

green space or limited opportunities for sports and other physical activities. Such information may be helpful when considering local need.

6. Existing designations affecting green space

There are numerous other designations that may already be applied to green spaces. It is essential to take these into account when considering making Local Green Space designations. In some instances, existing designations may be adequate, but in other cases Local Green Space designation may be necessary to provide the protection sought by the neighbourhood planning qualifying bodies.

The following checker sets out the purpose of some common designations and the potential for Local Green Space designation to provide complementary or additional protection.

Green belt

Green belts have the following stated purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Green belts are designated and modified through the local plan process. They may only be modified by neighbourhood plans, where a strategic plan or local plan first makes provision for them to do so, as set out in Paragraph 136 of the NPPF.

Local Green Space implications:

Green belts are applied to the fringe of urban areas. They do not preclude all development (appropriate kinds of development are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework).

Therefore, Local Green Space designation could be useful in the green belt, where the land meets the NPPF criteria.

Green belts do not recognise the landscape quality or community value of land. So there are instances where Local Green Space designation could be useful. For

example, it could recognise and protect the community value of a sports pitch on the edge of the green belt, adjacent to a housing estate.

Where there is no green belt, it would not be appropriate to try to use Local Green Space designation to attempt to impose green belt type protection of land around an urban area. This would be a misuse of the designation and would be likely to result in the neighbourhood plan running into difficulties in meeting the basic conditions at the independent examination stage.

Historic area designations

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Conservation areas sometimes include green spaces, such as formal parks, village greens or urban greens.

Local Green Space implications:

Conservation areas do not preclude new development. Indeed, some conservation areas are a focus for regeneration and development. Local Green Space designation may be useful in identifying green space of value to the community in conservation areas.

Inclusion on the register of historic parks and gardens does not afford much protection in itself, though it is a material consideration in making planning decisions. Protection would normally be conferred to historic parks and gardens by conservation area designation or listed building status for buildings and structures.

By their very nature, many historic parks and gardens would be likely to meet the NPPF criteria for Local Green Space designation. However, care is required in applying the designation, so as to allow necessary development. For example, some new development may be necessary in parks to enhance community value, for example by providing new changing or storage facilities for sports pitches or cafes and refreshment kiosks. This could be recognised in planning policies.

Natural environment designations

Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other natural environment designations recognise the scientific, ecological or wildlife value of land. They can be a significant factor in determining whether SEA (strategic environment assessment) is required for neighbourhood plan.

Fields in Trust designation provides some protection for sites.

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 protect important countryside hedges from removal, without the permission of the local planning authority.

Local Green Space implications:

Local Green Space designation could offer useful additional protection, making clear that such areas have community value. Tree preservation orders (TPOs) apply to single trees or groups of trees and require consent to be obtained to remove or do work to trees. The protection is specific to trees and does not preclude development. Local Green Space designation could protect the wider space around TPOs or protected hedges, where such spaces meet the criteria.

Ancient woodland and veteran trees have been afforded increased protection through the NPPF. Planning applications for development that would result in the loss of these will only be approved in exceptional circumstances (e.g. where public benefit would clearly outweigh their loss or deterioration, such as for nationally significant infrastructure projects and a suitable compensation strategy exists). Aside from these exceptions, Local Green Space designation could potentially protect the wider spaces around veteran trees. There is also potential to protect some of the spaces surrounding ancient woodland, although as per the NPPF criteria, the green space cannot be an extensive tract of land.

Asset of Community Value

Designation of a green space as an asset of community value may be a material consideration in making planning decisions, but does not necessarily preclude development.

Local Green Space implications:

Listing of a space as an asset of community value is a key consideration in applying the NPPF criteria for Local Green Space designations. Whilst being an asset of community value is a material consideration in making planning decisions, Local Green Space designation could provide stronger and more specific protection.

Sports Pitches

Sports pitches and playing fields may have no formal designation, but they are addressed in national policy. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF states:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or

b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or

c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

Local Green Space implications:

Designating sports pitches and playing fields as Local Green Space would be useful where the intention is to protect the specific facility in the specific location. However, if there is a possibility of alternative or better facilities being provided in future, perhaps in a better location, then Local Green Space designation would be inflexible and Paragraph 97 of the NPPF would provide a more appropriate form of protection.