

## **Appendix A2 Local Green Spaces Assessment - May 2018**

### **An evaluation of Local Green Spaces proposed for the Daws Hill Neighbourhood Plan**

#### 1. Introduction and Background to the Project

- 1.1 Daws Hill Neighbourhood Forum is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which will include a policy designating areas of Local Green Space which are particularly valued by the local community.
- 1.2 We have used the outcome of 4 examinations of Neighbourhood Plans to inform our assessment of what is and is not considered to be a LGS.
- 1.3 Section 2 of this report sets out key elements of national and local policy, and guidance, for Local Green Space designation. Section 3 summarises the methodology undertaken. Section 4 sets out the key conclusions of the assessment. The desktop study matrix and the detailed evaluation matrix are presented within appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

#### *Policy Context*

#### 2. What are Local Green Spaces?

- 2.1 Local Green Space designation is a way to provide special protection for green areas of particular importance to local communities. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in 2012 introduced the concept of Local Green Space (LGS) designation

#### *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).*

- 2.2 Paragraph 76 of the NPPF says that local communities should be able to identify green spaces of particular importance to them through local and neighbourhood plans. These designations would rule out development other than in very special circumstances and should therefore be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.
- 2.3 Paragraph 77 of the NPPF recognises that the LGS designation would not be appropriate for most green areas. It sets out the following criteria for designation of LGS sites:
  - Is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
  - 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
  - Local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.
- 2.4 Paragraph 78 of the NPPF states that local policy for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with policy for Green Belts.

#### *National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)*

- 2.5 The National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) includes further guidance on the LGS

designation. The guidance addresses many common questions about the LGS designation, particularly relating to what sort of sites would be suitable for designation and what the designation means in practice. The following paragraphs in the PPG are of particular relevance for the evaluation of sites for LGS designation. Key points are summarised below:

- Paragraph 007 – LGS designation should be consistent with local planning for sustainable development and should not be used in a way that undermines this aim of plan making.
- Paragraph 008 – generally LGS designation is rarely appropriate for land which is subject to planning permission for development.
- Paragraph 011- if land is already protected by designation (such as Site of Special Scientific Interest or National Park), then consideration should be given to whether any additional local benefit would be gained by LGS designation.
- Paragraph 014 – the proximity of a LGS to the community it serves will depend on local circumstances, including why the green area is seen as special e.g. if public access is a factor, then the site should be in easy walking distance.
- Paragraph 015 – there are no hard and fast rules about how big a LGS can be because places are different and a degree of judgement will inevitably be needed.
- Paragraph 017 – some areas that may be considered for designation as LGS may already have largely unrestricted public access, however land could be considered for LGS designation if there is no public access (e.g. if valued for biodiversity, historic significance and/or beauty). LGS designation in itself does not confer any rights of public access over what exists at present.

### 3. Methodology

3.1 The criteria set out in Section 2 (Policy Context) form the basis for the evaluation of the 9 possible sites. A two stage process has been undertaken in this evaluation: a desktop study, followed by a detailed evaluation. The methodology is explained below.

#### *Desktop Study*

3.2 The first stage of this evaluation involves a desktop assessment of all possible sites against 5 initial criteria in order to identify and discard sites which are clearly not able to meet the NPPF criteria. The criteria are:

- The green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serve
- The green space concerned is local in character and not an extensive tract of land;
- The green space is not allocated for another use;
- The green space does not already have planning permission for development; and
- The green space does not obviously fail to satisfy paragraph 77 of the NPPF

3.3 There are no clear specifications in the NPPF or in the PPG on precisely what constitutes 'close proximity to the community'. As noted above, the PPG, in general terms advises that where public access is a key factor, then the site would normally be in easy walking distance of the community served.

3.4 Similarly there is no clear definition of what constitutes an extensive tract of land but it must be local in character and therefore large areas of green space which are of much more than local significance have been carefully considered to make a judgment as to whether they are fulfilling the spirit and purpose of this LGS designation. It is also important to note that many such large areas are often already protected by other designations such as SSSI, SAC or covered by sports and open space policies within Local Plans.

3.5 Paragraph 77 of the NPPF sets out a further test; namely that the green area is demonstrably special to the local community. This criteria may require a more detailed analysis which is undertaken through stage 2 of this evaluation.

#### *Detailed analysis*

3.6 The second stage of this evaluation involves a more detailed analysis of those sites that remain following the desktop study and focuses on the following criteria set out in paragraph 77 of the NPPF which states that the LGS designation should only be used 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 in wildlife.

3.7 In order to fulfil the requirements, at least one of the five criteria must be met.

3.8 The assessment of whether a proposed site is demonstrably special to the local community for the five criteria set out above is challenging because terms such as 'beauty' are largely subjective. This assessment has considered each of these five terms using the key considerations and prompts as set out below:

- Beauty - Beauty is clearly a very subjective concept but we have used the normal meaning of the word i.e. a combination of qualities, such as shape, colour, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight, (Oxford Dictionaries) to assess the sites through site visits.
- Historic significance – consideration is given to how the proposed LGS holds particular local significance with regard to the history of the community or settlement e.g. historic village events, historic buildings, structure or landscape features present on site with a particular connection to the local community.
- Recreational value – observations from site visits of how the site is used for recreation e.g. playing sport, informal recreation, children's play etc.
- Tranquillity - Tranquillity is considered to be a state of calm, quietude and is associated with a feeling of peace; a state of mind that promotes mental wellbeing. It is a perceptual quality of the landscape, and is influenced by things that people can both see and hear around them. Positive tranquillity factors include seeing a natural landscape, natural looking woodland, rivers and open vistas, and hearing natural sounds such as birdsong, an absence of human activity, or even silence. Evidence from site visits was utilised.
- Wildlife – consideration is given to how the proposed LGS holds particular local significance for example through its management for wildlife, or for its role for local wildlife within the settlement, as observed when on site.

3.9 Two additional criteria are included into the matrix for reasons as set out below:

- Public access – Although not a requirement for LGS designation, public access can be a key factor as to why the site may be considered demonstrably special, for example with regard to its recreational value. This criteria has been added to assist in identifying where public access is necessary in order to fulfil the criteria.
- Layers of designation – The PPG asks that, where there are already protective designations on site, consideration is given to what additional benefit LGS designation would offer. This criteria is added so that it is clear where there is potential for layering of designation, so consideration can be given as to the benefits of LGS designation.

3.10 To support the detailed analysis of this stage 2 assessment, site visits were undertaken during the period 2015 to 2018 and were supported by further desk top analysis as necessary. A visual appraisal was made of each proposed Local Green Space to see whether they met the criteria set in the NPPF.

#### 4. Key conclusions of the Assessment

##### *Desktop review*

4.1 This first stage of assessment considered each of the 8 possible LGS sites in the Neighbourhood Area. The detail of this assessment is set out in the matrix in appendix 1. Through this process, the following 3 sites were discarded:

- The playing fields of St. Michael's School, subject to other planning regulations and therefore allocated to another use.
- The 2 areas of land on either side of the west junction of Daws Hill Lane and Knights Templar Way, having no public access nor any of the 5 demonstrable special features.

4.2 The desktop analysis found that the remaining 5 sites appear to fulfil the initial criteria and are therefore considered in more detail in the next stage of the assessment.

##### *Detailed analysis*

4.3 This second stage of assessment involved a detailed analysis of the remaining 5 proposed LGS sites. The detail of this assessment is set out in the matrix in appendix 2. None of the sites was rejected during this analysis.

##### *Conclusion*

4.4 The assessment undertaken has identified the following 6 sites which are considered to fulfil the criteria:

- (1) Myees Plantation
- (2) The area of grassland with trees on the south side of the junction of Marlow Hill and Daws Hill Lane
- (3) The area of land off The Spinney
- (4) The area of land on Fair Ridge adjacent to Foxleigh
- (5) The area of land bordered by Fair Ridge, Marlow Hill and Fair Ridge access Road.

4.5 All of these spaces are valued by the local community, in a Neighbourhood Area that is

already very developed. Loss of any of these spaces would be seen as a major detriment to the quality of life of residents. The spaces provide a pleasant natural area where houses have sometimes been built closely together and have small gardens.

4.6 Apart from providing spaces for children to play, local green spaces contribute to the mental well-being of residents. They also provide opportunities for physical activities to help counter the growing epidemic of obesity.

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4.7 There is some scope for additional tree planting on the local green spaces, with the benefits of slightly improved air quality and reduced surface water run-off.