

Neighbourhood Planning

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Neighbourhood Planning Local Green Spaces

A toolkit for neighbourhood
planners

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Introduction

Green infrastructure contributes to the quality and distinctiveness of the local environment. It creates opportunities for walking and physical activity and generally adding to quality of life. Green infrastructure is diverse in character and can include formal parks and gardens, informal grassed areas, linear paths, towpaths, sports pitches and various other kinds of landscaped area.

For many local communities, securing high quality green infrastructure in and around their neighbourhood is important. Neighbourhood plans can include policies for green spaces and can be used to designate 'Local Green Spaces' to protect them for current and future generations.

Section 1 of the document sets out why green space is important and discusses its different values. Section 2 discusses how neighbourhood plans can address green space. Section 3 looks at evidence requirements and Section 4 comprises an audit tool for use where existing evidence is not available. Section 5 discusses community and stakeholder engagement. Sections 6 and 7 comprise guidance and a tool for making Local Green Space designations. Section 8 looks at other green space designations, which must be taken into account when considering Local Green Space designations. Section 9 deals with policy making for Local Green Spaces.

The document is aimed at local communities, Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Forums and others involved in neighbourhood planning.

Take into account socio-economic data.
Include data on the current population and population growth predictions.

Take into account the other existing designations that already be applied to green spaces.
Do existing designations already provide adequate protection?



Collect evidence of what already exists.
Undertake a Green Space Audit. Using Green Infrastructure Audit Tool.
Ask the questions: Where it is? What type it is? Statutory designation or status? Quality and condition of the space? Value and Benefit to the community?

Engagement with the community and local stakeholders is essential in planning for green spaces.

Not all identified green spaces will be suitable for designation. Paragraph 102 of the NPPF must be applied

1. Why green space is important

Planning for green spaces can help to achieve social, economic and environmental benefits in a neighbourhood. Some of the community and environmental benefits of green spaces are:

- Being part of the public realm, where informal social interaction can take place
- Providing pitches and facilities for sports and supporting physical activity
- Forming part of a network of paths and spaces, enabling movement through an area
- Providing habitats for wildlife and a natural corridors and spaces through urban areas
- Providing flexible space for recreation, local cultural events and performance
- Adding to local amenity, providing an attractive setting and outlook for surrounding residential and commercial properties
- Forming part of the character or setting of historic areas, buildings and townscape
- Forming part of flood mitigation, such as SUDS
- Providing areas and opportunities for growing local food.

Green spaces contribute to quality of place, together with buildings, urban spaces and the wider public realm. Quality of place is a key factor in attracting investment, jobs and growth to an area. It is also important in making an area an attractive place to live, work and spend leisure time. So green spaces have real economic value to the surrounding area, in addition to supporting healthy lifestyles and community-wellbeing.

Achieving sustainable development

One of the basic conditions for neighbourhood plans is achieving sustainable development. The social, community, economic and environmental benefits of green spaces help to make local places sustainable.

The impact of new development on green spaces, and the provision of new green spaces as part of new development will often be significant factors in considering whether development is sustainable. Planning for green spaces needs to be considered as an integral part of the wider planning for the area.

2. Neighbourhood plans and green space

The potential of neighbourhood plans

Good planning requires that green infrastructure be considered in terms of the value and benefits it brings to the local community, local environment and local economy. Some examples of how Neighbourhood Plans can address green space are:

- Designation of Local Green Space
- Recognition of other designations involving open space
- Identification of green infrastructure deficiencies, which may then be addressed through new development or planning gain
- Policies for development around Local Green Space
- Policies for development affecting other kinds of green infrastructure
- Provision of new open space as part of new development.

Planning for Local Green Space

Designation of Local Green Space must be done in accordance with criteria contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, policies can relate to green space and infrastructure, or development adjacent to such facilities. Designations and policies are dealt with in more detail later in this document.

Good planning requires that green infrastructure be considered in terms of its values to the local community, local environment and local economy. This can be demonstrated by providing a clear rationale and evidence for Local Green Space designations or policies.

In addition to a robust and proportionate evidence base, it is necessary to engage with local communities and stakeholders. The following sections of this document deal with evidence and community and stakeholder engagement.

Care is required to ensure that green space policies are not being misused, for example through making designations to stop development, rather than to ensure proper green space provision.

3. Evidence

Evidence on green space for neighbourhood plans should identify existing green spaces, including:

- Where it is
- What type it is
- Statutory designation or status
- Quality and condition of the space
- Value and benefit to the community

This evidence will help in determining whether there is a need to improve existing green space or for new green space to be provided. It will also inform consideration of Local Green Space designations. The local authority should be approached in the first instance to provide or signpost existing evidence.

Different kinds of existing evidence are set out in the following sections.

Evidence of what exists already

- Evidence base underpinning the Local Plan or emerging Local Plan
- Any special technical reports commissioned by the local authority
- Local authority Green space strategy maps; also Green Infrastructure maps if the authority is maintaining them
- Places visited and for what purpose – Monitor of Engagement in the Natural Environment survey
- Ordnance Survey Green space maps may provide this information when it is published.

Evidence of condition and quality

- Statutory designations (see later section below)
- Local sports strategies
- Landscape assessments
- Identification of sites that have been winners of the Green Flag Award and Green Flag Community Award (the national quality standard for green space) or other award schemes.

Evidence of value and benefits of green space to the local community

- Places visited and for what purpose – Monitor of Engagement in the Natural Environment survey
- Local authority data on tourism and visitors
- Feedback from community engagement.

Evidence of need:

- Local authority data on green space provision and need
- Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANGSt) assessments where they have been undertaken; this tool itself provides an indication of whether sufficient provision exists
- Local Sport strategy and others where green space is mentioned.

Statutory designations

Sites and areas subject to statutory designations affecting green infrastructure should be identified so that they can be taken into account when developing policies or making Local Green Space designations.

Examples include:

- Public rights of way
- Conservation areas
- Registered historic parks and gardens
- Sites already designated under Local Greenspace Designation
- Local nature reserves
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Listed assets of community value.

The local authority should have records of all of these, including boundaries.

National Datasets offered under the MAGIC system include:

- Local Nature Reserves - <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest- <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>

Environmental data should also be considered, such as any value to wildlife or ecological value.

A later section of this document considers some of these other designations in more detail.

Green space audit

Where existing evidence does not already do so, it may be useful to undertake a green infrastructure audit of the area. This involves assessing and critically evaluating existing green spaces in the area in terms of: what there is, location (geographical distribution), type of space (purposes), quality of the facility, movement, amenity value and other relevant considerations.

A simple audit template is included in this guide. This is suitable for considering green spaces and other forms of green infrastructure, such as footpaths and towpaths. It is useful to plot such facilities on a map, as an aid to considering geographical distribution.

Checklist of green infrastructure

- **Informal green spaces**
- **Village Greens**
- **Allotments**
- **Cemeteries**
- **Highway verges**
- **Parks and gardens**
- **Footpaths and cycle routes**
- **Country parks**
- **Rural footpaths and nature trails**
- **Canal towpaths and river courses**
- **Sports pitches, golf courses and bowling greens**

This is not a comprehensive checklist. It is essential to develop a checklist for the specific locality.

Assessing local need

An assessment of local need may also need to be done, if not available in existing evidence. This may already have been done, at least partially, if there is a local sports strategy. This may include useful data on provision for sports and physical activity.

Socio-economic data will need to be taken into account, including data on the current population and population growth predictions. Deficiencies in provision may be identified by assessing current and future needs.

4. Green infrastructure audit tool

Site Details		
Name and address	Description and purposes	Quality of facility (including any deficiencies)
<p>EXAMPLE: Open space, Off Richmond Close and Chamberlain Avenue. (Number 12 on plan).</p>	<p>Informal, grassed open space. Area is around 0.5 hectares. Used for walking through, informal games (such as ball games) and other play.</p>	<p>Grass is well maintained. Three sides of the space are flanked by high rear fences of surrounding housing, resulting in poor surveillance.</p>

5. Community and stakeholder engagement

Importance of engagement

As with other aspects of neighbourhood planning, engagement with the community and local stakeholders is an essential part of planning for green spaces. Policies and designations in the neighbourhood plan should be based on careful consideration of evidence and of the outcomes of community and stakeholder engagement. More advice on community engagement for neighbourhood plans is given in the [Locality Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap Guide](#).

Local stakeholders

Key stakeholders could include local residents associations, sports and health bodies, canal and river bodies, conservation groups, the local authority (which often manages and maintains many local facilities) and other relevant local organisations.

Local stakeholders can provide useful data, advise on the quality and deficiencies of local facilities, and perhaps become more actively involved in preparing the neighbourhood plan. This includes identifying potential sites for Local Green Space designation.

Where Local Green Space designations are being considered, it is also advisable to engage with those controlling the land.

Engaging with the wider community

In engaging with the local community, the criteria in Paragraph 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for designating Local Green Space should be taken into account (NPPF criteria is discussed in more detail later in this document).

In particular, it would be useful to ask local people to identify any nearby green spaces that are special to the local community and hold a particular local significance, and to explain in what ways they are special and locally significant. This includes spaces that are special in terms of beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity, wildlife, or for other reasons. This information will be helpful to neighbourhood planning qualifying bodies in applying NPPF criteria.

Other questions could deal with the extent to which people use local facilities and whether they think there are gaps in local provision, for example a lack of green space or limited opportunities for sports and other physical activities. Such information may be helpful when considering local need.

6. Existing designations affecting green space

There are numerous other designations that may already be applied to green spaces. It is essential to take these into account when considering making Local Green Space designations. In some instances, existing designations may be adequate, but in other cases Local Green Space designation may be necessary to provide the protection sought by the neighbourhood planning qualifying bodies.

The following checker sets out the purpose of some common designations and the potential for Local Green Space designation to provide complementary or additional protection.

Green belt

Green belts have the following stated purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Green belts are designated and modified through the local plan process. They may only be modified by neighbourhood plans, where a strategic plan or local plan first makes provision for them to do so, as set out in Paragraph 140 of the NPPF.

Local Green Space implications:

Green belts are applied to the fringe of urban areas. They do not preclude all development (appropriate kinds of development are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework).

Therefore, Local Green Space designation could be useful in the green belt, where the land meets the NPPF criteria.

Green belts do not recognise the landscape quality or community value of land. So there are instances where Local Green Space designation could be useful. For example, it could recognise and protect the community value of a sports pitch on the edge of the green belt, adjacent to a housing estate.

Where there is no green belt, it would not be appropriate to try to use Local Green Space designation to attempt to impose green belt type protection of land around an urban area. This would be a misuse of the designation and would be likely to result in the

neighbourhood plan running into difficulties in meeting the basic conditions at the independent examination stage.

Historic area designations

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Conservation areas sometimes include green spaces, such as formal parks, village greens or urban greens.

Local Green Space implications:

Conservation areas do not preclude new development. Indeed, some conservation areas are a focus for regeneration and development. Local Green Space designation may be useful in identifying green space of value to the community in conservation areas.

Inclusion on the register of historic parks and gardens does not afford much protection in itself, though it is a material consideration in making planning decisions. Protection would normally be conferred to historic parks and gardens by conservation area designation or listed building status for buildings and structures.

By their very nature, many historic parks and gardens would be likely to meet the NPPF criteria for Local Green Space designation. However, care is required in applying the designation, so as to allow necessary development. For example, some new development may be necessary in parks to enhance community value, for example by providing new changing or storage facilities for sports pitches or cafes and refreshment kiosks. This could be recognised in planning policies.

Natural environment designations

Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other natural environment designations recognise the scientific, ecological or wildlife value of land. They can be a significant factor in determining whether SEA (strategic environment assessment) is required for neighbourhood plan.

Fields in Trust designation provides some protection for sites.

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 protect important countryside hedges from removal, without the permission of the local planning authority.

Local Green Space implications:

Local Green Space designation could offer useful additional protection, making clear that such areas have community value. Tree preservation orders (TPOs) apply to single trees or groups of trees and require consent to be obtained to remove or do work to trees. The protection is specific to trees and does not preclude development. Local Green Space designation could protect the wider space around TPOs or protected hedges, where such spaces meet the criteria.

Ancient woodland and veteran trees have been afforded increased protection through the NPPF. Planning applications for development that would result in the loss of these will only be approved in exceptional circumstances (e.g. where public benefit would clearly outweigh their loss or deterioration, such as for nationally significant infrastructure projects and a suitable compensation strategy exists). Aside from these exceptions, Local Green Space designation could potentially protect the wider spaces around veteran trees. There is also potential to protect some of the spaces surrounding ancient woodland, although as per the NPPF criteria, the green space cannot be an extensive tract of land.

Asset of Community Value

Designation of a green space as an asset of community value may be a material consideration in making planning decisions, but does not necessarily preclude development.

Local Green Space implications:

Listing of a space as an asset of community value is a key consideration in applying the NPPF criteria for Local Green Space designations. Whilst being an asset of community value is a material consideration in making planning decisions, Local Green Space designation could provide stronger and more specific protection.

Sports Pitches

Sports pitches and playing fields may have no formal designation, but they are addressed in national policy. Paragraph 99 of the NPPF states:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- b) 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
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

Local Green Space implications:

Designating sports pitches and playing fields as Local Green Space would be useful where the intention is to protect the specific facility in the specific location. However, if there is a possibility of alternative or better facilities being provided in future, perhaps in a better location, then Local Green Space designation would be inflexible and Paragraph 99 of the NPPF would provide a more appropriate form of protection.

7. Designation of local green space

Considering green spaces for designation

Not all green spaces will be suitable for formal designation as Local Green Space. The criteria in Paragraph 102 of the NPPF must be applied.

This section of the document sets out how designation of Local Green Spaces should be considered.

Application of NPPF Criteria

National Planning Practice Guidance states:

“Local Green Space designation is a way to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities”.

Paragraph 102 of the NPPF sets out the criteria that green space must meet in order to be designated as ‘Local Green Space’:

“The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- c) is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land”.

In addition to these criteria, National Planning Practice Guidance states:

“Local Green Space designation will rarely be appropriate where the land has planning permission for development. Exceptions could be where the development would be compatible with the reasons for designation or where planning permission is no longer capable of being implemented”.

Other designations of land, such as green belt or conservation area status, do not necessarily preclude or support designation as Local Green Space. But it is necessary to consider whether the additional designation is necessary and would serve a useful purpose. Existing designations are discussed in more detail later in this guide.

In applying the NPPF criteria, there is no precise definition of 'close proximity', but it could be interpreted as meaning adjacent or in very easy walking distance. It may depend to some extent on the nature of the facility.

In considering whether a space is demonstrably special to a local community, it is clearly important to engage with the community and to assess how the community uses a space. It is also important to engage with any owners of the land in question.

Consideration of whether the green space is local in character and not an extensive tract of land suggests spaces within a locality, rather than, for example, extensive green areas in the countryside around a settlement.

The following form has been developed to assist in the consideration of land for Local Green Space designation.

8. Local Green Space assessment tool

Site Details		
Site name	Grid Ref.	Description and purpose
Checklist		
Statutory designations (e.g. SSSI)	Site allocations (give details)	Planning permissions (give details)
NPPF Criteria		
Close to the community it serves	Demonstrably special to local community (beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity, wildlife, or other)	Local in character and not extensive tract

Notes on using the Local Green Space assessment tool

Site details section

The 'site' box should include the name of the space (if there is one) and the address (roads flanking the site). This, together with the grid reference, will identify the site.

The 'description and purpose' box should include any primary purpose (for example informal grassed area, park or football pitch) and any other occasional or secondary uses.

Checklist Section

The 'statutory designations' box should list all designations, e.g. conservation area, register of historic parks and gardens, SSSIs. The local authority should provide details of all such designations. Other statutory designations must be considered when making decisions on designation of Local Green Space (see later section)

Existing or proposed site allocations (e.g. in a local plan) or valid planning permissions for a site should be identified. Either of these is likely to exclude that site from consideration for designation as Local Green Space.

NPPF Criteria Section

Completion of the 'close to the community it serves' box should describe the proximity of the green space to the local community. The space should be within easy walking distance to meet this criterion satisfactorily.

The 'demonstrably special to local community' should describe the ways in which the space is used or enjoyed by the community. The outcomes of community engagement should be useful in demonstrating that a space is special to the community (see previous section on Community and Stakeholder Engagement). This includes consideration of beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity, wildlife, or other values.

The 'Local in character and not extensive tract' box should be used to demonstrate that the space in question is a local facility and not, for example, green space in the countryside around a settlement. The purpose of Local Green Space designation is to protect local spaces. Containing urban sprawl or protecting open countryside would not be proper uses of the designation.

To be eligible for designation as Local Green Space, the space in question would need to meet all of the NPPF criteria in paragraph 102.

9. Policies for Local Green Spaces

Purpose and rationale for planning policies

In addition to designating Local Green Space, a neighbourhood Plan may include policies or site allocations for development.

In drafting policies, it is necessary to be clear on the purpose. In addition, each policy needs to be backed by a clear planning rationale, based on analysis of relevant evidence.

It is important to note Paragraph 103 of the NPPF, which states:

“Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts”.

This does not mean that policies should simply repeat green belt policies.

Policy themes

Purposes and themes for policies addressing green space and infrastructure could include:

- Ensuring the space remains open and its community value is maintained
- Protecting the character of the area, including historic areas
- Ensuring adjacent development complements its setting
- Securing a natural corridor through development that enables people and wildlife to travel in and through or to link to surrounding paths;
- Setting out design requirements for new development around green space, including providing access into the space, where appropriate
- Enabling changes of use to allow a wider range of activities to take place
- Creation of new areas of green space in new development;
- Opportunities to create linkages between sites and address gaps in existing networks by the creation of new rights of way.

A policy specific to Local Green Space could make clear that development should not compromise the open character and community value of spaces or set out where limited development may be allowed to enhance the community use of the space.

Design policies could ensure that development adjacent to Local Green Space provide active frontages, to provide natural surveillance. Such policies could also deal with scale and character of development. Open Green Spaces could provide an ideal setting for creative modern buildings on adjacent sites.

Site briefs could be prepared for development sites adjacent to Local Green Spaces, highlighting things like access points, sensitive boundaries, etc.

The plan could identify enhancements necessary for specific green spaces, supported by evidence. Open space financial contributions required as part of a granting of planning permission could perhaps be used to help fund such enhancements.

Sites adjacent to Local Green Space could be allocated for complementary development, for example to provide community facilities associated with the recreational or sports use of the space.

Summary

Neighbourhood plans can designate Local Green Spaces. They can include policies relating to Local Green Spaces or other green infrastructure.

Green spaces provide a range of social, economic and environmental benefits. Considering green space is part of ensuring that development is sustainable, one of the basic conditions for neighbourhood plans.

Designations and policies should be based on a robust evidence base and community and stakeholder engagement. The evidence base could include an audit of green infrastructure in an area, where existing evidence is insufficient.

Local Green Space designations must be made in accordance with the criteria contained in Paragraph 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework and take account of National Planning Practice Guidance.

Local Green Space designations can complement other kinds of designation, such as inclusion on the register of historic parks and gardens.

Policies and site allocations can ensure that new development takes account of Open Green Spaces. Policies should have a clear purpose, rationale and be evidence-based.

Further Information (links)

- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
- [National Planning Practice Guidance](#)
- [NPPG Green Infrastructure Guidance](#)
- [Sport England - Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guidance](#)
- [Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap](#)
- [Fields in Trust FIT Standard](#) Fields in Trust guidance for assessing outdoors sports and play space.
- [Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment](#)
- [My Community Assets of Community Value Toolkit](#)
- [Green Flag Award](#)

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