

Local Plan Review

Publication Plan

Local Green Space Methodology & Assessment Topic Paper

November 2022

1. Scope and Background

- 1.1 South Staffordshire District Council is currently undertaking a Local Plan Review to re-examine the District's ability to meet its own development needs and to contribute to the unmet needs of other local authorities in the surrounding area. This offers an opportunity for local communities to identify areas of particular importance to them and for the District Council to designate them through the local plan (subject to meeting certain criteria). Such spaces are known as Local Green Spaces.
- 1.2 A significant area of South Staffordshire currently falls within the Green Belt or Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and also contains extensive areas within most villages that function as open space, sport and recreation facilities to meet the needs of the local community. Policy protections for these areas of land will be brought forward separately through other Local Plan Review policies.
- 1.3 Notwithstanding the extensive existing policy protections in place in large areas of the District, it is still important to robustly consider any community proposals for Local Green Spaces through the Local Plan Review. To date, there has been three formal requests from the community for an area of land to be designated as Local Green Space through the Local Plan Review. The Council recognises the potential importance of this mechanism to local communities and as such has prepared this paper to provide:
 - A proposed methodology for assessing any proposals for Local Green Spaces
 - The assessment of proposals received to date for Local Green Spaces
 - A suggestion form for local communities to use for future Local Green Space proposals

2. National Policy & Guidance

- 2.1 Paragraph 101 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) allows local and neighbourhood plans to identify and protect green areas of particular importance, where this is consistent with sustainable development and delivering sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Any such designations are known as Local Green Spaces and are given a high level of protection consistent with policy protections for Green Belt.
- 2.2 A number of criteria are given for assessing and identifying any Local Green Spaces in paragraph 102 of the NPPF. These state that the designation should only be used where a green space is:
 - 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”.

2.3 Further detail on the identification of Local Green Spaces is provided in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). Amongst other matters, this indicates that Local Green Spaces;

- Should not undermine the identification of suitable locations to meet development needs
- Will rarely be appropriate where the land has planning permission for development
- Can be allocated within the Green Belt, AONB, Conservation Area etc. where it could give additional local benefits, e.g. by helping to identify areas of particular importance to a local community
- Have no ‘hard and fast rules’ about their minimum or maximum size, but blanket designation of open countryside next to settlements will not be appropriate
- Should not be used to designate linear public rights of way, which are already protected by other legislation
- Do not need to be in public ownership, but landowners should be made aware of any proposals to designate their land and should have opportunities to make representations to any draft plan involving their land

3. Identifying Sites

3.1 The NPPF sets out that local communities should identify areas for potential designation. The Council has invited local communities to submit suggestions for Local Green Spaces as part of the Preferred Options consultation using the suggestion form contained in this topic paper. To date three such submissions have been received.

3.2 Aside from the Local Plan Review itself, there are a number of neighbourhood plans being progressed by Parish Councils within the District, which could also identify Local Green Spaces. Ultimately bodies preparing neighbourhood plans may allocate Local Green Spaces not identified by the Local Plan Review, as groups preparing such plans may have increased knowledge of spaces which are ‘demonstrably special’ to the local community. Any designations, whether made through the Local Plan Review or neighbourhood plans, will still have to have regard to the national policy and guidance summarised above.

4. Assessment methodology

- 4.1 This section sets out the criteria which the Council proposes to use to assess any future proposals for Local Green Space, reflecting the tests set out in the NPPF and the guidance offered on these in the PPG.
- 4.2 The initial stage of the assessment involves using information provided in the submissions form, together with resources such as GIS, StreetView, and site visits for the majority of sites. The assessment involves determining answers to the following questions set out below.

Table 1: Assessment criteria for Local Green Space suggestions

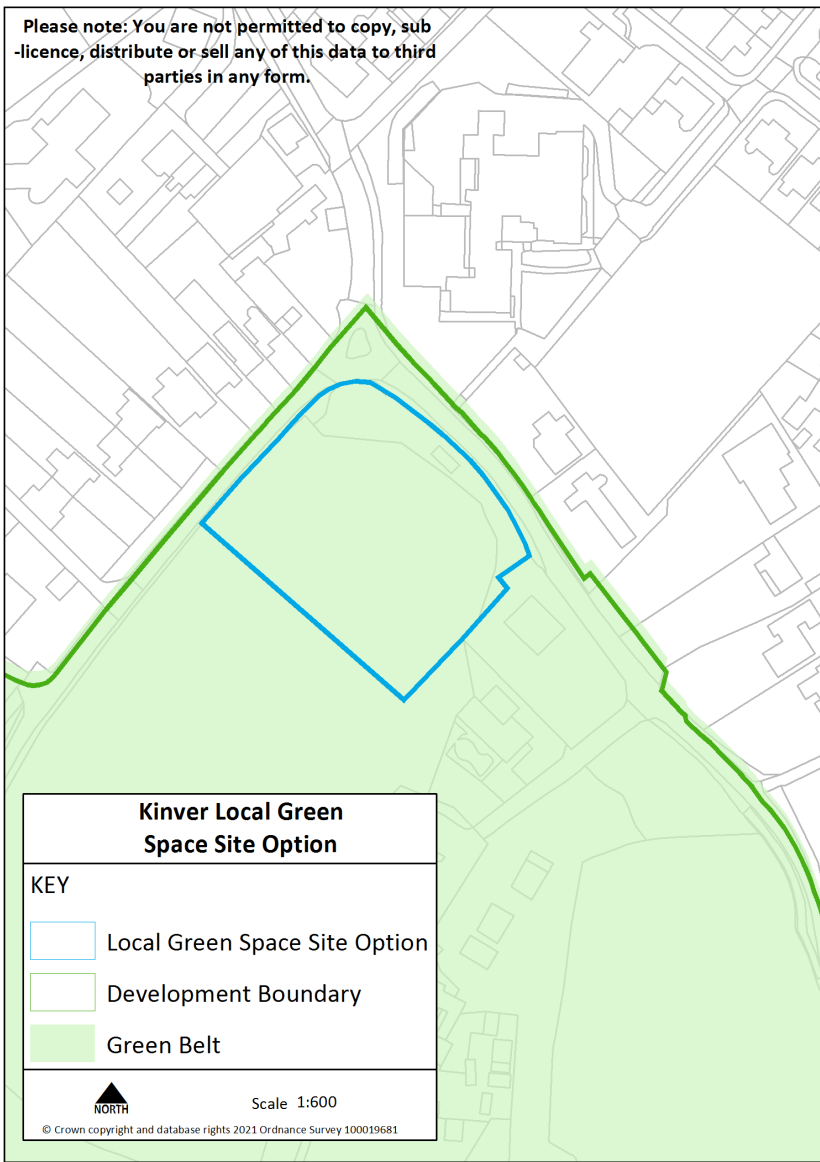
Assessment question	Key points considered by the Council
<i>Is the site already protected from development and would designation provide no further protection?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether site overlaps with key national designations restricting development (e.g. Green Belt, AONB, Ancient Woodland, SSSIs, Registered Parks and Gardens, Special Areas of Conservation, National or Local Nature Reserves, Flood Zones 2/3) - Additional protection (if any) offered by Local Green Space designation
<i>Is the site in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any adjacent existing settlements - Legible and safe walking routes providing access to an existing settlement within 800m
<i>Is the site allocated for development or subject of a planning permission?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing planning permissions on whole/part of site - Existing development allocation on whole/part of site (e.g. from the Site Allocations Document 2018) - Emerging development allocation on whole/part of site in the Local Plan Review – Preferred Options
<i>Is the site local in character? Is the site an extensive tract of land?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site area - Spatial relationship to the nearest settlement - Whether there is a distinct, well-contained, character with clearly defined boundaries separating it from wider open countryside

<p><i>Is the site of particular local importance and is there evidence to show that it is demonstrably special to the community it serves?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summary of relevant evidence submitted by local communities regarding the site's local importance - Local evidence base relevant to local recreation, beauty & tranquillity, wildlife and historical significance, or other demonstrable community value, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open Space Audits - Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Audits - Nature Recovery Network study (e.g. areas of highly distinctive habitats) - Historic Environment Site Assessment, Historic Environment Character Areas, recorded listed buildings and Conservation Area Management Plans - Landscape Sensitivity Studies
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- 4.3 Sites will be recommended or rejected for designation by considering the above questions in the round. Considering the assessment questions/criteria in the round allows for those issues weighing in favour or against designation to be taken into account and a balanced conclusion reached.

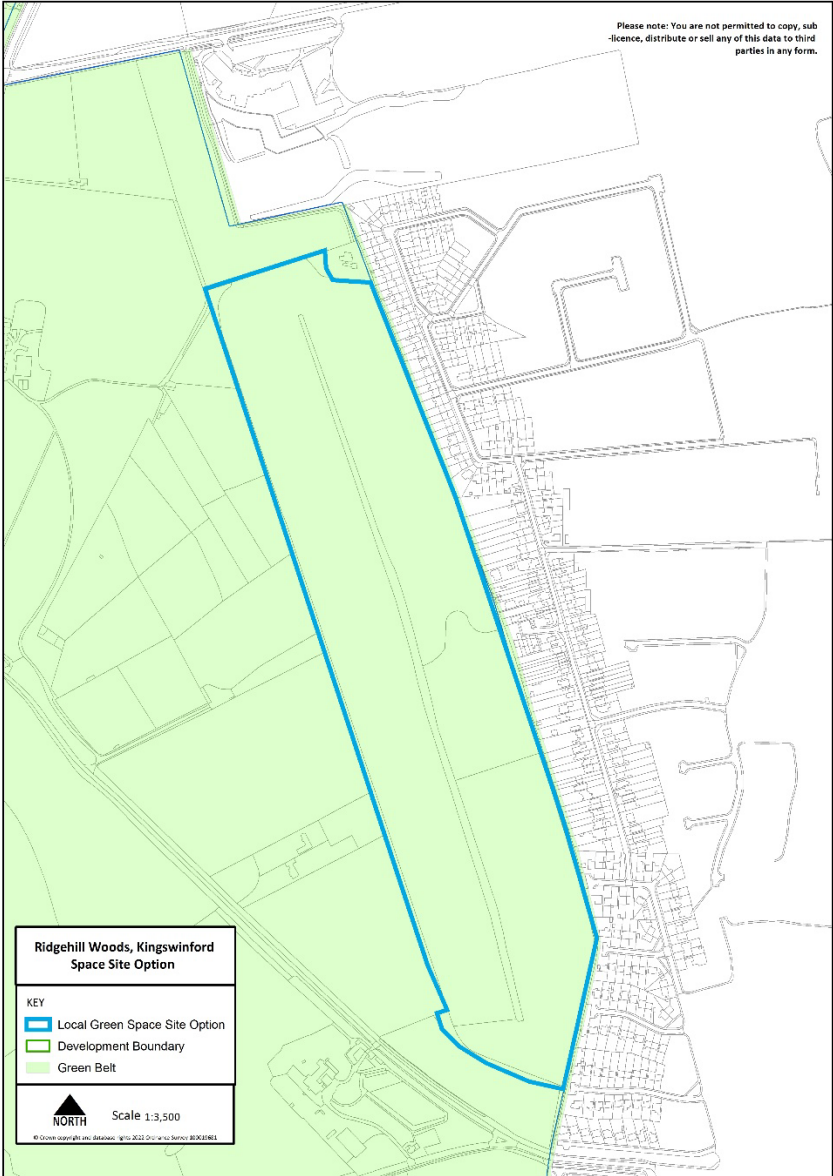
5. Site Assessment Findings

- 5.1 The following section presents the assessments of all relevant Local Green Space site suggestions submitted to the Council to date. At this time three sites have been suggested to the Council as candidates for a Local Green Space designation. This is set out below.

Site Name	Pony Paddock, The Compa, Kinver
Site Location	<p>Please note: You are not permitted to copy, sub-licence, distribute or sell any of this data to third parties in any form.</p>  <p>Kinver Local Green Space Site Option</p> <p>KEY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Green Space Site Option Development Boundary Green Belt <p>NORTH Scale 1:600 © Crown copyright and database rights 2021 Ordnance Survey 100019681</p>
<i>Is the site already protected from development and would designation provide no</i>	<p>The site is already within the Green Belt, Conservation Area and the majority of the site is covered by Tree Preservation Order.</p> <p>Local Green Space offers the same level of protection of Green Belt policy for planning application purposes, allowing the same types of development to be developed on site as is currently the case. Aside from this, the Council may have to consider Green Belt</p>

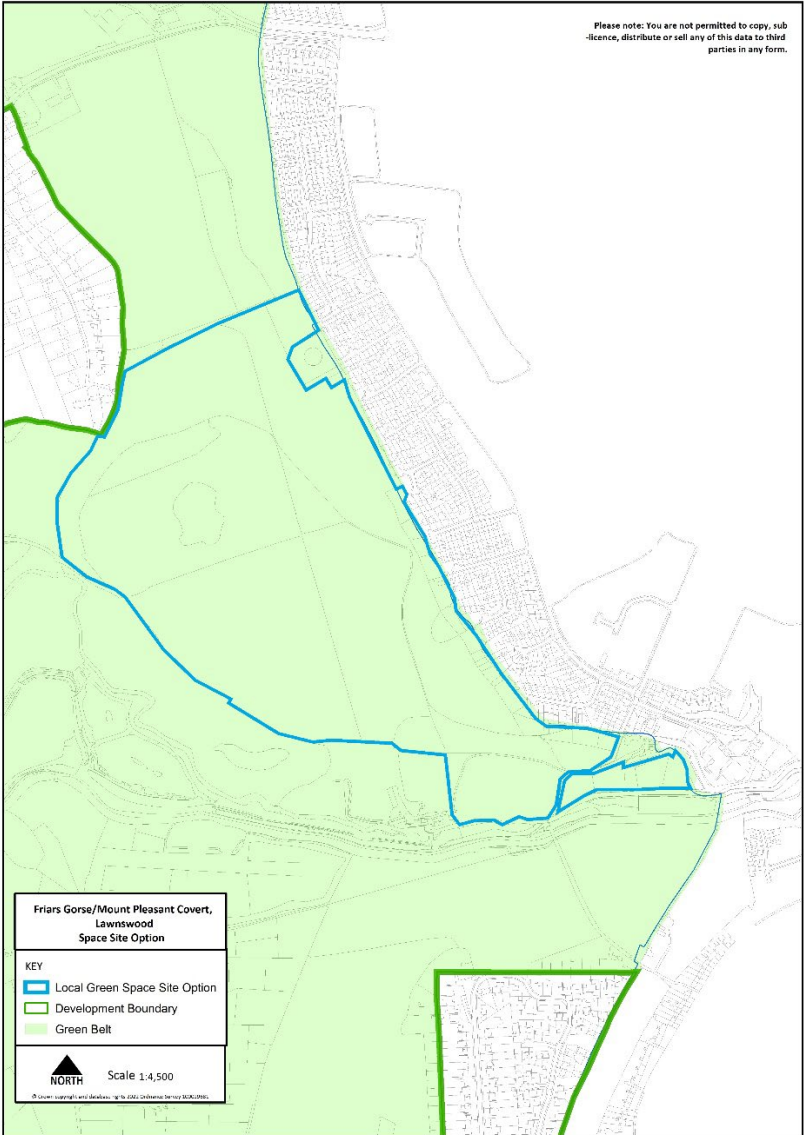
<i>further protection?</i>	<p>locations adjacent to existing villages in the emerging Local Plan Review to meet housing needs, the suggestion to allocate the land for housing (Site 277 in the SHELAA) has already been discounted, due to the existing Tree Preservation Order on the majority of the site.</p> <p>Given the above, it is unclear what additional protection a Local Green Space designation would offer beyond that offered by the combination of Green Belt, Conservation Area and Tree Preservation Orders.</p>
<i>Is the site in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves?</i>	The site is adjacent to the village of Kinver with walking routes along the adjacent residential streets to the site.
<i>Is the site allocated for development or subject of a planning permission?</i>	The site is not allocated in existing or emerging development plan (SHELAA indicates housing site suggestion on this land is 'not suitable' due to TPOs and extent of tree coverage). The northern area of the site with approved planning application for replacement of existing workshop/log cabin with new dwelling (application reference: 19/00490/FUL).
<i>Is the site local in character? Is the site an extensive tract of land?</i>	The site is not considered to be an extensive tract of land, being roughly 0.67ha in size. The majority of the site (excluding area granted planning permission – 19/00490/FUL) is in a sloping wooded hillside on the outer edge of the Kinver Conservation Area. The site is of similar use to the wider woodland to the south, but topography distinguishes the submitted site from wider woodland, creating a stronger relationship between the site and settlement.
<i>Is the site of particular local importance and is there evidence to show that it is demonstrably special to the community it serves?</i>	<p><u>Recreation/community use</u></p> <p>The written submission emphasises that designation as a Local Green Space, together with a concurrent Asset of Community Value application, would provide public open space otherwise lacking from the village's Conservation Area. However, the asset of Community Value application was rejected due to there being "[n]o evidence that the land has, or has recently had, a community use". The site is not recorded as having a public open space or sport function in the Open Space Audit Assessment Report 2019 or Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Report 2020 and does not appear to have any public rights of way running through it.</p> <p><u>Beauty & Tranquillity</u></p> <p>The written submission highlights that the site is within the Kinver Conservation Area and that it demonstrates key attributes of the Conservation Area whilst enhancing the wider streetscene. The extensive woodland on site and its role in providing a setting for the village and Kinver Edge, as recognised by Tree Preservation Orders and the Conservation Area Management Plan, is also</p>

	<p>highlighted. The written submission highlights the relative tranquillity of South Staffordshire compared to other Staffordshire authorities and the Pony Paddocks relatively tranquil nature compared to the residential areas and roads that adjoin it. In addition, the site sits within an area of high landscape sensitivity to housing development (Landscape Sensitivity Assessment 2019).</p> <p><u>Wildlife</u></p> <p>The written submission raises the general benefits of native woodland and that the sites features are reflective of lowland mixed deciduous woodland. The submission highlights positive benefits of the wildlife supported by the site to local residents (e.g. owls, badgers, hedgehogs) and the potential for development activities to harm woodland species within the site. In addition, the site is not within an existing natural environment designation and is not within an area of 'high' or 'very high' habitat distinctiveness (Nature Recovery Network Mapping – Final Report 2020).</p> <p><u>Historical significance</u></p> <p>The submission highlights the site's historical uses as a tram café and the presence of veteran trees on site. In addition, the site sits within the Conservation Area, and is recognised in the Conservation Area Management Plan as being part of an area of important trees.</p>
<p><i>Should site be allocated as Local Green Space in the Local Plan Review?</i></p>	<p>No. Whilst the submission and attached letters clearly show the site is valued by members of the local community and provides an important part of the village's setting, it already has a high level of existing protection (Green Belt, Conservation Area and blanket Tree Preservation Orders) commensurate with the site's beauty, wildlife, tranquillity and historical significance. Given the site's existing Green Belt status and lack of potentially suitable Local Plan Review site suggestions on the land, it is also unlikely that a Local Green Space designation (which offers similar policy protections to Green Belt) would offer significant additional protections. There is also an existing planning permission on part of the site and there does not appear to be any public access to the land itself.</p>

Site Name	Ridgehill Wood, Kingswinford
Site Location	 <p>Please note: You are not permitted to copy, sub-licence, distribute or sell any of this data to third parties in any form.</p> <p>Ridgehill Woods, Kingswinford Space Site Option</p> <p>KEY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Green Space Site Option Development Boundary Green Belt <p>NORTH Scale 1:3,500</p> <p>© Crown copyright and database rights 2022 Ordnance Survey 100019611</p>
<i>Is the site already protected from development and would designation provide no further protection?</i>	<p>The site is located within the Green Belt. The wood is protected by a blanket Tree Preservation Order. The site is designated as a Site of Biological Importance.</p> <p>Local Green Space offers the same level of protection as Green Belt policy for planning application purposes. This location was at one stage part of a significantly larger area which was submitted to the Council for consideration as a housing site as part of the emerging Local Plan. It would appear that the Ridgehill Wood element of the site was excluded from further consideration owing to the present of the blanket TPO's on the site, prior to the consideration of preferred option sites. The wider land parcel of which this site was formerly a part was not selected as a preferred site for development. The adopted Core Strategy Policy</p>

	<p>EQ1 promotes the protection and enhancement of locally important sites such as SBI's.</p> <p>It is unclear what additional protection a Local Green Space designation would offer beyond that already afforded by the combination of Green Belt, Tree Preservation Orders and SBI designation.</p>
<i>Is the site in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves?</i>	The site is adjacent to the West Midlands conurbation and is therefore in close proximity to the local community. There is a Public Right of Way which runs along the length of the eastern boundary of the site. The land is privately owned and access to the wood beyond the limit of the public footpath is at the discretion of the owners.
<i>Is the site allocated for development or subject of a planning permission?</i>	The site is not allocated in an existing or emerging development plan. The site is not the subject of a planning application or extant planning permission. It appears that the site was excluded from further consideration owing to the presence of a blanket TPO on the site.
<i>Is the site local in character? Is the site an extensive tract of land?</i>	The site covers 21.4ha. and is a discreet and clearly defined area of linear woodland occupying a prominent ridge. The site is immediately adjacent to the Black Country metropolitan area to the east and a rural setting to the west.
<i>Is the site of particular local importance and is there evidence to show that it is demonstrably special to the community it serves?</i>	<p><u>Recreation/Community Use</u></p> <p>The survey of the local community indicated that access to this area is valued by the local community as a space for informal recreation and the opportunity it affords to engage with the natural environment. The site is privately owned and access over the majority of the site is at the discretion of the private landowner. There is a Public Right of Way adjacent to the eastern boundary which will enjoy separate legal protection.</p> <p><u>Beauty & Tranquillity</u></p> <p>The survey of the local community frequently references the attractiveness and the tranquillity of the area. Ridgehill Wood is a prominent feature occupying a sandstone ridge and is host to a linear stretch of semi-natural mixed woodland. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2019) described the area within which the site is situated as having a high sensitivity to residential development based on the 'combination of prominent and varied landforms, strong settlement edge, sense of scenic rural character and valued natural features.'</p> <p><u>Wildlife</u></p> <p>The community survey highlighted a range of sighted species including squirrels, baggers, foxes, rabbits, woodland insects and a range of bird species. The site is designated as a County Site of</p>

	<p>Biological Importance (SBI) and is classified as having a ‘high’ habitat distinctiveness (Nature Recovery Network Mapping – Final Report 2020). The Staffordshire Ecological Record Site Report (2020) identifies the site as a mature woodland area comprising a mixed broadleaved wood dominated by beech and sweet chestnut with oak, sycamore, scots pine and birch, and containing good deadwood habitat for invertebrates.</p> <p><u>Historical Significance</u></p> <p>The supporting historical character evidence relates primarily to the adjacent urban area though it does provide a context highlighting the stages of enclosure and significance of extractive industries in the wider local area. The historical evidence indicates that the site was a component part of the extensive Kinver Forest, one of three Royal Forests in South Staffordshire.</p>
<p><i>Should site be allocated as Local Green Space in the Local Plan Review?</i></p>	<p>No. Whilst the submission and attached survey of the local community clearly show that the site is valued locally and provides an important area of informal recreation, the site already has a high level of existing protection (Green Belt, SBI designation and blanket Tree Preservation Orders) which recognise the significance of this site. The site’s existing Green Belt status and the decision to remove this site from consideration for inclusion in the Local Plan would suggest that Local Green Space designation is unlikely to offer significant additional protection.</p> <p>Legally permitted access to the site is restricted to a single Public Right of Way which is statutorily protected. Access to the wider area is at the discretion of the landowner. This is not a matter which would be subject to influence by the designation of the area as Local Green Space.</p> <p>The landscape within which the site sits has been recognised as being of ‘high’ sensitivity and evidence suggests the historical landscape associations may merit further consideration. These are evidenced matters which are likely to be weighed in support of protecting this site. It is considered unlikely that additional weight would be afforded to such considerations by a Local Green Space designation.</p>

Site Name	Friars Gorse/Mount Pleasant Covert, Lawnswood
Site Location	
<p><i>Is the site already protected from development and would designation provide no further protection?</i></p>	<p>The site is located within the Green Belt. Part of the site is designated as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI) and part of the site is designated as a Biodiversity Alert Site (BAS). The wooded area is protected by a blanket TPO.</p> <p>Local Green Space offers the same level of protection as Green Belt policy for planning application purposes. This location was at one stage part of a larger area which was submitted to the Council for consideration as a housing site as part of the emerging Local Plan. The Friars Gorse element of the site appears to have been discounted owing to the present of a blanket TPO on the site. The remaining area was discounted from further consideration as the landowner indicated that the land was not currently available. It was noted in the SHEELA that the site was subject to policy constraints, that part of the site is situated in Flood Zone 3 and was subject to SBI/BAS and TPO designations.</p>

	It is unclear what additional protection a Local Green Space designation would offer beyond that already afforded by the combination of Green Belt, Tree Preservation Order and SBI designation.
<i>Is the site in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves?</i>	The site is adjacent to the West Midlands conurbation and is therefore in close proximity to the local community. The site is crossed by a number of Public Rights of Way including one path giving direct access through the site. The land is privately owned.
<i>Is the site allocated for development or subject of a planning permission?</i>	The site is not allocated in an existing or emerging development plan. The site is not the subject of a planning application or extant planning permission. It appears that the site was excluded from further consideration owing to the presence of a blanket TPO on the site and the disinterest of the present owners.
<i>Is the site local in character? Is the site an extensive tract of land?</i>	The site in total extends to 36.6ha and comprises two distinct elements. The eastern part of the site adjacent to the conurbation is extensively wooded and is bounded along most of the western edge by a Public Right of Way. The site to the west comprises three fields of open grassland bounded to the west by a Public Right of Way. The site in character has a similar appearance to the wider rural area within which it is situated.
<i>Is the site of particular local importance and is there evidence to show that it is demonstrably special to the community it serves?</i>	<p><u>Recreation/Community Use</u></p> <p>The survey of the local community indicates that the site is used and appreciated by the local community for informal recreation use and the opportunity it affords to engage with the natural environment. There are a number of Public Rights of Way crossing the site which will enjoy separate legal protection. Aside from the footpaths any access is at the discretion of the private landowner.</p> <p><u>Beauty & Tranquillity</u></p> <p>The survey of the local community frequently references the attractiveness and tranquillity of the area. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2019) described the area within which the site is situated as having a high sensitivity to residential development based on the 'combination of prominent and varied landforms, strong settlement edge, sense of scenic rural character and valued natural features.'</p> <p><u>Wildlife</u></p> <p>The community survey highlighted a range of sighted species including badgers, foxes, deer, rabbits, squirrels and a number of bird species. The western part of the site is designated as a County Site of Biological Importance (SBI) and the eastern wooded area is designated as a Biodiversity Alert Site (BAS). The</p>

	<p>site is classified as having a 'high' habitat distinctiveness in the Nature Recovery Network Mapping – Final Report 2020. The Staffordshire Ecological Record Site Report (2020) for the SBI identifies the site as being mainly composed of semi-improved acid grassland with an area of broad-leaved woodland also being present. The 1996 Ecological Survey for the SBI concluded that the site was very important and that it should be protected. The Staffordshire Ecological Record Site Report (2020) identifies the BAS site as a broadleaved semi-natural woodland dominated by sweet chestnut, with some sycamore, oak, beech and birch. The report noted that there was a good variety of habitat for birds.</p> <p><u>Historical Significance</u></p> <p>The supporting historical character evidence relates primarily to the adjacent urban area though it does provide a context highlighting the stages of enclosure and significance of extractive industries in the wider local area. The historical evidence indicates that the site was a component part of the extensive Kinver Forest, one of three Royal Forests in South Staffordshire.</p>
<p><i>Should site be allocated as Local Green Space in the Local Plan Review?</i></p>	<p>No. Whilst the submission and attached survey of the local community clearly show that the site is valued locally and provides an important area of informal recreation, the site already has a high level of existing protection (Green Belt, SBI, BAS designation and blanket Tree Preservation Orders) which recognise the significance of this site. The site's existing Green Belt status and natural environment designations would suggest that Local Green Space designation is unlikely to offer significant additional protection.</p> <p>Legally permitted access to the site is restricted to the Public Right of Way crossing the site which are statutorily protected. Access to the wider area is at the discretion of the landowner. This is not a matter which would be subject to influence by the designation of the area as Local Green Space.</p> <p>The landscape within which the site sits has been recognised as being of 'high' sensitivity and evidence suggests the historical landscape associations may merit further consideration. These are evidenced matters which are likely to be weighed in support of protecting this site. It is considered unlikely that additional weight would be afforded to such considerations by a Local Green Space designation.</p>

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 Based on the findings of the site assessment process, no sites are currently proposed for a Local Green Space designation in the Local Plan Review.
- 6.2 In part, the lack of proposed Local Green Space designations at this point in time reflects the lack of formal site suggestions made to the Council by communities. The Council is mindful that other local communities may wish to suggest sites of particular local importance to the Council in future.
- 6.3 To support local communities in proposing Local Green Space designations to the Council, a site suggestion form has been prepared and is attached to Appendix 1 of this topic paper. Site suggestions made by communities using this form will be assessed using the methodology in this topic paper and, if appropriate and justified, designated as Local Green Spaces in the next stage of the Local Plan Review. The findings of this paper will also not preclude local communities preparing neighbourhood plans from reconsidering potential Local Green Space designations in their local area through the preparation of neighbourhood plans, although any designations will still have to have regard to the tests set out in national policy and guidance.

Appendix 1: Local Green Space site suggestion form

Location Plan	
<p><i>n.b. this should clearly indicate the site's boundary on a scaled map and can be attached separately if needed</i></p>	
General Information	
Name/address of site	
Site area (in hectares)	
Who owns the site?	
<p><i>Information on land ownership can be obtained from the Land Registry</i></p>	
Organisation or individual proposing the site for designation	
Is the owner of the site aware of the potential designation and have their views been sought?	
<p><i>Please note sites do not necessarily need the agreement of landowners to be designated as Local Green Spaces.</i></p>	
Do you know if:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is currently a planning application or permission on site? - it is allocated for development in the Local/Neighbourhood Plan? - it is proposed for development in the emerging Local Plan? 	
Is the site subject to any national or local designations or legal protections?	
<p><i>These include Village Green status, Assets of Community Value, Common Land, Green Belt, SSSI, AONB, Local Wildlife Sites, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens, Historic Landscape Areas, Open Countryside etc.</i></p>	

Size, scale and local character	
Is the site an “extensive tract of land” and is it “local in character” <i>E.g. site size, scale relative to settlement and physical relationship to settlement</i>	
How far is the site from the community it serves?	
Is the site publicly accessible?	
Is the site demonstrably special to the local community and hold a particular local significance?	
Evidence submitted to show that the site is “demonstrably special to a local community?” <i>This can include statements from the Parish or other community organisations, resident surveys/petitions, national stakeholders (e.g. Sport England, Natural England, CPRE)</i>	
Is the site of particular importance due to offering opportunities for community uses, including recreation?	
Is the site of particular importance due to its beauty or tranquility? <i>E.g. Does the site provides important views or features, form an important part of the village’s setting or contain landscape designations?</i>	
Is the site of particular historic significance? <i>E.g. Is there evidence the site contributes to the setting of any heritage assets, is it featured in art or literature, is it associated with any important historic events?</i>	
Is the site of particular value for wildlife and biodiversity? <i>E.g. Are there any wildlife designations on the site? Are there local wildlife enhancement or monitoring projects undertaken by the community?</i>	