

**South Staffordshire Council
Local Plan Review**

Preferred Options

**Local Green Space:
Methodology & Assessment
Topic Paper**

September 2021

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 only been one formal request from the community for an area of land to be designated as Local Green Space through the Local Plan Review. However, 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 99 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 100 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), tranquility 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 not previously asked local communities to formally submit suggestions for Local Green Spaces, but has received a suggestion to its previous Local Plan Review consultation and will invite other local communities to do so through the current Preferred Options consultation using the suggestion form contained in this topic paper.

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. However, these are at a relatively early stage at this point in time. 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

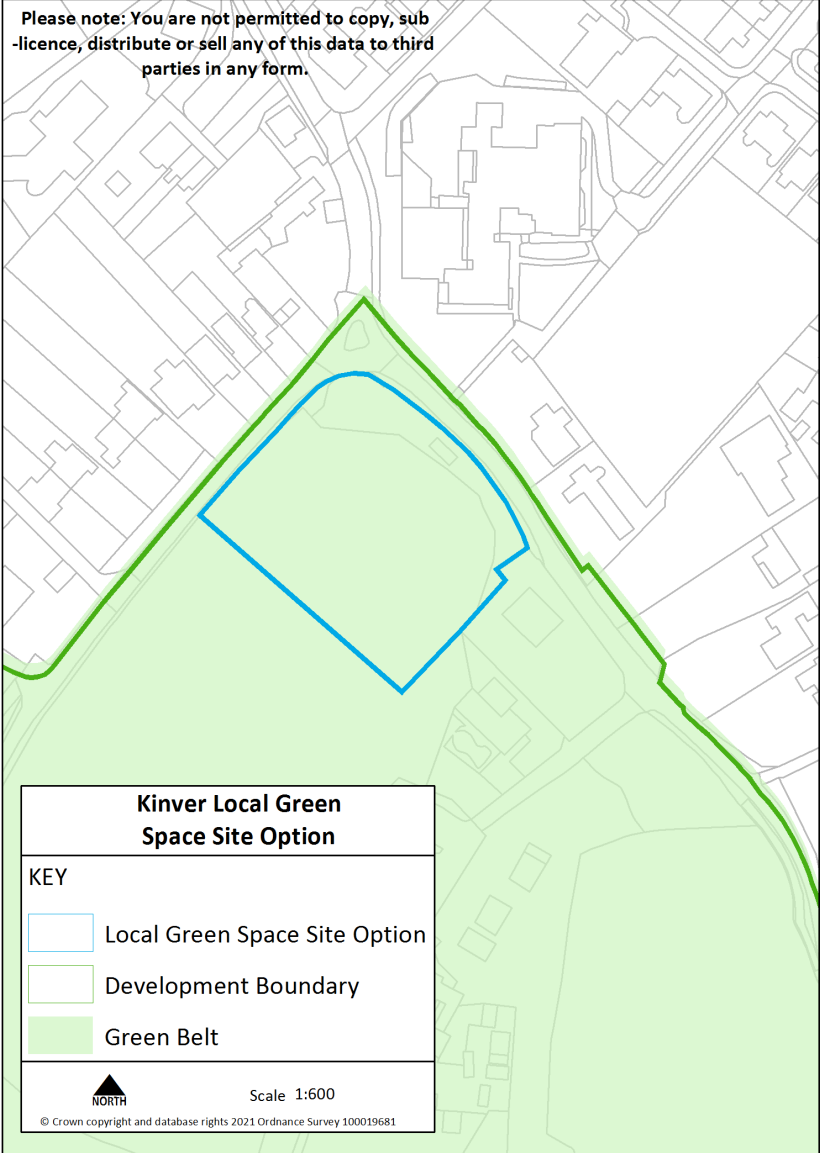
Assessment question	Key points considered by the Council
<i>Is the site already protected from development and would designation provide no further protection?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether site overlaps with key national designations restricting development (e.g. Green Belt, AONB, 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 & tranquility, 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 only one site has been suggested to the Council as a Local Green Space. This is set out below.

<p>Site Name</p>	<p>Pony Paddock, The Compa, Kinver</p>
<p>Site Location</p>	<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>
<p><i>Is the site already protected from development and would designation provide no</i></p>	<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>

<p><i>further protection?</i></p>	<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, Conversation Area and Tree Preservation Orders.</p>
<p><i>Is the site in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves?</i></p>	<p>The site is adjacent to the village of Kinver with walking routes along the adjacent residential streets to the site.</p>
<p><i>Is the site allocated for development or subject of a planning permission?</i></p>	<p>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).</p>
<p><i>Is the site local in character? Is the site an extensive tract of land?</i></p>	<p>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.</p>
<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>	<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</p>

	<p>Orders and the Conservation Area Management Plan, is also 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>

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, for consideration in the Local Plan Review.
- 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? 	

<p>Is the site subject to any national or local designations or legal protections?</p> <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>	
<p>Size, scale and local character</p>	
<p>Is the site an “extensive tract of land” and is it “local in character”</p> <p><i>E.g. site size, scale relative to settlement and physical relationship to settlement</i></p>	
<p>How far is the site from the community it serves?</p>	
<p>Is the site publicly accessible?</p>	
<p>Is the site demonstrably special to the local community and hold a particular local significance?</p>	
<p>Evidence submitted to show that the site is “demonstrably special to a local community?”</p> <p><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></p>	
<p>Is the site of particular importance due to offering opportunities for community uses, including recreation?</p>	
<p>Is the site of particular importance due to its beauty or tranquility?</p> <p><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></p>	
<p>Is the site of particular historic significance?</p> <p><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</i></p>	

<i>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>	