

DESIGNATING LOCAL GREEN SPACES IN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

Guidance for Parish Councils and communities

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1. Introduction

This document has been produced by Suffolk County Council's Planning Strategy department, to provide guidance and advice to parish councils and local communities wishing to designate Local Green Spaces as part of the neighbourhood plan process. Research from CPRE (February 2022)¹ indicates that a total of 6,515 Local Green Spaces have been designated in the past ten years, totalling 30,000 acres.

There is no requirement for you to designate Local Green Spaces in your neighbourhood plan, but by doing so, you can provide extra protection to areas that you feel should be protected from development. However, designation should not be inappropriately used to retroactively counter development sites with granted planning permission. In addition to this, direct access may not be provided or possible, but a site may still be suitable for Local Green Space designation. If you do wish to designate Local Green Spaces in your neighbourhood plan, you may wish to seek further guidance from your District Council or approach SCC who will be happy to assist with your matter where we can.

1.1. Why designate Local Green Spaces?

The designation of Local Green Spaces can provide a variety of advantages. Ecological benefits, habitat conservation, and biodiversity net gain/enhancement can be achieved through the protection offered through the designation. Local Green Spaces are a flexible and multi-use provision of:

- public realm;
- local amenity and leisure;
- a place for sports, exercise and activity, recreation and relaxation; and /or,
- access to nature.

Pleasant outdoor areas can lead to improvements in physical health, due to increased exercise and physical activity, but also can improve mental health and wellbeing.

Local Green Spaces can also be used for water drainage and storage. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)² can be multifunctional and provide ecological and amenity value to the community, whilst harvesting and storing water.

Local Green Space designation is a way to provide special protection against unsuitable development of green areas that are of particular importance to local communities. Designated Local Green Spaces are afforded the same level of protection as Green Belt, ruling out development in all but very exceptional circumstances.

¹<https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/local-green-spaces-new-research-proves-their-value-to-people-and-nature/>

² <https://www.susdrain.org/delivering-suds/using-suds/background/sustainable-drainage.html>

1.2. Which sites are suitable for Local Green Space designation?

Provided that certain criteria are met, any type of green space could be suitable for designation. This can include land where sports pavilions, boating lakes or structures such as war memorials are located, allotments, village greens, playing fields, and wooded areas or urban spaces that provide a tranquil oasis. Designation should only apply to the land that the building/structure sits within and not the building/structure itself, for example, a churchyard can be designated as a Local Green Space but not the church itself.

Local Green Spaces may be designated where spaces are reasonably close and demonstrably special to the local community while being local in character and not an extensive tract of land (which SCC determines to be 20ha, reasons for this were explained within the Examiners Report for Halesworth Millennium Green which was deemed to be an extensive tract of land which was over 20ha).

It needs to be shown that the site can demonstrate a particular significance to the community. The PPG³ states: Different types of designations are intended to achieve different purposes and, in circumstances where land is already protected by a designation, consideration should be given to whether any additional local benefit would be gained by designation as Local Green Space.

Neighbourhood plans should consider if there are benefits to designating a site that is protected under other designations, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), County Wildlife Sites (CWS), open spaces (in the Local Plan), Public Rights of Way (PRoW), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), and historic parks and gardens etc.

In terms of designating Local Green Spaces, it is entirely within the power of the parish to do so. The process of creating a neighbourhood plan is the perfect time for communities to identify and designate land that is particularly important to them. This ensures that the land is protected from inappropriate development.

Note: Proposals for Local Green Spaces should not be land that has already been allocated for development or has already been granted planning permissions. Local Green Space designation should not be used as an attempt to prevent future development.

³ PPG, paragraph 011. Reference ID: 37-011-20140306

2. National Policy

The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF, revised 12th December 2024), paragraph 103 states 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.

The NPPF has guidance on Local Green Spaces, in particular:

106. *The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should 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 updated, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.*

107. *The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green 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) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

108. *Policies and decisions for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with national policy for Green Belts set out in chapter 13 of this Framework⁴⁵.*

⁴⁵ Excluding provisions relating to grey belt and previously developed land set out in chapter 13.

Note: It is important that the proposed site meets all the above criteria of the NPPF, and this must be demonstrated with clear evidence and justification.

An assessment would need to be undertaken, to ensure that the above criteria are met for each site. These sites would then need to be designated within a neighbourhood plan policy and shown on a policies map.

Note: The designation of an area as Local Green Space may hinder any aspirations to build new facilities on the land, so you may decide it is not appropriate for you (**paragraph 154 b of the NPPF**)

2.1. “Close proximity” and “Extensive Tract of Land”

Unfortunately, the NPPF does not define what qualifies as ‘close proximity’ or ‘extensive tract of land’. Guidance suggests that designated Local Green Spaces would “normally be fairly self-contained with clearly defined edges”. The NPPF (paragraph 107) outlines three key reasons for designation which are listed in Table 1 as questions 1, 2 & 3.

Natural England’s Accessible Greenspace Standards suggests that ‘close proximity’ be defined as within a 15-minute walk or under 2km from home and less than 20 hectares and therefore an ‘extensive tract of land’ be defined as over 20 hectares ⁴.

However, communities may deem this distance of 2km as too far, and may choose to designate sites located closer to their village centres.

There is no minimum size stated for a Local Green Space, and the sizes will vary between different communities, however, any designations will need to be local in character. Within the NPPG⁵ the guidance outlines that blanket designation of open countryside adjacent to settlements will not be appropriate. In particular, designation should not be proposed as a ‘back door’ way to try to achieve what would amount to a new area of Green Belt by another name.

The examination of Halesworth Neighbourhood Plan (adopted February 2023) found that the Millennium Green was demonstrated to be special to the community, however it was 20ha in size and deemed to be an extensive tract of land, and therefore not in accordance with the criteria of the NPPF for designation of Local Green Spaces. The examiner’s report⁶ stated that *“However, the wider Millennium Green consists of several discrete elements with their individual characteristics and maintenance regimes”*, and therefore recommended that the proposed Local Green Space be subdivided into the 11 individual sites.

The Examiner’s Report⁷ for Holbrook Neighbourhood Plan (adopted November 2023) recommended the removal of some proposed Local Green Space sites, including the Alton Reservoir Waters (*“Whilst the NPPF does not give guidance as to what constitutes an extensive tract of land, in my opinion, this is both an extensive tract of land and an area that includes a large water area. Whilst water areas, such as small ponds within a wider landscape can be included in LGS, the NPPF specifically refers to the protection of green areas, rather than large areas of water”*), Holbrook Creek (*“As previously mentioned under my comments on Alton Reservoir Water, the NPPF specifically refers to the protection of green areas, rather than large areas of water. Holbrook Creek is not a green area as it is predominately water/mud flats”*), and the Holbrook Gardens/Fishponds (*“This is an extensive tract of land”*).

⁴[Green Infrastructure Standards for England Summary \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://naturalengland.org.uk/green-infrastructure-standards-for-england-summary)

⁵ PPG, Paragraph: 015 Reference ID: 37-015-20140306

⁶<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Neighbourhood-Planning/Designated-Neighbourhood-Areas/Halesworth/Halesworth-Neighbourhood-Development-Plan-examiners-report.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/documents/d/babergh/holbrook-np-exam-report>

3. Justification and Evidence

Evidence must be provided of the land's value and use by the local community, to show the land holds a particular local significance. The land must fulfil one or more of the following criteria:

3.1. Beauty

This relates to the visual attractiveness and scenic quality of the site, and its contribution to landscape, character and/or setting of the neighbourhood plan area. Local Green Spaces would need to contribute to local identity, character of the area and a sense of place, and make an important contribution to the physical form and layout of the settlement. It may link up with other open spaces and allow views through or beyond the settlement which are valued locally.

3.2. Historic significance

Heritage assets and land which forms their setting,⁸ such as public gardens or parkland, or other locally valued landmarks can be appropriate for designation. It may be necessary to research historic records from the County Historic Environment Record or National or Local Records Office. Historic mapping, including first edition OS and Tithe mapping, is likely to provide important evidence.

The land is historically undeveloped by reason of historic land use, such as Greens, Commons⁹, or Tyes,¹⁰ and therefore has shaped the layout of the settlement contributing to its historic character.

3.3. Recreational value

The land has local significance for recreation, perhaps through the variety of activities it supports, and is of value to the community. This can include land used for formal and informal sports/ exercise, as well as social activities such as picnics and village fêtes/ fairs.

⁸ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/heag180-gpa3-setting-heritage-assets/>

⁹ <https://suffolklandscape.org.uk/glossary/greens/>

¹⁰ <https://suffolklandscape.org.uk/glossary/tyes/>

3.4. Tranquillity

In the case of Local Green Space, tranquil spaces mean areas that provide an oasis of calm and a place for quiet reflection. Some district authorities, across the United Kingdom, have provided a 'tranquility map' displaying these areas within their administrative areas.

3.5. Richness of wildlife

This might include the value of the sites habitat, and priority areas may have been identified by the council. It may require some objective evidence, such as a designation, for example a wildlife site or Local Nature Reserve.¹¹

¹¹ <https://www.suffolkbis.org.uk/>

3.6. Justifications table

An example of justification/evidence table for designating Local Green Spaces can be found below, to be included as a supporting document or appendix.

- Questions 1, 2, and 3 must all be answered with “yes” and expanded upon with a reasonable explanation to designate the site as a Local Green Space, in line with the criteria set out in paragraph 107 of the NPPF (2024).

Table 1: Template for Justification for Local Green Space Designation

Site name / location	
Description of site	
Is the site publicly accessible?	
Is the site crossed by any highway roads or paths (including PROW)?	
1. Site is local in character, and not an extensive tract of land	
2. Site is in reasonably close proximity	
3. Site is demonstrably special: (at least one of the following criteria)	
<i>a) Beauty</i>	
<i>b) Historic significance</i>	
<i>c) Recreational value</i>	
<i>d) Tranquillity</i>	
<i>e) Richness of wildlife</i>	
Map showing location and/or photographs of site	
Site meets NPPF (2024) para 107 and can be designated as LGS:	

Table 2: Example table for justification for Local Green Space Designation

The following is an example of a completed justification/evidence table, of a fictional proposed Local Green Space:

Site name / location	LGS 1: Village Green and playing field
Description of site	A mown playing field located to the north of the village. Used for dog walking, formal and informal sports & recreation, and site of the summer village fete.
Is the site publicly accessible?	Yes
Is the site crossed by any highway roads or paths (including PROW)?	No.
1. Site is local in character, and not an extensive tract of land	Yes - 5 hectares
2. Site is in reasonably close proximity	Yes – located behind the village hall.
3. Site is demonstrably special: (at least one of the following criteria)	Yes
a) Beauty	No
b) Historic significance	No.
c) Recreational value	Yes – Playing field is used for dog walking, and sports/games. There are football goalposts and two wooden benches.
d) Tranquillity	No – next to high street, and some traffic noise is heard
e) Richness of wildlife	Yes – a variety of trees and wildflowers including daffodils around the perimeter of the site. Bats and birds are known to roost in the trees.
Map showing location and/or photographs of site	
Site meets NPPF (2024) para 107 and can be designated as LGS:	Yes. This site meets all criteria, and is designated as Local Green Space

4. Other Considerations

4.1. Designation of Highways Verges

Whilst not recommended by SCC, some parish councils have tried to designate highways verges as Local Green Spaces within draft plans. There is the concern that should there be a need to undertake (permitted development) highway works that affect the verges included in these allocations, there may be local opposition to such works from the perceived damage to a protected green space, even though these works are undertaken by (or on behalf of) the Highway Authority to ultimately benefit the local community.

Note: Highway verges are effectively part of the highway land where the road or footway is adopted highway as defined through Highways legislation. This should not be adopted as open space as it is for all intents and purposes functional highway land for maintenance purposes for the adopted road or footway or surface water drainage associated with the adopted highway. However, where a road/footway is not adopted, it may be possible with the consent of the landowner/s.

National guidance (paragraph 104 of the NPPF) states that the space must be capable of enduring beyond the plan period. Land adjoining an existing highway is subject to ‘Permitted Development’ rights, which could be used to bring forward development that is in direct contradiction to the designation of a Local Green Space, but would not require planning permission to be granted. Highway land may also be utilised in bringing forward future highway/transport schemes, as well as active travel measures to encourage walking and cycling, such as cycle lanes or footways. Therefore, highway land/roadside verges would not typically be suitable for designation. There may be specific circumstances where any special characteristics of verges relate to the former pattern of agriculture and or livestock management, and as such contribute to the historic character of place.¹² These locations may be open to designation, if you think this may be the case in your community, please communicate with the SCC Neighbourhood Planning contact who will be able to assist with this query.

SCC is of the belief that highways verges do not typically meet the criteria of paragraph 107 of the NPPF of being “demonstrably special” or of “particular local significance”, and therefore are not suitable to be designated as Local Green Spaces.

If verges are of particular significance to a parish, SCC would recommend that they are protected through a different mechanism, such as the example provided in the Halesworth Neighbourhood Plan verges policy below. The supporting text for this policy states the importance of grass verges to the parish as a key characteristic of the village and included photographs to provide context.

¹² <https://suffolklandscape.org.uk/glossary/droveway/>

POLICY HAL.ENV4: VERGES

- A. Existing green verges along roadways should be retained and should only be removed if it is clearly demonstrated to be part of necessary highway improvements, including for walking and cycling. Any such improvements should incorporate opportunities for planting around the existing verges wherever practicable.
- B. Major development (as defined in the NPPF) should maximise the provision of green verges along main roadways and should demonstrate that these are designed so that vehicles are not able to use them for parking or be degraded by day-to-day activity.
- C. On roadways outside of main routes, the design of roadways and verges to maximise biodiversity value will be supported. This could include enabling the planting of street trees or wildflower meadows or the creation of community gardens.
- D. Proposals to enhance the biodiversity value of verges will be strongly supported.

(Halesworth Neighbourhood Plan, Page 37)

SCC is supportive of this policy as it does not impose any restrictions on our duties as the Highways Authority.

Other mechanisms to protect highway verges can be done through other environmental and landscaping techniques. Dorset Council have also created a guide on how to manage such a scheme¹³.

Alternatively, communities and town/parish councils may wish to consider the designation of verges as a Roadside Nature Reserve.

Under the Roadside Nature Reserve scheme (RNR), the grass verges are individually managed to benefit the scarce/unusual plants or fungi growing in the stretch protected from normal highways management. RNRs may also be designated as County Wildlife Sites (CWS), and several are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). RNRs are marked by two white posts, one at each end, with a black arrow on both posts pointing inwards to the RNR. This is to indicate to the grass verge cutters that this specific site is an RNR and is not to be cut outside of its designated cutting times. Suffolk's Roadside Nature Reserves interactive map shows designated RNRs.¹⁴

¹³<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/3340525/Managing+Highway+Verges+2023.pdf/58a561ba-077d-5b7a-c5b3-6950f7737957>

¹⁴<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/suffolks-countryside-and-wildlife/landscape-and-wildlife/suffolks-roadside-nature-reserves-interactive-map/>

4.2. School Land

Caution should be taken when considering designating school land (such as playing fields) as Local Green Spaces. This could hinder possibilities and opportunities for expansion of the school facilities, if required in the future. As such, SCC would usually not be supportive of designations of school land.

4.3. Ownership and Access

Land designated as Local Green Space does not need to be in public ownership. Where privately owned land meets the NPPF criteria, it can be designated, however, it is recommended landowners should be contacted as early as possible about proposals to designate any part of their land as Local Green Space.

There are no requirements for public access to the Local Green Space site. Some areas that may be considered for designation as Local Green Space may already have largely unrestricted public access, though even in places like parks there may be some restrictions. However, other land could be considered for designation even if there is no public access (e.g., green areas which are valued because of their wildlife, historic significance and/or beauty).

For example, a wildflower meadow that is rich in wildlife and ecological value may be a suitable space to designate as a Local Green Space. The landowner may decide that it would be inappropriate for continual public access, especially as this could be detrimental to the wildlife and natural features.

Designation does not in itself confer any rights of public access over what exists at present. Any additional access would be a matter for separate negotiation with landowners, whose legal rights must be respected.

Areas that may be considered for designation as Local Green Space may be crossed by public rights of way. There is no need to designate linear corridors as Local Green Space simply to protect rights of way, which are already protected under other legislation.

For the designation of sites that are publicly accessible, communities may wish to consider the access needs for a range of users, including those with restricted mobility.

Whilst not a requirement as part of designation, improved accessibility can help to increase inclusivity and reduce exclusion of those who may be elderly, frail and/or with accessibility needs.

5. Useful Links

You could seek inspiration from other neighbourhood plans, to see what they have written about Local Green Spaces. For example;

- [Great Barton Neighbourhood Plan](#) (West Suffolk, adopted - page 50-51)
- [Framlingham Neighbourhood Plan](#) (East Suffolk, adopted - page 42-45)
- [Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan](#) (Mid Suffolk, adopted – page 88 -91)
- [Aldham Neighbourhood Plan](#) (Babergh, adopted – page 20-21)

Here are some other links providing further information:

- <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/making-local-green-space-designations-neighbourhood-plan/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space>
- <https://www.oss.org.uk/faqs-about-local-green-space-designation/>
- <https://www.oss.org.uk/need-to-know-more/information-hub/how-to-win-local-green-space-through-neighbourhood-plans/#procedure>
- National Library of Scotland Historic mapping - <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/find/#zoom=11&lat=52.27860&lon=1.34301&layers=102&b=1&z=0&point=0,0>
- <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/downloads/Green%20Infrastructure%20Standards%20for%20England%20Summary%20v1.1.pdf>
- Suffolk Heritage Explorer - mapping - <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/map>
- Suffolk Landscapes - SCC Environment Service - <https://suffolklandscape.org.uk/>

There is no obligation for you to designate Local Green Spaces in your neighbourhood plan, but by doing so, you can provide extra protection to areas that you feel should be protected from development.

If you do wish to designate Local Green Spaces in your neighbourhood plan, you may wish to seek further guidance from your District Council.

- East Suffolk Council (ESC) - <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/>
- West Suffolk Council (WSC) - <https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/>
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils (BMSDC) - <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/planning-policy>
<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning-policy>

Hopefully this information has been useful to you, and please feel free to contact us here at SCC (neighbourhoodplanning@suffolk.gov.uk) for any other guidance or support.

If you need help to understand this information in another language please call 03456 066 067.

Se precisar de ajuda para ler estas informações em outra língua, por favor telefone para o número abaixo. 03456 066 067

Portuguese

Jeżeli potrzebujesz pomocy w zrozumieniu tych informacji w swoim języku zadzwoń na podany poniżej numer. 03456 066 067

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