quantity provision standards

The provision standards for quantity 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 is a Citywide standard and provision guidelines to guide potential new open space provision in the Central and Inner Urban areas of the city.

Our provision standard directly relates 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 will seek 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 2039 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.

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.

Overview of sites not considered as open space for recreation Open Space by the Parks and Green Spaces 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 church yards 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:

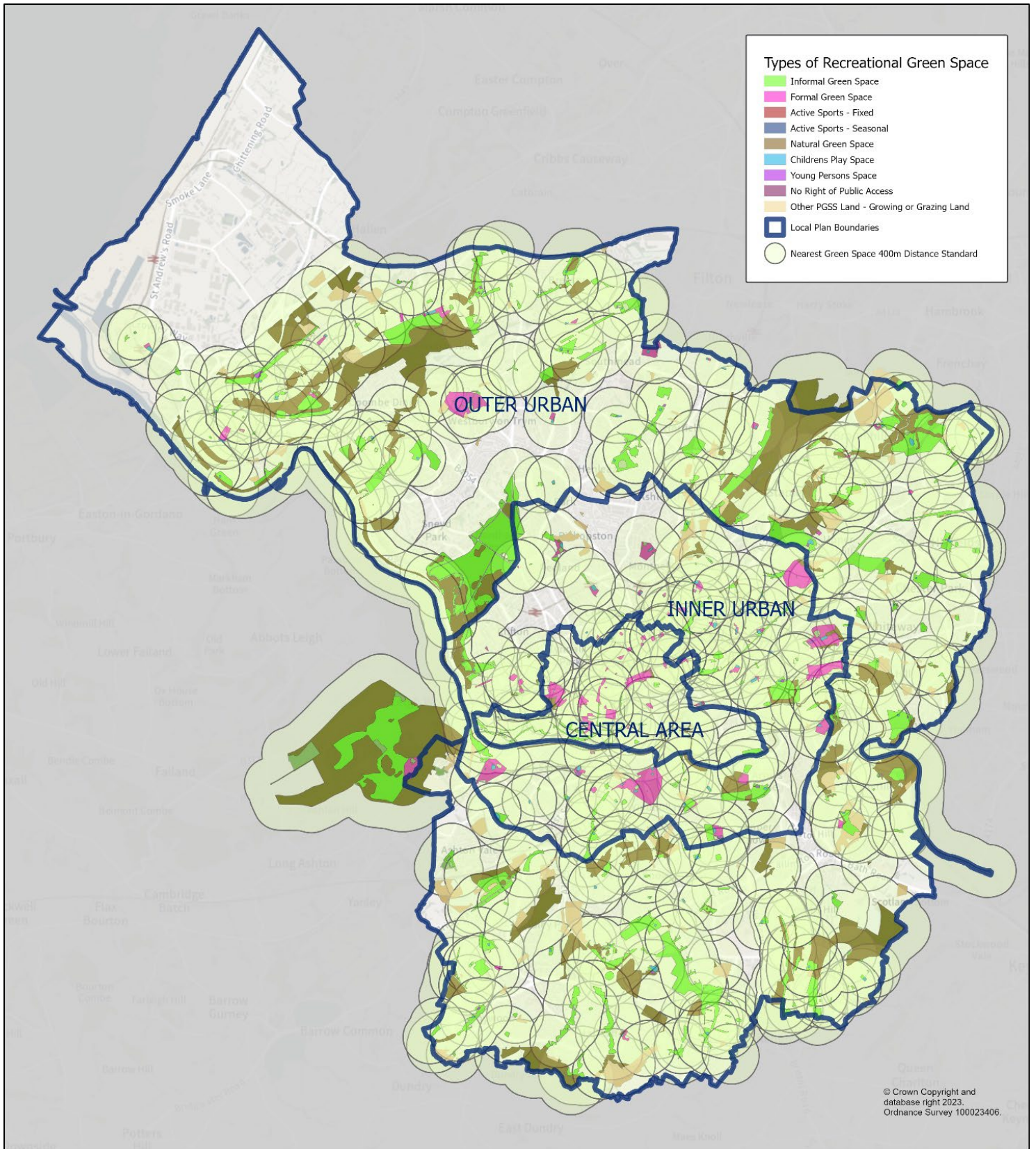
These are areas within a park and green space where the public is excluded. These will normally be depot facilities, leased buildings not servicing a parks and green space function or staff housing / park lodges.

1.12 Areas of open water:

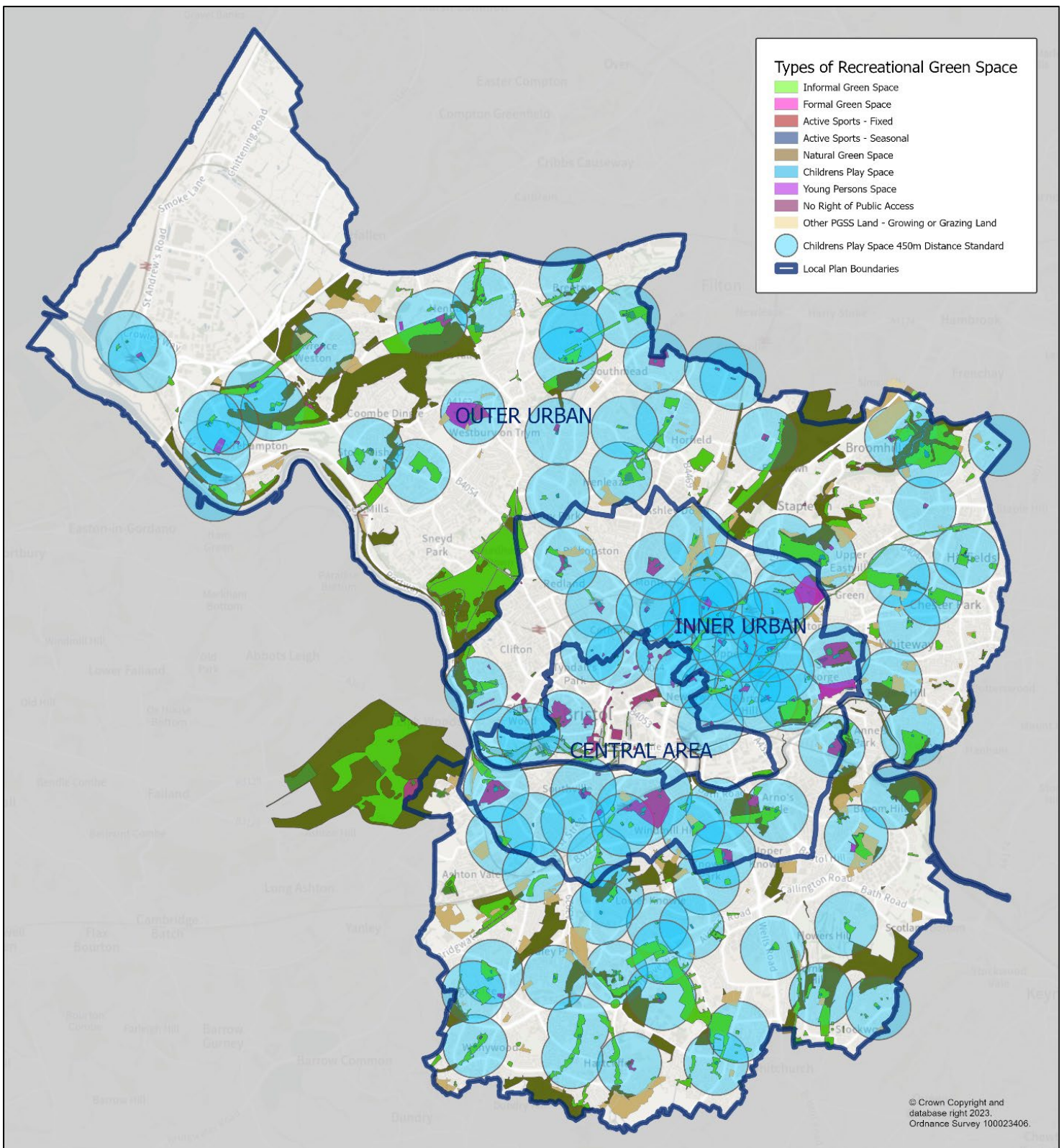
Ponds, lakes and streams which are integral to parks are included.

The Distance Standards applied to Bristol.

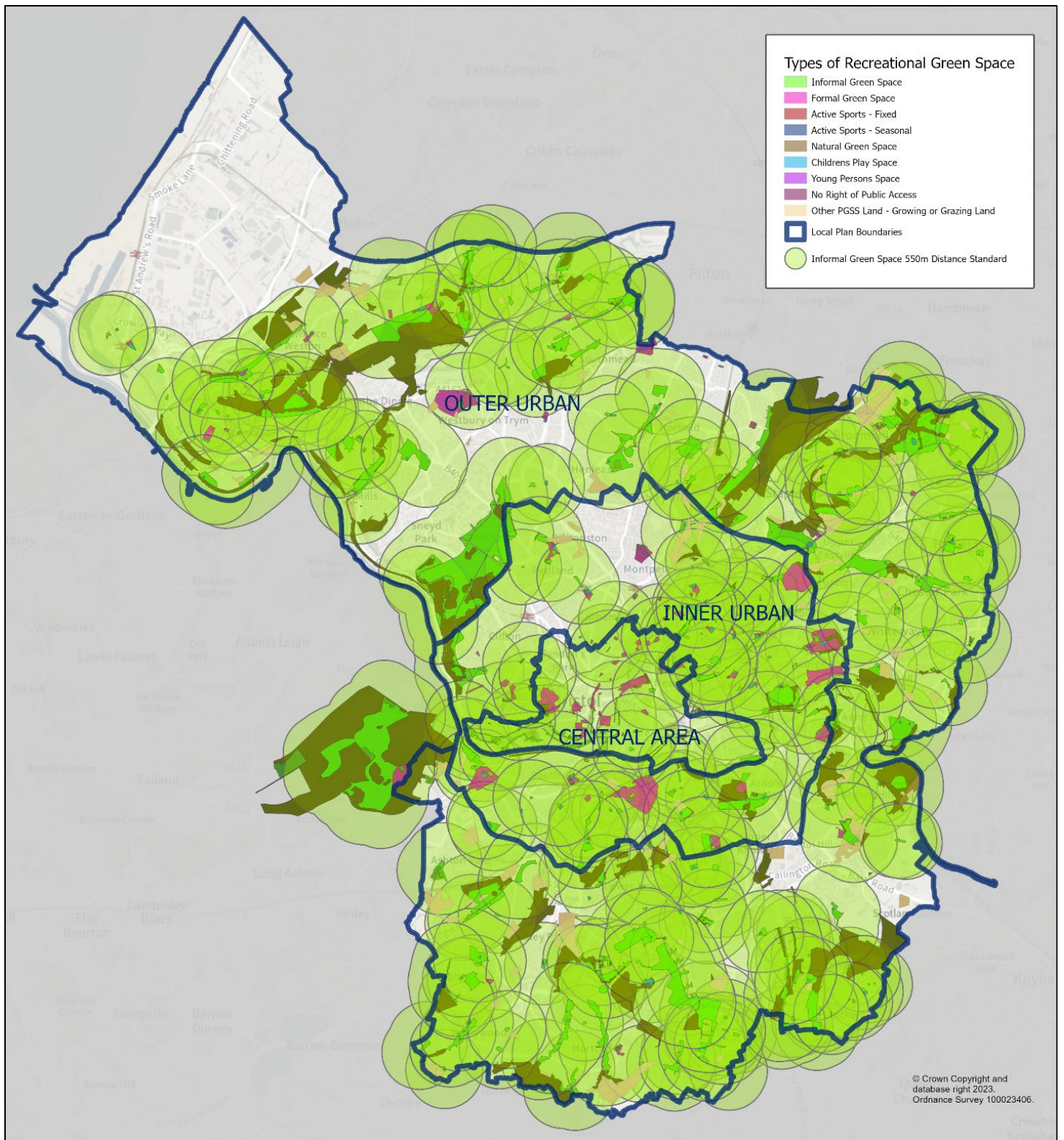
Map 1: Nearest Green Space 400m distance standard



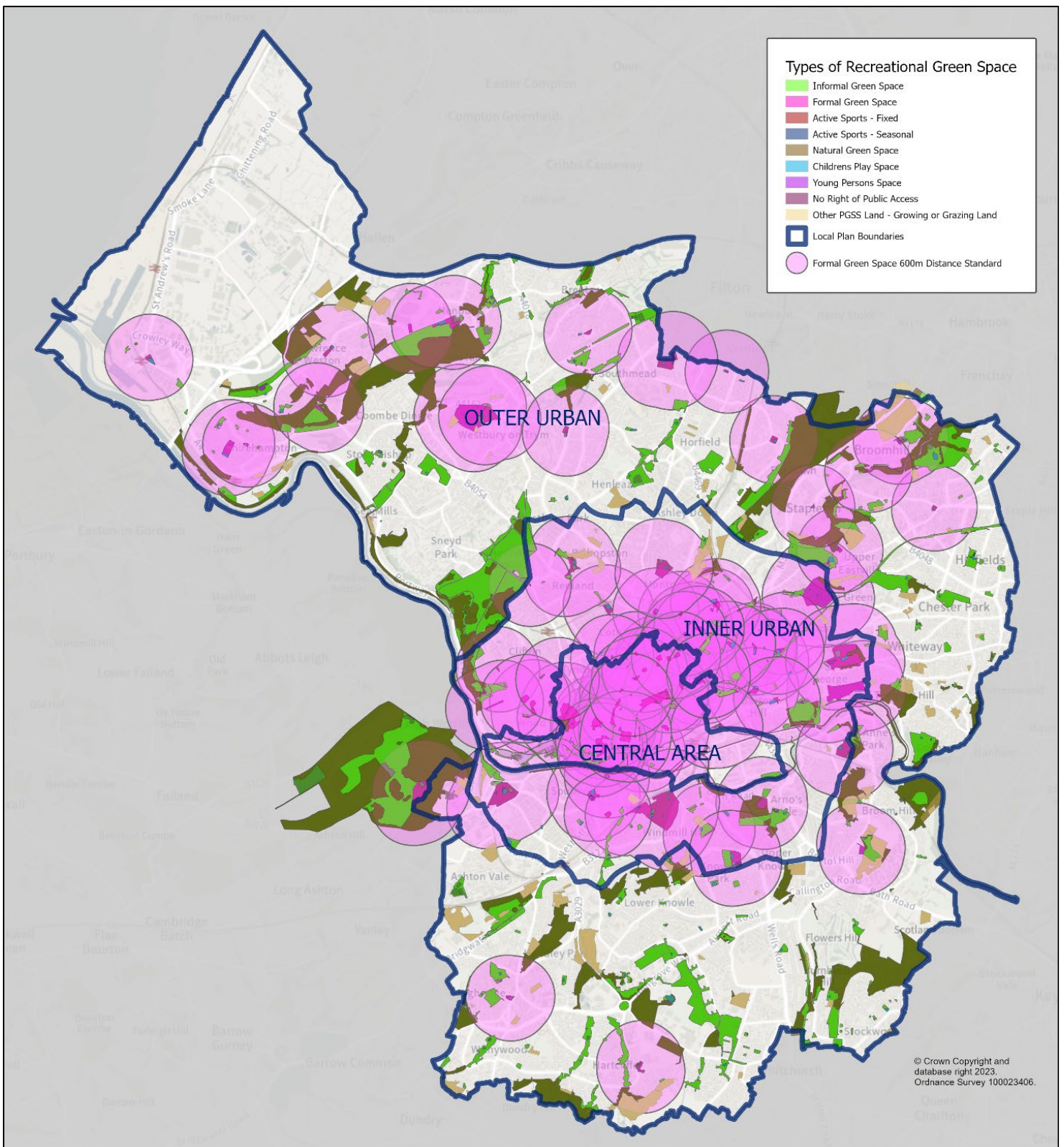
Map 2: Children's Play Space 450m distance standard



Map 3: Informal Green Space 550m distance standard



Map 4: Formal Green Space 600m distance standard



Map 5: Natural Green Space 700m distance standard

