

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance Note 24

Recreational areas

April 2013 - Revised April 2015



Open spaces are a popular resource, which can make a valuable contribution to the social, economic and environmental attractiveness of a neighbourhood in both urban and rural communities, add to the health and well being of local people and provide educational opportunities for children and adults alike. This guidance note considers the meaning of open space and sets out the ways in which Neighbourhood Development Plans can protect and enhance existing provision, and act as a catalyst for securing new spaces.

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An introduction to recreational areas

Herefordshire enjoys access to a wealth of formal parks, open spaces and picturesque countryside, which offer opportunities ranging from quiet contemplation through to active participative sports and pursuits.

Types of open space

The term 'open space' refers to everything from open countryside, including natural landscapes and farmland, through to cemeteries and domestic gardens. The different types of spaces are shown in Appendix 1, and will be useful to bear in mind in preparing and formulating policies for your Neighbourhood Development Plan. Equally, the definitions of categories included in Appendix 2, will help you better understand the different functions that these spaces perform and establish which are of greatest importance to your Neighbourhood Area. It is important to note that all spaces, regardless of ownership and accessibility (for example, public and private spaces) contribute to the amenity and character of an area and can be taken into account. This guidance note is concerned with the kinds of open space that provide a recreational function in your area

Why are recreational areas important?

Recreational areas are important for a number of social, economic and environmental reasons. We've listed some of the benefits below, however it is likely that with your local knowledge of the area you will be able to highlight more as you work through the Neighbourhood Development Plan process.

Social

Well managed and maintained spaces can help to create opportunities to bring communities together, particularly young and old, through local events and social gatherings. They can promote a sense of place, be a source of community pride, and also offer opportunities for people to play an active part in caring for the local environment.

Well designed and managed recreational areas

can be seen as safe places to visit and enjoy by reducing the fear of crime.

Recreational areas can open up opportunities for environmental education for local groups, schools and individuals.

Recreational areas can provide opportunities for physical activity, sport and recreation for all ages and abilities, helping to improve general health and wellbeing of local communities and encouraging more active and healthier lifestyles. As well as physical benefits, access to recreational areas and the natural environment has been shown to have a positive effect on the mental well-being of people. The enormous social value of 'care farms' (places that provide therapeutic or vocational provision for a wide variety of people) is also becoming more and more appreciated. Community gardens, orchards and allotments can all make good recreational areas, encouraging communities to locally grow produce as part of their "five a day".

Economic

Well designed and managed recreational areas can make a locality much more attractive to new businesses, including retail and leisure, investing in the local area and encourage existing businesses to raise their customer standards and take a greater pride in their local community.

Tourism is vital to the County's economy with its unspoilt naturalness and rich heritage a key visitor attraction. High quality accessible recreational areas and countryside will help to attract visitors to an area, thereby benefitting local tourism related businesses.

Recreational areas provide economic benefits in their own right; for example, produce and other natural products from allotments and community orchards.

The quality of civic spaces undoubtedly helps define the identity of towns and cities, which can enhance their attraction for living, working, investment and tourism.

New residential developments can offer opportunities to create new and enhance existing recreational areas provision. Neighbourhood Development Plans can support priorities for enhancement of local facilities and

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identify what is required as part of the new development. Sustainable Drainage Schemes are a good example how a recreational area can provide both natural water/flood management (water storage) partnered with accessible open space and enhanced wildlife habitats.

Environmental

Recreational areas underpin (at all scales) the land and townscape structure that create the individual identity of a settlement. Recreational areas support a wealth of flora and fauna, important in its own right, but critical to many of the elements already mentioned.

Recreational areas can create and enhance green networks and corridors linking spaces, promoting biodiversity and enabling the safe movement of wildlife. [Herefordshire Council's Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat: Managed Green Space](#) which can be viewed on the website supports opportunities to enhance biodiversity through all major developments by the provision of managed green space.

A well-defined and managed Rights of Way network will enhance links between, and within, recreational areas for all abilities of walkers, runners, riders and cyclists. [Herefordshire Council's Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan](#) can be viewed on our website, which sets out priorities for the protection and enhancement of the Rights of Way network.

The right tree in the right place is a key feature of recreational areas helping soften the impact of development and make green and civic spaces more appealing. They can play a role in the control of air, noise and water pollution, contribute to energy reduction by providing shelter for buildings, perform an important social, well-being function and are a great wildlife habitat.

Orchards are an intrinsic part of the character, biodiversity and economics of the county. Orchards old and new can make great recreational areas combining heritage; wildlife; trees; a catalyst for community action and produce a harvest that the local community can benefit from. Herefordshire has been at the cutting edge of "top fruit" breeding, growing and use for over two centuries.

National policy context

National Policy and Guidance reinforces these messages: that recreational areas are a popular resource which can make a valuable contribution to the attractiveness of a neighbourhood; to the health and well being of local people and; to the educational opportunities of children and adults alike.

National Planning Policy Framework

The current national planning policy relating to open space, sport and recreation is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This requires Herefordshire Council to undertake robust assessments which set out quantitative and qualitative surpluses and deficiencies in different types of open space based on the existing and future needs of local communities.

The NPPF also states that existing open space and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity or quality in a suitable location; or
- The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

Also of importance is the new designation of Local Green Space that local communities are now empowered to make through Neighbourhood Development Plans. This enables them to identify green areas of particular importance for special protection if they are not already identified as recreational areas.

Local policy context

At a local level you will need to know which policies you should take account of in relation to your priorities. The key ones are summarised below but all relevant policies can be viewed on Herefordshire Council's website.

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Local Planning Policy

The Local Plan - Core Strategy includes 3 policies on this theme: OS1 - Requirement for open space, sports and recreation facilities; OS2 - Meeting open space, sports and recreation needs; OS3 - Loss of open space, sports or recreation facilities.

The Local Plan - Core Strategy affords a high level of protection to Herefordshire's broad range of recreational areas and facilities and should help to ensure that communities do not miss out on potential for enhancement. That is not to say, however, that neighbourhood plans should not include local or place specific policies on this theme. Guidance Note 8: Writing Planning Policies provides detailed advice in respect of this matter.

The elements of the Local Plan - Core Strategy that relate to recreational space have to conform to the requirements laid out in the NPPF. Under the heading 'Promoting Healthy Communities' (section 8, p17) the NPPF details how recreational areas are to be treated in the planning process.

The list detailed on previous pages can also provide a useful checklist to assess existing open spaces within your neighbourhood area.

As part of this requirement Herefordshire Council undertook an [Open Space Study](#) in 2006 which can be viewed on the council's website.

This document has been replaced in part with a Countywide [Playing Pitch Assessment 2012](#) (which covers outdoor playing pitches) and a Countywide [Play Facilities Study 2012](#) (which covers play provision for children and young people) which are available on the Council's website.

The rest of the data within the 2006 Open Space Study (covering amenity green space, parks and gardens and semi natural open space) will not be updated at this time.

[Herefordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2010](#) can be viewed on our website and sets out a list of criteria based on consultation between Herefordshire Council and Natural England. It recognises that people like to visit and partake in activities associated with the countryside and

landscape, that a rich and varied biodiversity provides the essential building blocks and that each landscape type creates a different recreation experience. Therefore the plan identifies the minimum standards for access to this type of semi natural open space.

The data findings from all of these documents have provided the evidence to enable locally derived standards to be set for open space which have been included in the Local Plan - Core Strategy and provides the basis for developing local strategies such as Neighbourhood Development Plans.

Other players in delivering recreational areas

A number of Government Agencies exist who provide advisory roles in delivering open space. These include:

Sport England:

Is the Government Agency responsible for focusing on helping people and communities create a sporting habit for life. They are accountable to Parliament through the department of Culture, Media and Sports. They have a key role in protecting sports provision and are formally consulted on all English planning applications affecting sports fields. They provide support, share best practice and help deliver sport locally. They provide a range of planning services designed to develop strategic planning for sports facilities and try to ensure that the development of new sports facilities are underpinned by robust needs and evidence base. Further information on the work of Sport England, including guidance and planning resources can be obtained clicking at the following address. <http://www.sportengland.org/>

Natural England:

As the Government's advisor on the natural environment, they provide practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England's natural wealth for the benefit of everyone. Their remit is to ensure sustainable stewardship of the land and sea so that people and nature can thrive. It is their responsibility to see that England's rich natural environment can adapt and survive intact for future generations to enjoy. They work with farmers and land

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managers; business and industry; planners and developers; national and local government; interest groups and local communities to help them improve their local environment. The link <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/> will take you to the Natural England homepage from where you can search their website and access a vast range of useful publications:

For advice and information on trees and woodland the following links are good places to start your search:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/>
<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk>
<http://www.treecouncil.org.uk/>

Other useful Information about open space, the natural environment and Neighbourhood Planning can be found on the wildlife trusts website, which can be access by clicking this link <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>

Play England:

Is part of the children's charity NCB and was established by the former Children's Play Council. It delivers a programme of work that represents and supports the play sector in response to the changing political context. Their purpose is to ensure that children and young people in England have the space and opportunity to play freely as part of their daily lives, at school and at home and throughout the public realm. They promote local strategies for play, promote equality and diversity in play, raise awareness and promote standards and give advice and support to anyone involved in the strategic development of children's play. Further information on the work of Play England can be obtained by clicking this link: <http://www.playengland.org.uk/>.

Herefordshire Council

Herefordshire Council is responsible for developing policies and guidance on the future provision of play, leisure, public open space ('urban' parks and 'rural' countryside facilities) and the County's Public Rights of Way network. Council officers perform a 'hands-on' strategic function formally commenting on planning applications and advising developers at the pre-application stage on the requirements and provision of open space, access, play and sports facilities. The council also manages the open

spaces it owns through the Parks management Contract and its dedicated Countryside Service Team. Please see the Council's website for further details. <http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside>

Parish Councils

Many parish councils across Herefordshire take an active role in the identification of open spaces and recreational facilities that are in need of enhancement within their own area. In these areas there tends to be a more focussed, less generalised provision of Section 106 open space obligations, as specific areas can be discussed before the agreements are finalised and the spending limitations shaped accordingly.

It is considered that parish councils are best placed to be able to identify the need for such open spaces or recreational facilities within their area and balance this with the needs of the local community to establish a list of priority sites.

The case for recreational areas in your neighbourhood

In some areas there may be some recreational areas of poor quality or poor value that could lost to redevelopment. Your local community would be the best people to identify these areas. Any poor quality land sold for development could help improve existing or provide a new site. (See Policy SC1 of the Local Plan - Core Strategy concerning community facilities). For Herefordshire Council owned sites we will be preparing our own audit of recreational areas with this in mind.

However, once developed upon, recreational areas are likely to be lost to the community forever, since they can rarely be recovered. This alone makes the protection of good quality and accessible open space a worthwhile exercise, as it can:

- Improve community safety
- Build local confidence in the built and natural environments
- Bring your community closer together
- Improve residents' general health and wellbeing

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- Raise the environmental profile of settlements
- Make your settlements more attractive places in which to work and live
- Make a contribution towards a better economy

How to deliver, protect and enhance recreational areas within your parish

The Local Plan - Core Strategy takes a positive stance towards creating new open spaces and safeguarding existing provision across Herefordshire. However, there are several things which Neighbourhood Development Plans can do to deliver, protect and enhance recreational areas within your parish.

Safeguarding open space

It is possible to prevent the loss of public or private open space with recreational value, or locally important open areas or green spaces through through polices or safeguarding on a policies map within your Neighbourhood Development Plan. Policies OS3, and depending on the circumstances OS2, LD1, LD2 and LD3 can provide more details on how this is achieved at county level.

Site allocations

It is also possible to allocate sites solely for new open space, play areas or sports facilities in your parish, including allotments. To do this however requires evidence of a local need. This evidence can be found in your local consultations and dialogue with your local community and would help to satisfy the local needs for sport and recreation provision, as evidenced in the as evidenced in the Council's evidence base, or your own studies. Further guidance on this matter can be obtained from Guidance Note 21: Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites.

Detailed Neighbourhood Plan policies

It is not envisaged that Neighbourhood Development Plans will need to include local standards for open space and the Local Plan - Core Strategy will preclude the loss of public or private areas with recreational value, or which help meet the recreational needs of your community. However, this does not mean that

your plan should not include detailed planning policies on recreational areas.

The extent of your policies on recreational areas ought to reflect local circumstances, but as a general rule such policies could, for instance, aim to bring about improvements in residents' satisfaction with local spaces and play areas by setting out a requirement for both old and new provision, to be of high quality, attractive to users, accessible, well maintained and managed. Similarly, your policies could help to ensure that in considering proposals for new housing development the opportunity will be taken to include new allotment provision, where this can be shown to be justified.

Assets of community value

In addition to this, under the Localism Act (2011), Herefordshire Council must maintain a list of land and property (whether in public or private ownership) across the County that is of "community value". The Act gives the local community the opportunity to acquire or maintain the property on the list if it is put up for sale. The intention behind this initiative is to enable local communities to take responsibility for the things which they value before they are lost to the community through a potential sale, transfer or redevelopment by a third party.

Examples might be the local cricket pitch or even a historic feature in private ownership. It is possible that parish councils will seek to re-open or take ownership of their local public house. An excellent case study of the complete process can be seen at www.lyvennetcommunitypub.com. An owner will be notified if their property is placed on the list and, in the event of an intended sale, the owner must give the community up to 6 months to raise the money if they express interest in acquiring the listed asset, at current use value.

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Appendix 1

A typology of open space

Main types of Open Space				
ALL GREEN SPACE	Amenity green space	Recreation Green Space	Parks and Gardens	
			Informal Recreation Areas	
			Outdoor Sports Areas	
			Play Areas	
		Incidental Green Space	Housing Green Space	
			Other Incidental Space	
		Private Green Space	Domestic Gardens	
		Functional green space	Productive Green Space	Remnant Farmland
				Farm Parks
	Allotments			
	Burial Grounds		Cemeteries	
			Churchyards	
	Institutional Grounds		School Grounds (including school farms/growing areas)	
			Other institutional grounds	
	Semi-natural Habitats	Wetland	Open/Running Water	
			Marsh	
		Woodland	Deciduous Woodland	
			Coniferous Woodland	
			Mixed Woodland	
		Other Habitats	Moor/Heath	
Grassland				
Disturbed Ground				
Linear Green Space	River and Canal Banks			
	Transport Corridors (road, rail, cycleways, bridleways walking routes)			

Appendix 2:

Definitions of types of Open Space

Definitions of types of Open Space	
<p>Amenity Green Space All land which is designed primarily for amenity, both visual amenity and enjoyment for access and recreation. It consists mainly of publicly owned land but also includes private land, such as domestic gardens, which can contribute greatly to the green fabric of towns and cities. Sub-types of amenity green space are listed alongside.</p>	<p>Parks and Gardens Areas of green space specifically designed for public access and enjoyment and combining a variety of landscape and horticultural elements (sometimes including semi-natural habitats) and facilities for the public (including buildings) and in some cases incorporating sports facilities and/or play areas. At the smaller scale may include community gardens.</p>
	<p>Informal Recreation Areas Areas of green space available for public access and enjoyment but with only low key provision of facilities. Usually consist mainly of grass areas for informal recreation, but may also have trees, a play area, paths and sometimes toilets and parking area.</p>
	<p>Outdoor Sports Areas Green space designed to accommodate sports: including sports pitches, playing fields, golf courses, and other outdoor activities. Often occur within parks, but may also be separate, especially in the case of golf courses.</p>
	<p>Play Areas Green space designed specifically for children's play, with various levels of provision of equipment and facilities. May occur separately but also often incorporated within parks, information recreation areas and outdoor sports facilities.</p>
	<p>Incidental Green Space Areas of green space that, although publicly owned and managed, and accessible for public enjoyment, have no clear recreation function and little significant value as habitat. Their function is usually as a green 'landscape backdrop' but their landscape value can sometimes be minimal because of poor design. They include the 'left over' green spaces within housing and other forms of development.</p>
	<p>Domestic Gardens Green space within the curtilage of individual dwellings, which is generally not publicly accessible, but which often makes a significant contribution to the green fabric of town / village environments.</p>

<p>Functional Green Space Green space which has a primary function other than amenity or recreation, although some of these areas may also be publicly accessible and available for people's enjoyment. The primary functions include farming, horticulture, burial grounds and education and other institutional use. Access to these green spaces may go hand-in-hand with the primary function (for example, cemeteries, churchyards and allotments) or be by public right of way, or by agreement, for example where school grounds are made available for public use.</p>	<p>Farmland Green space under agricultural management includes farms which also have a recreation and education function such as farm parks.</p>
	<p>Allotments Green space available for members of the public who occupy them to cultivate vegetable or fruit crops for their own use</p>
	<p>Burial Grounds Land used as burial grounds, including cemeteries and churchyards</p>
	<p>School Grounds Green space in the grounds of schools including sports pitches, other outdoor sports facilities, play areas, gardens, nature areas, school farms and growing areas and incidental green space.</p>
	<p>Other institutional Grounds Green space in the grounds of institutions such as universities and colleges, hospitals and nursing homes, and associated with commercial and industrial premises, including gardens, sports pitches, other outdoor sports facilities, play areas, semi-natural habitats and incidental green space.</p>
<p>Semi-natural Green Space Green space that is made up of semi-natural habitat. These habitats may be encapsulated areas of the countryside that existed before the urban area expanded. Alternatively they may have been formed by the natural processes of colonisation and succession on abandoned or disturbed ground or by deliberate creation of new habitats through initiatives such as urban forestry and reclamation of derelict land. Some of these habitats may not be accessible for public enjoyment, though in some cases where there is access it may be unofficial, but still extremely important.</p>	<p>Wetland Green space dominated by wet habitats, including water bodies, running water and fen, marsh, bog and wet flush vegetation</p>
	<p>Woodland All forms of urban woodland including deciduous woodland (both ancient semi-natural and woodlands or more recent origin) and mixed and coniferous woodland (including plantations and shelterbelts).</p>
	<p>Moor and Heath Areas of moorland and heath land vegetation consisting mainly of ericaceous species, and including moorland grass, shrub moor, shrub heath and bracken. Likely to include some commons within urban areas.</p>
	<p>Grassland Grassland which is not agriculturally improved and not formally part of an amenity greenspace, including calcareous grassland, acidic upland grassland and unimproved meadows. Could include established vegetation on reclaimed derelict land which is not part of a formal recreation green space.</p>

	<p>Disturbed Ground Land which has been disturbed by previous development or land use but is now abandoned, waste or derelict and is now going through the process of re-colonisation and natural succession.</p>
<p>Linear Green Space Green space that occurs in association with linear features, especially transport routes such as roads, railways and canals, but also rivers and streams.</p>	<p>River and Canal Banks Green space occurring along the margins of canals or rivers and forming part of the river or canal corridor.</p>
	<p>Transport Corridors The often substantial areas of green space associated with transport. Includes: the variety of habitats, associate with railways, which are often inaccessible but when they fall into disuse can become an important part of an open space network; green space associated with roads, and especially the large areas of grassland, scrub, trees and woodland found along major roads and motorways; and green space along cycleways, bridleways and walking routes.</p> <p>Public Rights of Way There are over 3400 Kms of public footpaths, bridleways and byways open to all traffic which are open and free to use by members of the public. This network provides access to the countryside, links between communities, access to services and a opportunities for wide variety of recreational activities from walking through to equestrian events. The public rights of way network also plays a key role in the development of tourism and helps provide an income to the many business that thrive thanks to the unique countryside. Details of the rights of way network is now available on Herefordshire Council's website.</p>

Neighbourhood Planning guidance notes available:

Deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan

1. Which is the right tool for your parish
2. What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan
3. Getting started
4. A guide to procedures
5. Funding

Plan Production

6. Developing a Vision and Objectives
7. Generating options
8. Writing planning policies
9. Environmental Assessment
10. Evidence base and information requirements
11. Implementation and Monitoring
12. Best practice community engagement techniques
13. Statutory consultees
14. Writing a consultation statement
15. Planning and other legislation
16. Web enabling your plan
17. Using OS based mapping
18. Glossary of planning terms

Topics

19. Sustainable Water Management in Herefordshire
20. Guide to settlement boundaries
21. Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites
22. Meeting your housing requirements
23. Conservation issues
24. Recreational areas
25. Renewable energy
26. Transport issues
27. Community Infrastructure Levy

Additional Guidance

28. Setting up a steering group
29. Creating a questionnaire
30. Community facilities
31. Conformity with the Local Plan (Core Strategy)
32. Examinations of Neighbourhood Development Plans
33. Guide to Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendums
34. Tourism
35. Basic Conditions
36. Your plan - Contributing to sustainable development