

Local Green Space Assessment Methodology

DRAFT REPORT



Spelthorne Takes Shape

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Spelthorne Borough Council is preparing a new Local Plan which will set out policies and proposals that will guide development in the Borough throughout the period of the new plan covering 2020-2035.
- 1.2 The Council undertook its Issues and Options consultation in May/June 2018. This set out the main issues for Spelthorne and identified four potential strategic options that could address the main challenges faced. The responses received to the consultation will assist in preparing the Preferred Options and overall strategy for the new Plan.
- 1.3 The new Local Plan must consider a number of strategic issues and as part of this a robust and up-to-date evidence base must be produced to inform the Plan. One of the strategic issues the Plan must consider is the protection of land as open space for recreation, character and significance to local communities.
- 1.4 One of the mechanisms by which spaces can be protected is by applying a Local Green Space designation. The Local Green Space designation was introduced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 which offers a high degree of protection to areas of importance to the local community. This is on the basis that the land meets certain criteria to achieve the designation.
- 1.5 This section outlines the process that the Council will undertake as part of searching for and identifying sites that are considered to be appropriate to be classified as Local Green Space within the Borough.
- 1.6 The methodology expands on the principles of Local Green Space as identified within the revised NPPF. The NPPF provides initial guiding principles around which the Local Green Space designation should be formed however it leaves the decision-making process to the Local Authority, in partnership with local communities, to designate Local Green Space within the Borough. The process for selection and designation is laid out within this methodology to show the process which the Council will follow when considering sites for designation. This process will be in line with national policy and guidance insofar as this is applicable.
- 1.7 The NPPF in paragraph 99 states that ‘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’

Potential areas for Local Green Space designation

- 1.8 Within the current Core Strategy, a total of 71 sites have the designation of protected urban open space (PUOS). These sites are listed in Appendix 1 of this document and incorporate council-owned parks and recreation grounds, private sports grounds, school grounds, open land within residential estates and other land as identified. The PUOS designation was first developed as part of the 2001 Local Plan under Policy BE14 – Open Space and carried forward into the Core Strategy (2009) under Policy EN4 – provision of Open Space and Sport and Recreation Facilities. The intention of the PUOS was to seek to maintain the quality of open spaces within the Borough.
- 1.9 In the Issues and Options consultation, one of the questions asked was ‘*Do you agree that the Public Urban Open Space designation can be removed and we should consider sites for designation as Local Green Space instead*’. There were a total of 166 responses to this question, 93 responses (56%) were in support of removing the designation, 44 responses (27%) were against whilst 29 responses (17%) said they did not know. There was therefore strong support from the responses for using the LGS as an alternative to PUOS. Therefore, the PUOS sites will be assessed against the criteria to determine if they should be designated as LGS.
- 1.10 In addition to this, Q5 of the consultation document requested responders to suggest sites that should be considered for the LGS designation. A total of 94 responses to this question were received and the sites put forward through this process will also be assessed against the criteria to determine if they should be considered suitable for the LGS designation.
- 1.11 The Council will therefore operate a sifting process in order to identify sites which are considered to be suitable for the LGS.
- 1.12 The NPPF within paragraph 99 states that ‘*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*’. Therefore national policy supports local communities where they have submitted a site for consideration.
- 1.13 The criteria for undertaking the assessment of the sites are specified below and are based around the principles as stated within the NPPF paragraphs 99 and 100 as well as additional guidance contained within the PPG.

2. LOCAL GREEN SPACE CRITERIA

- 2.1 There has been no standard methodology produced by the Government against which the areas proposed to be designated as Local Green Space are assessed. Therefore, the Council have produced its own methodology to accord with the NPPF and guidance as set out within PPG. In addition, Spelthorne have also utilised assessments carried out by other authorities, particularly neighbouring Runnymede and Elmbridge, to inform the assessment and decision-making processes.
- 2.2 The NPPF and PPG sets out the main principles for Local Green Space designations which include three key criteria that need to be met in order for the site to be considered as Local Green Space. The three criteria are:
- 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

Reasonably close proximity to the community it serves

- 2.3 The NPPF and PPG do not define what ‘reasonably close proximity’ means. The NPPF states that to be considered for designation, the green space should be in reasonably close proximity to the community the space serves. PPG states that the proximity of designated Local Green Space to the community will depend on local circumstances. It specifies that if public access is a key factor, then the site would normally be within easy walking distance of the community it serves.
- 2.4 The Government does not intend for green spaces which are isolated or not easily accessible to be designated. The Council will focus on the accessibility of the land, which will include how accessible the land is in terms of public footpaths and whether there are barriers e.g. roads, railways lines, rivers etc.
- 2.5 Natural England’s Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance sets out an appropriate walking distance when assessing the proximity of a community to a service or facility. The standard distance given is **300m** and this will be appropriated as part of the assessment. This distance will be used as a guide rather than the sole determining factor. The main intention of this criterion is to focus on the accessibility of the land. A judgement will therefore have to be made, particularly in relation to land which is private and where there is no public access. As such land will generally not be included unless there is clear evidence of its importance

Demonstrably special to a local community

- 2.6 The NPPF states in order to be considered for designation, the site or area should be demonstrably special to a local community and have a particular local

significance. Five factors for consideration as part of this assessment are listed below:

- Beauty
- Historic significance
- Recreational value (including as a playing field)
- Tranquillity
- Richness of its wildlife

2.7 The NPPF and PPG do not provide any further detail on what is meant by each of the bullet points stated above. It is therefore for the Council to determine where a site or area is considered to be 'demonstrably special to a local community'. Factors which will be taken into account as part of an assessment relating to each of the five bullet points are listed below

- **Beauty** – includes the visual attractiveness of the area(s) and their contribution to townscape, landscape and character. Any flora and fauna which are considered to be special to the local area will also be important. Areas designated as Local Green Space will contribute to local character and help to form the identity of the place.
- **Historic significance** – factors include whether the area has archaeological value, is within, or impacts upon, a conservation area or if the area provides a setting for a statutorily listed building or similar historic feature.
- **Recreational value** – this would include an area which supports activities or events which are considered to provide value to the community and are considered to be of local significance. Recreational facilities such as bowling greens, golf courses, playing fields and play areas may not on their own be suitable for designation however should they be part of a wider green area then this could support inclusion.
- **Tranquillity** – this includes providing value through offering an area which is away from urban areas or provides a space for reflection. These areas will allow its users to be away from pollution and noise of the urban area and provide an environment whereby the users can escape to.
- **Richness of wildlife** – the area(s) may have ecological importance, be subject to local, national or international designations due to its wildlife or support wildlife which can be evidence such as through providing hedgerows, ponds, mature trees.

2.8 The Council requires evidence when sites are submitted as to why that site and/or area is of significance to the local community and why it should be considered suitable for the protection afforded by its designation when compared to other areas of open space in the Borough. This evidence could include, for example, photographic evidence or details of how the community has used the space over a period of time e.g. community events.

Local in character and not an extensive tract of land

- 2.9 The NPPF states that the Local Green Space designation should only be applied where the green space is not an extensive tract of land. PPG states that there are no rules governing how large a Local Green Space can be and a degree of judgement will be needed. However, along with the NPPF principles, blanket designations of open countryside adjacent to settlements will not be considered appropriate. This seeks to ensure that the designation is not used as a means to achieve a new area of Green Belt by another name.
- 2.9 The Council will gather evidence and make a judgement on a site by site basis when it comes to determining whether a space meets this criteria as part of a submission for designation. Local Green Spaces should have 'clear and defensible boundaries' therefore generally discounting larger sites.

Sites with Planning Permission

- 2.10 As set out within PPG, sites which have planning permission for development will not be considered suitable for the designation and will therefore be discounted.

Green Belt

- 2.11 PPG states that if land is already designated as Green Belt then consideration should be given as to whether any additional local benefit would be gained from designating the land as Local Green Space.
- 2.12 PPG states that one potential benefit applies to areas where protection from development is the norm e.g. villages included within 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.
- 2.13 This guidance would, however, unlikely to apply to Spelthorne as the Borough does not have any villages which are washed over by Green Belt. Sites that are within Green Belt would already benefit from the protection of the Green Belt designation and the requirement to demonstrate very special circumstances to allow for either the site to be removed from the Green Belt or to allow development within the Green Belt.

3. SCORING

Demonstrably special to a local community

Beauty

- 3.1 The Council will assess the visual attractiveness of the areas and their contribution to the local character, landscape, flora and fauna. Local Green Spaces will be contributors to local identity and character of the area and a sense of place.

Score	Required Attributes
1	Limited visual attractiveness, limited variety of natural features, provides a limited contribution to the setting of the local area.
2	Good visual attractiveness, limited variety of natural features but of a good quality, provides a good contribution to the setting of the local area.
3	Good visual attractiveness, variety of natural features of a good quality, provides a good contribution to the setting of the local area.
4	Very good visual attractiveness, good variety of natural features and of a good quality, provides a very good contribution to the setting of the local area.
5	Excellent visual attractiveness, excellent variety of natural features and of good quality, provides an excellent contribution to the setting of the local area.

Historic Significance

- 3.2 Consideration will be given to the proposed areas and whether they, or areas of them, have a historical significance. The areas may reflect an archaeological site or other historical feature, provide the setting to a statutory listed building or scheduled monument or be within a Conservation Area.

Score	Required Attributes
0	The site meets none of the sub-criteria
1	The site meets one of the sub-criteria
2	The site meets two of the sub-criteria
3	The site meets three of the sub-criteria
4	The site meets four of the sub-criteria
5	The site meets all of the sub-criteria

Sub-criteria	
	Site is located within an area of high archaeological potential .
	Site makes a positive contribution to the setting of a locally listed building .
	Site makes a positive contribution to the setting of a nationally listed building .
	Site makes a positive contribution to the setting of a scheduled ancient monument .
	Site makes a positive contribution to the setting of a conservation area

Recreational Value

- 3.3 A Local Green Space would normally be more than just an informal play area or grassed pitches. For an area to be designated, the local significance of its recreational value, terms of the variety of activities it supports and therefore its value to the community would need to be demonstrated. Formal recreational facilities such as bowling greens, grass tennis courts, golf courses, playing fields, grass play areas and allotments would not on their own be necessarily enough to meet the criteria fully, although they may be included where they are either part of a wider greenspace or have a particular local significance. Similarly the existence of a right of way across land for example would not in itself be demonstration of significant recreational value.

Score	Required Attributes
0	Site has no public access and is therefore considered to have no/very limited recreational value.
1	Site is accessible to the public if an entrance fee is paid/or site is privately accessible to a limited group of people.
2	Public access but no evidence submitted of informal or formal use, no notable recreation facilities, and no information provided/evidence of frequent use .
3	Public access, evidence of good range of informal uses , some limited facilities and/or information provided on/ evidence of reasonably frequent use .
4	Public access, evidence of good range of informal and formal uses, good facilities (fair condition and range) and/or information on/evidence of frequent use.
5	Public access, evidence of a good range of informal and formal uses, excellent facilities (good/excellent condition and range) and information on/evidence of frequent use.

Richness of Wildlife

- 3.4 A Local Green Space may be of particular local significance because of its importance for wildlife. This can take the form of international, national or local wildlife designations in addition to non-designated features that have the ability to support wildlife, e.g. mature trees, ponds, hedgerows, riverbanks etc.

Score	Required Attributes
1	None or limited evidence submitted in relation to wildlife observed on the site, and the open space is not in, or in close proximity to any designated area of ecological significance. There is however an assumed level of wildlife value to the site (habits or species).
2	Good evidence submitted in relation to wildlife observed on site but open space is not in or close proximity to any designated area of ecological significance.
3	Good level of evidence submitted in relation to wildlife on site, and open space is located in close proximity to, or is designated as, an area of local ecological importance of Local Nature Reserve.
4	Good level of evidence submitted in relation to wildlife observed on the site, and the site is located in close proximity to a site of national significance i.e. Site of Special Scientific Interest.
5	Good level of evidence submitted in relation to wildlife on the site, and the site is located in close proximity to site of international importance i.e. Special Protection Area or RAMSAR site.

Tranquility

- 3.5 A degree of remoteness is expected in areas that are tranquil although this is unlikely to be the case in Spelthorne. The Borough's proximity to Heathrow Airport alongside the M25 and M3 motorways play a role in significantly reducing tranquillity in most parts. It is for this reason that the tranquillity attributes have been produced and sites have been assessed in context of the points above.

Score	Required Attributes
1	Major and constant disturbance. The site is heavily affected by a main road/or by neighbouring uses with regular disturbance. Total lack of self-containment and screening.
2	Frequent disturbance. The site has some disturbance by a main and/or multiple roads and/or by neighbouring uses with regular disturbance. Limited self-containment and screening.

3	Some disturbance. The site is located on a major and/or minor road with some neighbouring uses causing disturbance. Limited self-containment and screening. Scale of site may mean there are undisturbed parts.
4	Limited disturbance in at least part of site, e.g. site is located within residential area with low levels of noise and visual intrusion from associated residential or recreational activities. Degree of self-containment and screening limit noise disturbance in site.
5	No notable sources of disturbance. No visual or audible intrusion. High degree of self-contain limit noise and disturbance.

- 3.6 In designating an area as Local Green Space it is proposed that if an area achieves over 50% of the total available 'points' e.g. a total score of at least 13 out of the 25 available, then it would be considered for designation. This is because it would need to score highly against at least three criteria. Alternatively, if an area scores maximum points (5) against two criteria, but does not score at least 13 points overall, it will also be considered for designation due it scoring so highly against those criteria.
- 3.7 If an area scores below 13 points and does not score 5 against two criteria then it will not be considered for designation as the area is not considered to be meeting the requirements of the criteria sufficiently to warrant designation.

Local in Character and not an extensive tract of land

- 3.8 As a guideline, the Council will not seek to designate any land which is larger than 10ha (approximately 24 acres). This threshold was selected as Local Green Spaces should have 'clear and definable boundaries' and those that were above this threshold tended not to meet this criterion. The 10ha limit is also considered to be an appropriate threshold as spaces which are not designated as Green Belt fall below this size. Any sites larger than this will be automatically excluded during the initial 'sieving' exercise at the start of the area analysis process
- 3.9 The minimum threshold proposed is any area below 0.25 hectares (0.6 acres) would not be designated. This represents the size of an area which can accommodate approximately one residential unit.

APPENDIX 1: List of current Protected Urban Open Space sites

The following spaces are shown on the Council's Proposals Map:

Council-owned Parks and Recreation Grounds

- A1. Alexandra Road, Ashford
- A2. Ashford Recreation Ground, Clockhouse Lane, Ashford
- A3. Cedars Recreation Ground, Green Street, Sunbury
- A4. Feltham Hill Road, Ashford
- A5. Groveley Road, Sunbury
- A6. Lauser Road (eastern end), Stanwell
- A7. Scott Freeman Gardens, Church Road, Ashford
- A8. Staines Park, Knowle Green, Staines
- A9. Stanwell Recreation Ground, Oaks Road
- A10. Village Park, Hadfield Road, Stanwell
- A11. Memorial Gardens, Staines
- A12. Spelthorne Grove, Sunbury
- A13. Holywell Way, Stanwell
- A14. Shepperton Studios
- A15. Glebeland Gardens, Shepperton
- A16. Former line of Lower Sunbury Relief Road (TP26)

Private Sports Grounds

- B1. Ashford Sports Club, Woodthorpe Road, Ashford
- B2. Lazards Sports Club, The Avenue, Sunbury
- B3. Gaflac Sports Ground + London Irish RFC, The Avenue, Sunbury
- B4. Elmsway Tennis Club, Elmsway, Ashford School Grounds
- C1. Town Farm School Stanwell
- C2. Echelforde School, Park Road, Ashford
- C3. R/O Spelthorne College, Church Road, Ashford
- C4. Staines Prep School, Gresham Road, Staines
- C5. R/O Our Lady RC School and Kingscroft Junior School, Park Ave, Staines
- C6. Matthew Arnold School, Staines
- C7. Sunbury Manor School, Nursery Road, Sunbury
- C8. St Nicholas School, Shepperton
- C9. St Paul's School and St Teresa's Convent Sunbury
- C10. Thamesmead School, Shepperton
- C11. Halliford School, Shepperton
- C12. Springfield CF and Middle School, Sunbury

Open Land within Residential Estates

- D1. Hadrian Way/Canopus Way, Stanwell
- D2. The Royal Estate (Edinburgh Drive/Elizabeth Avenue), Staines
- D3. Beechwood Avenue/Ashridge Way, Sunbury
- D4. Belgrave Road/Batavia Road, Sunbury
- D5. Preston Road/Greeno Crescent, Shepperton
- D6. Selwood Gardens, Stanwell
- D7. Strodes Crescent, Staines
- D8. Denman Drive, Ashford
- D9. Chessholme Road, Ashford
- D10. Norman Road, Ashford
- D11. Tudor Road, Ashford
- D12. Nell Gwynne Avenue/Caesers Way, Shepperton

- D13. Catlin Crescent, Shepperton
- D14. Lime Crescent, Sunbury
- D15. Catherine Drive, Sunbury
- D16. Heathcroft Avenue, Sunbury
- D17. Feltham Hill Road/Woodlands Parade, Ashford
- D18. Elgin Avenue, Ashford

Other Land

- E1. Horton Road/Hithermoor Road, Stanwell Moor
- E2. Jordans Close/Town Lane, Stanwell
- E3. Duncroft, Wraysbury Road, Staines
- E4. Adjacent River Colne, Church Street, Staines
- E5. Knowle Green
- E6. Allotments, Staines Park
- E7. R/O Riverside Flats, Laleham Road
- E8. Penton Hall Drive, Laleham
- E9. Penton Hook Road
- E10. R/O Brookside Avenue, Ashford
- E11. Grounds of Sunbury Court, Sunbury
- E12. Flower Pot Green, Thames Street, Sunbury
- E13. Cemetery, Church Road, Shepperton
- E14. Allotments, Grove Road, Shepperton
- E15. Gordon Road/Russell Road, Shepperton
- E16. Staines Res. Aqueduct (Shortwood Common to Ashford Road)
- E17. Staines Res. Aqueduct (Ashford Road to Spelthorne Lane)
- E18. Staines Res. Aqueduct (West of Windmill Road)
- E19. Staines Res. Aqueduct (Windmill Road to M3)
- E20. St Matthews Church, Ashford
- E21. Land at Sunbury Cross between M3 and railway