

Neighbourhood *Planning*



Local Green Space Designation Toolkit

Introduction

In preparing their neighbourhood plans, many groups have expressed the desire to identify and protect green spaces which are of particular significance for the area.

Guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) includes provision for neighbourhood plans to designate Local Green Spaces. Such spaces would be afforded a high level of protection from development (akin to Green Belt status). However, in order to designate a Local Green Space it must be justified and supported by evidence. If not, then the designation may fail at the examination stage and be removed from the plan.

The purpose of this note is to give guidance to local communities on identifying and designating Local Green Spaces in their neighbourhood plans, which conform with the requirements of the NPPF.

The importance of green spaces

Green spaces close to communities provide a range of social, environmental and economic benefits, including:

- improved health, both mental and physical;
- improved community cohesion and sense of local identity;
- more resilient wildlife, and habitats;
- opportunities for flood reduction and protection;
- climate change adaptation;
- reduced crime rates;
- increased opportunities for children to learn;
- potential for growing food locally; and
- more attractive places to live, work, play, visit and invest.

National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) contains the following guidance on Local Green Space:

Paragraph 76:

Local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. Identifying land as Local

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Green Space should therefore be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.

Paragraph 77:

The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:

- Where the green space is in **reasonably close proximity** to the community it serves;
- Where the green area is **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 wildlife**; and
- Where the green area concerned is **local in character and is not an extensive tract of land**.

Paragraph 78:

Local policy for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with policy for Green Belts.

The purpose of Local Green Spaces

The Local Green Space designation allows local communities to protect spaces that are important to them. However, due to the strength of the protection set out in the NPPF above, designation as a Local Green Space must be fully justified.

To maximise the chance of an examiner approving a designation, strong evidence is vital. This guidance sets out the potential reasons for designating Local Green Space, useful evidence sources, and how these could be used to demonstrate the importance of a site to the local community.

When is Local Green Space designation not appropriate or necessary?

- **If land has planning permission.** If land has already been granted planning permission for built development, it is unlikely that designation as a Local Green Space will be appropriate. Exceptions could be where the development would be compatible with the reasons for designation (e.g. a sports pavilion) or where planning permission is no longer capable of being implemented.

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- **If land is already Green Belt.** If land is already within the Green Belt, Local Green Space designation will not add any additional protection. Consideration should be given to whether any additional local benefit would be gained.
- **If land is already protected by environmental designations.** If looking to identify Local Green Space for richness of wildlife or other environmental protection reasons, then consideration should be given to whether any additional local benefit would be gained to sites already designated for these purposes (SSSI, LWS, TPO, RIGS) by additional designation as Local Green Space. The important test will be whether the site serves additional functions in terms of the NPPF to justify the additional designation.

There may be alternative mechanisms for protecting green spaces, and they are listed for consideration in Appendix 1.

Ownership

It should be noted that, whilst a Local Green Space does not need to be in public ownership, landowners should be contacted at an early stage about proposals to designate any part of their land as Local Green Space. Landowners will have opportunities to make representations in respect of proposals in the draft neighbourhood plan.

Further, management of land designated as Local Green Space will remain the responsibility of its owner. As such, it is an important consideration for local communities to consider how, with the landowner's agreement, they might be able to get involved, perhaps in partnership with interested organisations that can provide advice or resources.

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Criteria for designation

This note is designed to support local communities in producing neighbourhood plans including proposals to designate Local Green Space in a robust, consistent and transparent manner. It lists a number of criteria that commonly apply to open spaces which can be used to help justify a Local Green Space designation. It is not intended as an exhaustive list. There may well be other features that apply to particular spaces which are not listed but which would support designation. Community groups should add to the list as appropriate.

A list of potentially useful evidence held by the Council is provided in Appendix 2.

Reasonable proximity

There is no set distance that is considered as reasonable proximity. This will vary from site to site, and by the reasons for designation. Generally, a site would be expected to be within easy walking distance of the community (perhaps 5-10 minutes walk), but there may be justifiable exceptions.

Considerations for assessment should include:

- How far the site is from the community? (this could include the distance to the nearest residential area and to the centre of the settlement)
- How easy is it to access the site? Are there good pedestrian and cycle links from nearby residential areas and the centre of the settlement?
- Are there any barriers to accessing the site? Barriers can include railway tracks, rivers, main roads or other un-crossable features.
- Does the site provide a local facility predominately, or do people travel from further afield to visit? (e.g. for sport, to use the play areas, for particular events etc.)

Demonstrably special

Evidence supporting the identification of prospective Local Green Space needs to be provided. Specific sources regarding the reasons for the identification of a site will be covered in each section. It is key, however, that a site can be demonstrated to be special. This can be supported through representations from as many as possible of the following, setting out the importance of the site for them and the community generally:

- Parish or Town Council
- Local community groups/individuals/schools
- Community leaders
- Other groups (sports clubs, CPRE, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, etc.)

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Particular local significance

Beauty

Considerations for assessment should include:

- How visible is the site?
- Is the site covered by any designations which reflect its aesthetic value such as
 - Conservation Area
 - Area of Special County Value
- Is the site mentioned in any relevant landscape character assessments?
- Is the site mentioned in local literature or art?

Historic significance

Considerations for assessment should include:

- Are there any historic buildings, structures or remains on, under or adjacent to the site?
 - Listed buildings
 - Scheduled ancient monuments
 - Registered parks and gardens
 - War memorials
 - Archaeological remains
- Are there any important historic landscape features on the site?
 - Old hedgerows
 - Ancient trees
 - Traditional Orchards
 - Historic ponds
 - Historic garden features
- Did the site play an important role in the historic development of the village or town?
- Did any important historic events take place on the site?
- Do any historic rituals take place on the site?

Recreational value

Considerations for assessment should include:

- Are there public able to access the site?
 - Any Public Rights Of Way?
 - Is access allowed on discretionary basis?
 - Is the whole site accessible, or only part?
 - Is there good disabled access?

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- Is there parking available?
- Is the site used for sport?
 - Which sport/s?
 - Do specific clubs regularly use the facility?
 - Are there changing facilities etc.?
- Is the site used by the local community for informal recreation?
 - What use?
 - How long for?
 - Is there play and/or outdoor gym equipment?
 - Any other facilities such as bike or skateboard areas?
- Is the site regularly used for community events, annual fairs, visits from schools etc?
 - Are there any refreshments available on site (café, kiosk etc)

Tranquillity

This may be fairly subjective, but considerations for assessment should include:

- Do you consider the site to be tranquil? Why?
 - Are there any main roads, railway lines or other sources of noise nearby?
- Is the site within a recognised tranquil area? (see CPRE tranquillity maps)

Richness of wildlife

Considerations for assessment should include:

- Is the site formally designated for its wildlife value?
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest
 - Local Wildlife Sites
- Are any important habitats or species found on the site?
 - Check the Cheshire BAPS
 - Red/amber list of birds and conservation concerns
- What other wildlife of interest has been found on the site?
- Is the site part of the long term study by members of the community?

Other

The NPPF does allow for other, unspecified, reasons for designation. Assessment of these will need to be identified depending on these reasons, and will be considered on a site by site basis.

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Local in character

There is no set size for how large, or small, a Local Green Space should be. The NPPF states that this area shouldn't be an extensive tract of land, however. As such, Local Green Spaces are likely to be self-contained with clearly-defined edges.

Considerations for assessment should include:

- Area of proposed site
 - How large is it in comparison to other fields/groups of fields/areas of land in vicinity?
 - Does the site 'feel' local in scale?
- Is the site 'local in character'?
 - Does the site feel as though it is part of the local area?
 - How does it connect physically, visually and socially to the local area?

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Presentation

For each site the community are proposing to designate as Local Green Space, it would be useful to compile a short report (perhaps one to two pages) to include:

- a map of the site;
- details of the reasons and justification for designation in terms of the NPPF criteria;
- photographs of the site to support the reasons for designation; and
- supporting representations from community members or groups (these could be included in an appendix).

This would then form part of the supporting evidence for the neighbourhood plan for consideration by the neighbourhood plan examiner.

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Appendix 1 - Alternatives to Local Green Space

Village Green status

Land can be registered as a Village Green if it has been used by local people for lawful sports and pastimes 'as of right' (ie without permission, force or secrecy) for at least 20 years.

[Town and village greens: how to register - Detailed guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Assets of Community Value

Village shops, pubs or allotments can be nominated to go on a Register of Assets of Community Value. If something on this register becomes available for sale, the community then have up to six months to prepare a bid.

[Assets of community value: policy statement - Publications - GOV.UK](#)

Agreements with land-owners

Local communities may be able to reach either formal or informal agreements with the owner of the site to ensure access to the site for local people. It may be possible for the land-owner to dedicate the site as "open access land".

<https://www.gov.uk/open-access-land-management-rights-and-responsibilities>



Appendix 2 – List of Useful Evidence Sources

The [Background documents](#) page of the Cheshire West and Chester Council website includes the evidence base documents used for the formulation and adoption of the Local Plan. The following have information that may prove useful:

- Chester Archaeological Plan
- Chester Characterisation Study
- Conservation Area Appraisals
- Green Infrastructure Framework for North East Wales, Cheshire and Wirral
- Ellesmere Port and Chester GI Links Action Plan
- Open Space Audit and Assessment of Need
- Playing Pitch Strategy
- River Dee Green Infrastructure Feasibility Study
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

The Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Planning Policy Mapping 2015 sets out the extent of policies across the borough (<http://maps.cheshire.gov.uk/cwac/localplan/#>). This can be used to identify the following:

- Conservation Areas
- Areas of Special County Value
- Listed buildings
- Scheduled Monuments
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Public Rights of Way
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites

Other Council information:

- [Local Landscape Character Assessment](#)
- [Biodiversity](#)
- [Further CWAC mapping including TPO's](#)

Other

- CPRE Tranquillity Maps ([CPRE Maps](#))
- National designations, inventories (natural and historic), and character types ([Magic](#))