



## Local Green Space Call for Sites Guidance Note

Stafford Borough Council needs your help to identify important areas of Local Green Space (LGS) across the Borough. These are areas that hold a particular importance to the community, and if designated in the Local Plan would be protected from inappropriate development.

Whilst areas of open space and land of environmental value have always been identified by the Council, designation as a Local Green Space is a designation introduced by central Government in 2012 through the National Planning Policy Framework. The designation focusses on the importance of identified areas for the local community. Importantly national planning policy makes it clear that this designation should be consistent with wider planning policy for an area including the provision of new homes and employment opportunities, and it should not be seen as means to prevent wider development needs.

### Policy Background

#### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF (December 2023) states that any sites designated as Local Green Space must be:

- 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.” (Para. 106)

When Local Green Space is designated the NPPF states that protection for such areas should be consistent with policy for Green Belts.

#### Planning Practice Guidance

The Local Green Space section of the Planning Practice Guidance ([www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space#Local-Green-Space-designation](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space#Local-Green-Space-designation)) provides examples of situations in which the designation of land as LGS would not be appropriate. For example, any land with planning permission for development should not be considered appropriate for designation, and therefore would not be suitable for progression through this study.

Consideration should also be given as to whether sites already protected from development by other designations, e.g. Green Belt or a National Landscape formerly known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), would benefit from further protection by LGS. In such cases, it may be that the site is already offered sufficient protection from development, and so would not be appropriate for designation as LGS.

The PPG also indicates that LGS designation should not be used in a way which prevents the sustainable development of an area. The purpose of LGS designation is to protect land, which is valuable to local communities, and protect it from future development. It is not to restrict and prevent the sustainable growth of an area. With this in mind, blanket designations of open countryside on the edges of settlements will not be considered as appropriate.

### **Assessment**

Full details of the site assessment process can be viewed in the Local Green Space Designations Background Paper ([www.staffordbc.gov.uk/Local-Green-Space-Designations-Background-Paper](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/Local-Green-Space-Designations-Background-Paper)) which was published to support the Preferred Options stage of the Local Plan 2020-2040.

The following stages highlight the key points to consider when submitted a site for assessment.

#### **Stage 1**

To be considered suitable for designation, the site has to satisfy the following criteria:

1. The site forms the setting of features indicative of significance to the local community;
2. The site is no more than 30 hectares in size;
3. The site is within 300 metres of the community it serves; and
4. Is not subject to an extant planning permission.

The size threshold of 30 hectares was set to comply with the NPPF guidance that the site is not an “extensive tract of land”. LGS studies conducted by other local planning authorities have been used to inform what is generally considered to be an appropriate threshold. Based on this information there is an upper size limit of 30 hectares. In addition, the relevant Planning Practice Guidance states that there is no lower size limit for a site of LGS, and thus no lower size threshold will be enforced.

The above criteria also states that the site must be “within 300 metres of the community it serves”, which comes from the NPPF guidance that the site must be in “reasonably close proximity” to the community it serves. Natural England’s Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) sets out a threshold for the delivery of Greenspace which, when followed, results in the optimal distribution of Greenspace throughout an area. In accordance with these standards sites must be

within 300 metres of the community it serves to be considered suitable for LGS designation.

Sites with existing planning permission or an adopted allocation will not be considered appropriate, and no further assessment will be carried out. If a planning permission has lapsed for an alternative incompatible use this will also be taken into consideration. The exception to this may be where it can be demonstrated that the approved development would be compatible with the Local Green Space designation, or where it is demonstrated that the planning permission or adopted allocation is no longer capable of being implemented. In such instances the Council would continue to assess the sites' potential designation as a Local Green Space.

### **Stage 2**

If the site is already protected through other policy designations, these will not be designated as they are already offered sufficient protection from development by other policy or statutory legislation. This includes:

- Sites that lie within the boundary of the Cannock Chase National Landscape (formerly known as the AONB).
- Sites that were washed over by the Green Belt.
- Sites which are common land, and are thus protected by the relevant byelaws.
- Sites which are recognised by the Council as open space or playing fields. These sites are afforded protection through the relevant policies in the NPPF.

### **Stage 3**

The proposed designation of spaces must be based on evidence to demonstrate why the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. Each site will be given a score out of 25 based on its possession of each of the following qualities, with each quality given a score out of 5:

#### Beauty

This relates to the visual attractiveness and aesthetic value of the site, and its contribution to townscape, landscape, character and / or setting of the settlement. To be identified as a Local Green Space the Council would normally expect an area to contribute significantly to the local identity and character of the area, playing an important role in defining the sense of place of an area and, where relevant, in defining the physical form and layout of the settlement.

#### Historic Significance

The site is viewed to be of local significance because of its historic importance to the local community. This could be due to the location of a historic asset within it, the areas' role in providing the setting for heritage assets or other locally valued landmarks, or because of the area's cultural associations and importance to local

history. The area's status as common land may be a further example of the historic value of a site to the local community.

### Recreational value

The site holds a local significance for recreation providing an important asset for the community for a particular recreation activity or for a range of activities. This could be for formal or informal activity.

### Tranquility

The site submitted is viewed to be of importance to the local community because of the tranquillity it provides, offering a place for reflection and peaceful enjoyment. This is a subjective assessment, and the Council will require clear justification as to why an area is of particular value in relation to this criterion.

### Richness of wildlife

The site is viewed to be of local significance because of its wildlife. It should be noted that in considering this criterion the Council will require justification as to why existing levels of protection e.g. local wildlife sites, Heritage Sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are insufficient and why the area warrants additional protection beyond that currently provided.

In all instances the Council requires evidence as to why an area is of particular significance to the local community and why it warrants additional protection compared to other areas of open green space across the district. This could include for example photographic evidence, wildlife reviews or headcount data. The Council reserves the right to request additional evidence where needed.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1) Can areas already protected under alternative allocations and designations (e.g. Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Conservation Area) be considered for allocation as a Local Green Space?**

Yes. National Guidance makes it clear that different types of designations are intended to achieve different purposes. When considering additional protection, the Council will, however, need to consider whether any additional local benefit would be gained by an additional allocation as a Local Green Space.

### **2) Can areas already being considered for alternative uses be considered as Local Green Space?**

The methodology states, that in general, sites that already benefit from planning permission for alternative use will not normally be considered appropriate. This is consistent with national guidance which states that Local Green Space designation will rarely be appropriate where the land has planning permission for development.

It is recognised that there might be some exceptions to this where for example the approved development would be compatible with the Local Green Space designation, or where it can be demonstrated that the planning permission is no longer capable of being implemented.

However, it should be noted that the Government are clear that the identification of Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning policy of sustainable development and complement investment in homes, jobs and other essential services. Plans must identify sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs.

The Government have made it clear that Local Green Spaces should not be used in a way that undermines the aim of plan making.

### **3) Does land need to have public access?**

Land does not need to have public access. The Council recognise that some land being considered may have no public access (e.g. green areas which are valued due to wildlife, historic significance and / or beauty).

Allocation as a Local Green Space in the Local Plan does not itself confer any rights of public access over what exists at present. Any additional access would be a matter for separate negotiations with land owners, whose legal rights must be respected.

### **4) Does land need to be in public ownership?**

National guidance makes it clear that a Local Green Space does not need to be in public ownership. If the Local Green Space is going to be proposed for designation within the Local Plan, the Council will contact the landowners (if known) in advance of consultation. Landowners will have opportunities to make representations to the proposed allocation via the Draft Plan.

### **5) How restrictive is the Local Green Space allocation on ownership?**

Allocation as a Local Green Space would give an area protection consistent with that in respect of Green Belt, as a new restrictions or obligations on landowners.

### **6) Who will manage the Local Green Space?**

Management of the Local Green Space will remain the responsibility of the landowner.