

## High Halstow Neighbourhood Plan – Local Green Space Assessment

### INTRODUCTION

This document presents an assessment of all green spaces in High Halstow proposed for designation as a Local Green Space in line with the powers established in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that enable Neighbourhood Plan groups to identify and designate such spaces.

This document presents an overview of the importance of green spaces and the criteria for determining whether a space warrants designation, followed by assessment of proposed spaces. It concludes by recommending whether the proposed spaces warrant designation in the High Halstow Neighbourhood Plan.

### ROLE AND PURPOSE OF LOCAL GREEN SPACE DESIGNATIONS

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) highlights the importance of green infrastructure for communities, referencing benefits such as *‘enhanced well-being, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes, food and energy production, urban cooling and the management of flood risk’*.

Green infrastructure can drive economic growth and regeneration, reinforce and enhance local landscape character and contribute to a sense of place. It can also help to improve the health and well-being of a community, providing opportunities for residents and visitors to exercise, interact with one another, experience nature, and get involved in their community through activities like food growing and gardening, all of which bring physical and mental health benefits.

In their research project ‘Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces’, Fields in Trust, the independent charity working to secure the protection of parks and green spaces at both the local and national level, quantified the ‘Wellbeing Value’ of such spaces. They established that an individual would need to be compensated by £974 a year to replace the life satisfaction they would have gained from using their local park or green space. Equally, parks and green spaces are estimated to save the NHS around £111 million per year based solely on a reduction in GP visits<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Fields in Trust – Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces: <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/research>

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Such spaces are particularly important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. With access to gyms, sports facilities, cafés, shops and other community facilities restricted, open spaces have become hugely important sites where people can exercise and interact with one another in a socially distanced and safe environment<sup>2</sup>.

This is highlighted in recent guidance published by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)<sup>3</sup>, which identifies ‘good green spaces in the right places’ as a key ingredient in the ‘20-minute neighbourhood’, being places where the community has access to the full range of services and facilities to support day-to-day life. Equally, the Quality of Life Framework<sup>4</sup> identifies access to places for leisure and recreation, and contact with nature, as being important determinants in the quality of a place and people’s quality of life, making health and wellbeing central to the way we plan for our communities.

Furthermore, and with the requirement to demonstrate biodiversity net-gain on development sites emerging through the Environment Bill<sup>5</sup> and publication of the Natural England / Defra Biodiversity Metric<sup>6</sup>, Local Green Spaces might comprise locations where net gain can be delivered.

Under the NPPF Neighbourhood Plans can designate Local Green Spaces which are of importance and value to the local community. The NPPF states<sup>7</sup> that Local Green Spaces should only be designated where the green space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it services;
- 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.

It is important to note that whilst designation affords the green space similar policy protection to Green Belt, it does not place any new restrictions or obligations on landowners.

Management of the land remains the responsibility of the landowner although, with the agreement of the landowner, there may be opportunities that can be explored which allow the local community to become more involved in the management of the space. Furthermore, designation does not confer any rights of access over what exists at present.

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<sup>2</sup> LSE London Blog – Valuing London’s urban green space in a time of crisis – and in everyday life: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lse-london/valuing-londons-urban-green-space-in-a-time-of-crisis-and-in-everyday-life/>

<sup>3</sup> TCPA, March 2021, 20-Minute Neighbourhoods: Creating Healthier, Active, Prosperous Communities – An Introduction for Council Planners in England

<sup>4</sup> The Quality of Life Foundation, March 2021, Quality of Life Framework (prepared with support from MHCLG, the TCPA, RTPI and others)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020>

<sup>6</sup> <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6049804846366720>

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 100, MHCLG, February 2019, National Planning Policy Framework

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Where sites are designated as Local Green Space in a Neighbourhood Plan, new development will only be allowed within those spaces where very special circumstances can be demonstrated in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and which might include provision of essential utility infrastructure, such as drainage pipes or sewer tunnels, or where the proposal is supplementary to and supports the function of that green space, such as new changing rooms associated with sports pitches).

Further information on the Local Green Space designation is set out in Planning Practice Guidance, as included in the appendix to this summary report.

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### ASSESSMENT TABLE

Site	Commentary	Recommendation
<b>Site 01 – Allotments</b>	The allotments are sited in a central location (located within approx. 160m of St Margaret’s Church and adjacent to the Cricket Club perimeter). The allotments provide a valuable resource to the local community, offering residents of nearby properties opportunities for social interaction as well as providing land for food growing. The land is relatively contained by a tree line to the east, and building edges to the north, west and south.	Y
<b>Site 02 – Churchyard</b>	The churchyard surrounds the grade I listed St Margaret’s Church. Set in the centre of the village, the churchyard forms a historic and tranquil setting for the local community. The churchyard provides spaces for the internment of ashes and burials. The churchyard is contained on all sides by existing development, Forge Lane to the West and Cooling Road to the east; thus, ensuring the churchyard is a limited scale but with a strong local character.	Y
<b>Site 03 – Cooling Road</b>	The site is a triangular junction section located along Cooling Road. The site hosts local signage which is visible upon entry into High Halstow via Cooling Road and Dux Court Road. The site is important in terms of being a gateway location to the village and providing a green setting for the adjacent church. It is formed by the historic ‘crossroads’ in the village and thus important to local character and identity.	Y
<b>Site 04 – Dalham Farmland</b>	Dalham Farmland is a designated SSSI and can be accessed from Forge Lane following the RS40 public footpath. The SSSI was recognised as having great geological significance and is regarded as being a rare example of an <i>“undisturbed area which shows mass movement phenomena on low-angled, inland slopes of London Clay”</i> <sup>8</sup> . The site is noted as offering recreational value through the provision of walking routes. It is also partially identified as being a priority habitat for deciduous woodland. Furthermore, the site is contained by ribbon development to the south and east (along Cooling Road) and a hedgerow to the north and west, which prevents it	Y

<sup>8</sup> <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1003835.pdf>

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	from merging with adjacent land and helps to maintain its local feel. Although already benefitting from being designated as a SSSI, the site is relatively local in size, is close to the existing built-up area, and comprises part of the setting of the village. It is, as noted above, also important for local recreation. Identifying this as LGS could confer an additional level of protection	
<b>Site 05 – Fisher’s Wood</b>	Fisher’s Wood consists of a tract of ancient woodland adjacent to Sharnal Street. Although not publicly accessible, it is in close proximity to the residential properties along Sharnal Street and is a tranquil setting that serves as an important habitat for local wildlife. It is currently designated as an Area of Ancient Woodland (and partially identified as a priority habitat for woodland) and thus already benefits from a high level of protection. However, it forms part of an important green corridor running parallel to Sharnal Street, and which will help retain the separate identity of Sharnal Street from the growth of High Halstow. It is thus important to reinforcing local character and identity, as well as comprising an important area of biodiversity close to areas of future growth.	Y
<b>Site 06 - Forge Common</b>	Forge Common is a recreational area located adjacent to the northern edge of High Halstow. The site is lined to the north by woodland and a row of deciduous woodland. The space is the largest area of recreational land to the north of Britannia Road, and helps to fulfil the community’s need for outdoor activity space. In addition, the RS50 footpath provides strong east-west linkages along the northern edge of the site. Forge Common has a strong physical and visual relationship with High Halstow and is entirely contained by woodland and the urban edge.	Y
<b>Site 07 - Half Moon Way</b>	The site consists of a grassy and planted area of land on the verge of Half Moon Way. The site is limited in size, indistinctive and provides limited recreation opportunities for the local community.	N
<b>Site 08 - Area of Heronsdon</b>	The site consists of deciduous woodland (and is identified as a priority habitat for deciduous woodland) which provides opportunities for wildlife habitat and enhanced biodiversity. The site	Y

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	lies adjacent to existing housing off Willowbank Drive, Longfield Avenue and Haglestowe Avenue / Heronsdon Grange. The site is earmarked to contain two drainage retention ponds in an existing planning application. Designation will help retain this site as an important wildlife corridor. It also extends to include the new area of open space at the entrance to recent housing development on Halgestowe Avenue. This comprises a 'green gateway' to High Hasltow when travelling into the village along Britannia Road and also forms part of the setting of the new area of housing. It also has biodiversity value as part of the SUDs network delivered through the development.	
<b>Site 09 - Hill Farm Close</b>	The Hill Farm Close site consists of an open space centred within the Hill Farm Close cul-de-sac. The site offers a recreational area for the local community, in addition to creating an open frontage. The site is contained on all sides by development. The open nature of the land helps to maintain its local rural character.	Y
<b>Site 9 - Horsefield</b>	The site forms part of the wider network of green infrastructure in High Halstow, which links the local centre with the Recreation Ground and Topley Drive Recreation Area. The Public Right of Way running along the northern edge of the site links this network of green infrastructure and providing a connection out to the potential area of future growth and development to the east of High Halstow. Forming part of the existing village area it is local in character and in close proximity to the community, and is important to the structure of the village.	Y
<b>Site 11 - Part of Chattenden Woods &amp; Lodge Hill Estate within High Halstow</b>	This area of land sits within the south western portion of the neighbourhood area. The site predominantly consists of deciduous woodland and grassland, including an ancient woodland fragment to the west of Deangate Ridge Recreation Ground. There are a number of footpaths offering access to/from and through the site. The site provides a tranquil setting and is an important habitat for local wildlife, and, in particular, is home to a large nightingale community. The site also provides recreational space for walkers.	Y

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	Although currently designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and partially an area of Ancient Woodland which do afford protection to the space, its value to the community as a recreation area and wildlife habitat is recognised. With the scale of growth proposed across the Hoo Peninsula through the Medway HIF this space becomes an important resource for a growing community and where biodiversity net gains could potentially be achieved.	
<b>Site 12 - Recreation Ground and Cricket Ground</b>	The recreation ground is a key central feature of High Halstow and provides space for recreational outdoor activities for the local community, as evidenced by the on-site cricket pitch. The site is currently identified as open space by Medway Council. The site is contained on all sides by housing which helps to maintain its local character as a community meeting space. Should this area be designated, and the Community consider that supporting facilities, such as improvements to the changing rooms are required to enhance the quality of the sports field, then the associated policy for this space will need to acknowledge and allow for the type of change.	Y
<b>Site 13 - RS44</b>	The site consists of a public footpath and neighbouring open field located adjacent to housing within Mackintosh Close. The site is approx. 450m from High Halstow Cricket Pavilion and is close to other community facilities. The site itself provides opportunities for recreational use, such as dog walking. The RS44 public footpath also provides links to the wider public footpath network. The site can be distinguished from the wider open land to the east by a hedgerow. However, Planning Practice Guidance advises that there is no need to designate rights of way as LGS as they are protected under other legislation. The route also runs through the housing allocation area. Rather than designated this as LGS the design and placemaking principles formulated for the allocation area could include retention of footpaths within this, maintaining the link through the allocation area into the main built-up area of high Halstow.	N
<b>Site 14 - Northwood Hill</b>	Northwood Hill (High Halstow National Nature Reserve) is a large tract of deciduous woodland to the north and west of High Halstow. In the northern half of the site there are two ancient woodland fragments. Saxon Shore Way crosses the site, allowing the local community to access the area from High Halstow and Cooling.	N

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	<p>The site is a tranquil and beautiful natural setting, providing habitat for local wildlife. The site is biodiverse and is home to the largest heronry in the country.</p> <p>Despite the local significance of this special site, the site is notably extensive as its size is comparable to the overall size of High Halstow. It currently benefits from being designated as a Natural Nature Reserve and as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Furthermore, it is also a RSPB Reserve and parts of the area are designated as Ancient Woodland and a priority habitat for deciduous woodland. It thus currently benefits from a range of protections, which LGS would add little to. Combined with its size, it is not considered that it fulfils the criteria for LGS.</p>	
<b>Site 15 - South Thames estuary &amp; Marshes</b>	This is an extensive area of land designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest wrapping around the northern edge of the Hoo Peninsula. It is also designated as a Special Protection Area. The existing designations, plus its size and distance from the main area of population rule it out as LGS.	N
<b>Site 16 - Saxon Shore Way</b>	The Saxon Shore Way is a long distance footpath running between Gravesend and Hastings. Although skirting the northern edge of the main built-up area of High Halstow, the path is around 163 miles in length and thus not 'local' in character. Planning Practice Guidance also notes that there is no need to designate rights of way as LGS as they are already protected under other legislation.	N
<b>Site 17 - The Street</b>	The site consists of a grass verge with some tree cover, situated between The Street and Eden Road in a central local location. Although the recreational value of the site is limited, it is important to the character of development in this part of the built-up area. It is clearly local in character, size and in close proximity to the local community.	Y
<b>Site 18 - Topley Drive recreation area</b>	The site consists of an open recreational area, with public access off Topley Drive, Half Moon Way and Gypsy Way. The site is centrally located and is locally significant due to its high recreational value. The site also includes a tree pocket which may provide important space for	Y

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	wildlife habitats. The site is bounded to the north and south by housing, Half Moon Way to the east and paddocks to the west.	
<b>Site 19 - Valentines Drive East</b>	Although the 'verge' forms a wildlife corridor and natural link to the surrounding countryside, including a vegetated buffer to housing as well as a drainage channel, its value as a wildlife area is considered to be limited and the space along Valentines Drive has limited recreational value.	N
<b>Site 20 - Valentines Drive West</b>	As above	N
<b>Site 21 – Vegetation to the rear of properties on Leaman Close and Holmes Close (east side)</b>	This comprises a narrow strip of vegetation between existing properties and proposed new housing allocation area, which would act as a visual buffer between the two but which is limited in terms of recreational or wildlife benefits. As with RS44, the design and placemaking principles formulated for the allocation area through the neighbourhood plan could include references to retention of vegetation on the site.	N
<b>Site 22 – Vegetation to the rear of properties on Cardigan Close and Mackintosh Close (east side)</b>	As per Site 21, this comprises a narrow strip of vegetation between existing properties and proposed new housing allocation area, which would act as a visual buffer between the two but which is limited in terms of recreational or wildlife benefits. As with RS44, the design and placemaking principles formulated for the allocation area through the neighbourhood plan could include references to retention of vegetation on the site.	N
<b>Site 23 - Ruggles Close</b>	The site consists of a semi-circular patch of open space with limited tree cover. The site is entirely contained by Ruggles Close road and housing. Despite its central location, the site is not considered to have any special function or local significance due to its small scale and its strong relationship with urbanising influences.	N
<b>Site 24 - RS47</b>	The RS47 footpath is an ancient footpath which connects High Halstow to Cooling. The footpath has an important recreational value, providing the local community with a peaceful walking route. However, Planning Practice Guidance confirms there is no need to designate rights of way as LGS as they are already protected under other legislation.	N

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<b>Site 25 -</b>	n/a	n/a
<b>Site 26 -</b>	n/a	n/a
<b>Site 27 -</b>	n/a	n/a
<b>Site 28 - Ratcliffe Highway verges</b>	The site consists of the A228 roadside verges which provide a natural buffer to the properties to the south along Sharnall Street. The land is vegetated and wild and is in close proximity to the hamlet to the south and the southern section of High Halstow. The land is considered locally significant as it helps to reduce the traffic noise along the A228. It also forms part of the linear green corridor that helps to define the extent of Sharnal Street and High Halstow, thus being important to the retention of the separate identity of both places. Furthermore, the verges form part of the green gateway into High Halstow and reinforce its rural character.	Y
<b>Site 29 – Wybornes Wood</b>	Wybornes Wood is an area of ancient deciduous woodland located in the south west of the Parish and somewhat removed from the main built-up area. It is an important habitat for wildlife and surrounded by agricultural land. It is designated as Ancient Woodland and identified as a priority habitat for deciduous woodland. It is also within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Given the existing protections and distance from the main area of population it is not considered to fulfil criteria for designation as LGS.	N

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based upon the above the following sites may be considered appropriate for Local Green Space designation and subject to consultation alongside the Neighbourhood Plan:

1. Allotments
2. Churchyard
3. Cooling Road
4. Dalham Farmland
5. Fisherwood
6. Forge Common
7. Heronsdon
8. Hill Farm Close
9. Horsefield
10. Lodge Hill Estate within High Halstow
11. Recreation Ground
12. The Street
13. Topley Drive Recreation Area
14. Ratcliffe Highway verges.

The sites are mapped in the following pages



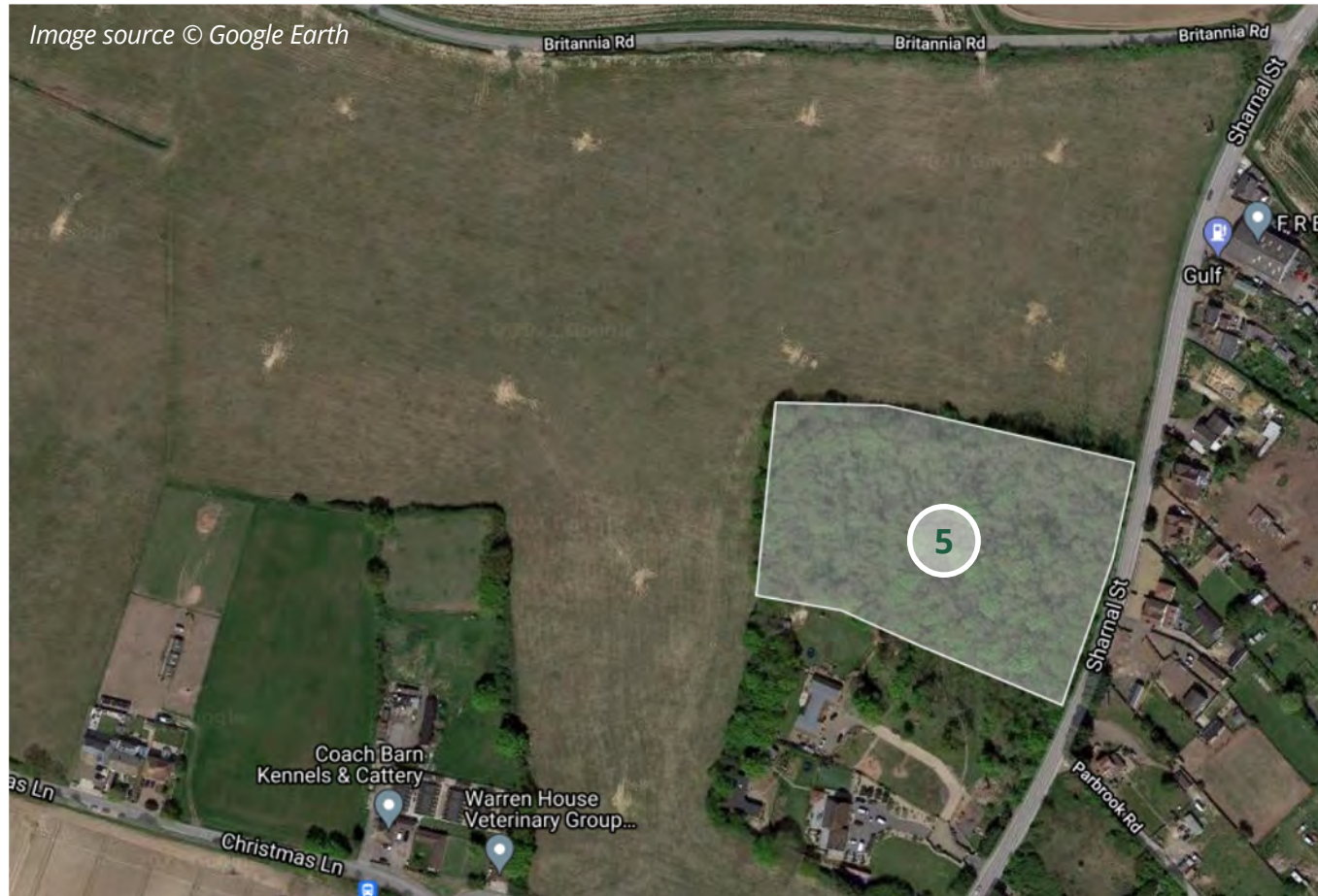
- LGS 1: Allotments*
- LGS 8: Hill Farm Close*
- LGS 9: Horsefield*
- LGS 11: Recreation Ground*
- LGS 13: Topley Drive Recreation Area*

Image source © Google Earth



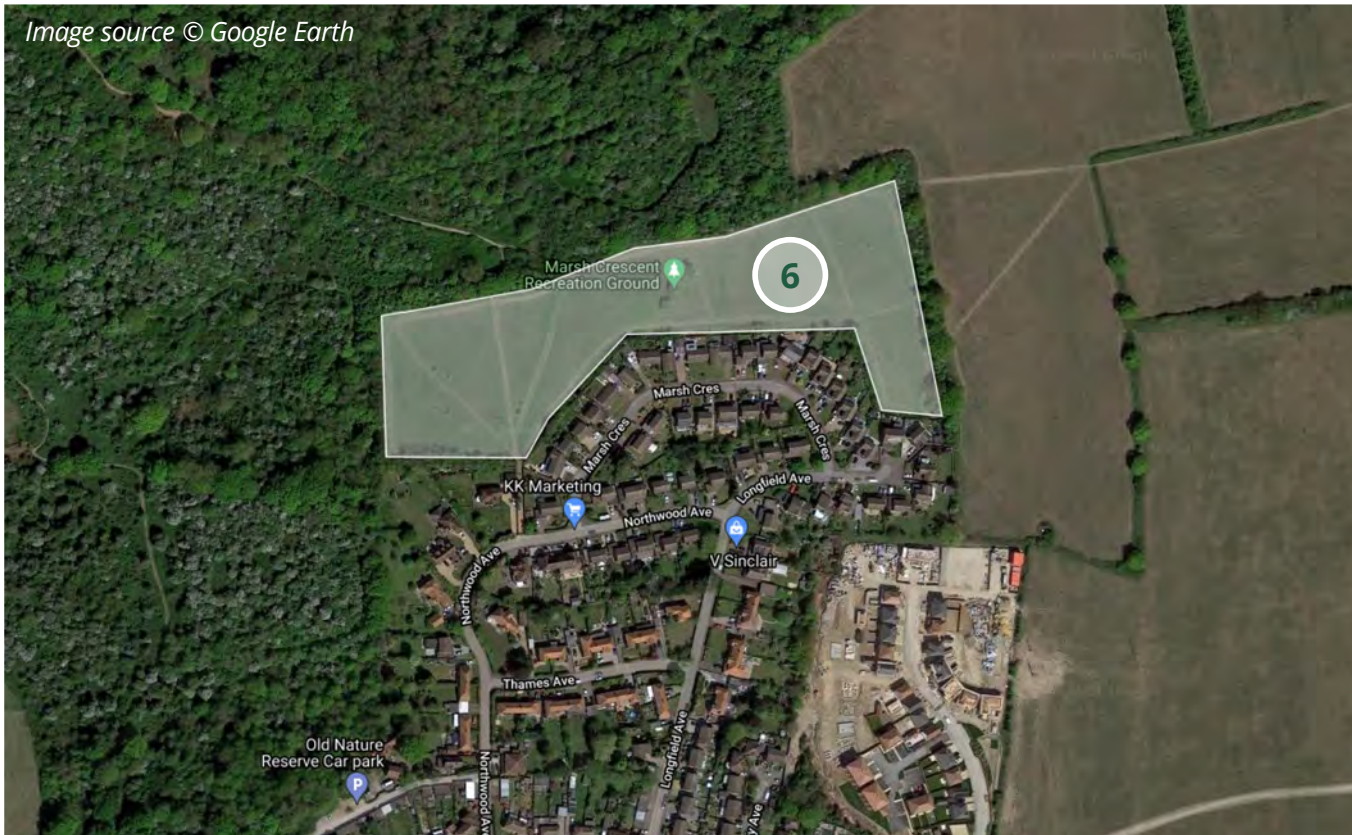
LGS 2: Churchyard  
LGS 3: Cooling Road  
LGS 4: Dalham Farmland

Image source © Google Earth



LGS 5: Fisherwood

Image source © Google Earth



LGS 6: Forge Common



LGS 7: Heronsdon  
LGS 12: The Street

Image source © Google Earth



LGS 10: Lodge Hill Estate within High Halstow

Image source © Google Earth



LGS 14: Ratcliffe Highway verges

## **APPENDIX 1: PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

The following is extracted from Planning Practice Guidance and provides an overview of the Local Green Space Designation, how these should be identified and what is conferred by designation.

### **What is Local Green Space designation?**

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

*Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 37-005-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **How is land designated as Local Green Space?**

Local Green Space designation is for use in [Local Plans](#) or [Neighbourhood Plans](#). These plans can identify on a map ('designate') green areas for special protection. Anyone who wants an area to be designated as Local Green Space should contact the local planning authority about the contents of its local plan or get involved in neighbourhood planning.

*Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 37-006-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **How does Local Green Space designation relate to development?**

Designating any Local Green Space will need to be consistent with local planning for sustainable development in the area. In particular, plans must identify sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs and the Local Green Space designation should not be used in a way that undermines this aim of plan making.

*Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 37-007-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **What if land has planning permission for development?**

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.

*Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 37-008-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **Can all communities benefit from Local Green Space?**

Local Green Spaces may be designated where those spaces are demonstrably special to the local community, whether in a village or in a neighbourhood in a town or city.

*Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 37-009-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **What if land is already protected by Green Belt or as Metropolitan Open Land (in London)?**

If land is already protected by Green Belt policy, or in London, policy on Metropolitan Open Land, then consideration should be

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given to whether any additional local benefit would be gained by designation as Local Green Space. One potential benefit in areas where protection from development is the norm (e.g.: villages included in the green belt) but where there could be exceptions is that the Local Green Space designation could help to identify areas that are of particular importance to the local community.

*Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 37-010-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **What if land is already protected by designations such as National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Site of Special Scientific Interest, Scheduled Monument or conservation area?**

Different types of designations are intended to achieve different purposes. If land is already protected by designation, then consideration should be given to whether any additional local benefit would be gained by designation as Local Green Space.

*Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 37-011-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **What about new communities?**

New residential areas may include green areas that were planned as part of the development. Such green areas could be designated as Local Green Space if they are demonstrably special and hold particular local significance.

*Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 37-012-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **What types of green area can be identified as Local Green Space?**

The green area will need to meet the criteria set out in [paragraph 100](#) of the National Planning Policy Framework. Whether to

designate land is a matter for local discretion. For example, green areas could include land where sports pavilions, boating lakes or structures such as war memorials are located, allotments, or urban spaces that provide a tranquil oasis.

*Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 37-013-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **How close does a Local Green Space need to be to the community it serves?**

The proximity of a Local Green Space to the community it serves will depend on local circumstances, including why the green area is seen as special, but it must be reasonably close. For example, if public access is a key factor, then the site would normally be within easy walking distance of the community served.

*Paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 37-014-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **How big can a Local Green Space be?**

There are no hard and fast rules about how big a Local Green Space can be because places are different and a degree of judgment will inevitably be needed. However, [paragraph 100](#) of the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green area concerned is not an extensive tract of land. Consequently 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.

*Paragraph: 015 Reference ID: 37-015-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

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### **Is there a minimum area?**

Provided land can meet the criteria at [paragraph 100](#) of the National Planning Policy Framework there is no lower size limit for a Local Green Space.

*Paragraph: 016 Reference ID: 37-016-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **What about public access?**

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). 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 land owners, whose legal rights must be respected.

*Paragraph: 017 Reference ID: 37-017-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **What about public rights of way?**

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.

*Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 37-018-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

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

A Local Green Space does not need to be in public ownership. However, the local planning authority (in the case of local plan making) or the qualifying body (in the case of neighbourhood plan making) should contact landowners 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 a draft plan.

*Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 37-019-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **Would designation place any restrictions or obligations on landowners?**

Designating a green area as Local Green Space would give it protection consistent with that in respect of Green Belt, but otherwise there are no new restrictions or obligations on landowners.

*Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 37-020-20140306*

*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **Who will manage Local Green Space?**

Management of land designated as Local Green Space will remain the responsibility of its owner. If the features that make a green area special and locally significant are to be conserved, how it will be managed in the future is likely to be an important consideration. Local communities can 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.

*Paragraph: 021 Reference ID: 37-021-20140306*

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*Revision date: 06 03 2014*

### **Can a Local Green Space be registered as an Asset of Community Value?**

Land designated as Local Green Space may potentially also be nominated for listing by the local authority as an [Asset of Community Value](#). Listing gives community interest groups an opportunity to bid if the owner wants to dispose of the land.

*Related policy: [paragraphs 99-100](#)*

*Paragraph: 022 Reference ID: 37-022-20140306*

Revision date: 06 03 2014

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