

## How local communities can protect their valued green spaces

This brief guide looks at four specific land designations: Local Green Spaces, Assets of Community Value, Village Greens, and Local Nature Reserves.

It is widely recognised that connection to nature is important for physical and mental health and the availability of green spaces is essential in built-up areas to offset the effects of climate change. How can communities ensure that green spaces are preserved for future generations? Can enduring protections be put into place?

### An array of land protection designations

Land protection operates at local, regional, national, and international levels. Nature sites and areas of countryside can be given a special status as protected areas because of their natural and cultural importance by local councils or organisations such as Natural England.

What do different designations mean legally under planning policy? What are the implications of one form of designation versus another? And how can local communities achieve one of these designations?

We will try to answer some of these questions here.

### Local Green Spaces

**Local Green Space** is a formal land designation first introduced in the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012. This designation can only be made through the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan process and affords designated land the same protection from unwarranted and inappropriate development as Green Belts. This makes the **Local Green Space** designation a powerful tool in land use planning.

In early 2022 CPRE published research into Local Green Spaces [https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Feb-2022\\_CPRES\\_Local-Green-Spaces-full-report-1.pdf](https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Feb-2022_CPRES_Local-Green-Spaces-full-report-1.pdf). The research shows that just over 80% of **Local Green Spaces** have been designated at least in part due to their recreational value, and by protecting the recreational value of these spaces under the **Local Green Space** designation, many local communities also seek to secure their social value.

### Local Green Spaces in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

As of February 2022, there were 137 designated **Local Green Spaces** in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, which equates to 16 **Local Green Spaces** per 100,000 people.

### Applying for the Local Green Space designation

The relevant authority for approval of **Local Green Space** is the local planning authority, i.e. the district or borough council. Parish and town councils can initiate the process, and **Local Green Spaces** can be formalised in Neighbourhood Plans as well as Local Plans.

### Eligibility criteria

**Local Green Spaces** must be demonstrably special to their local communities because of their beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity, or richness of wildlife. **Local Green Spaces** might also be community gardens, orchards, fields popular with dog walkers, and recreation grounds. All new residential areas should include green areas that were planned as part of the development and these may be formally

designated as Local Green Spaces. It's important that **Local Green Spaces** are close to the communities they serve, preferably within easy walking distance.

### **Assets of Community Value**

The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to maintain a list of **Assets of Community Value** which have been nominated by the local community. When listed assets come up for sale or change of ownership, the Act then gives community groups the time to raise money to bid for the asset. This is intended to help local communities keep much-loved sites in public use and part of local life.

A building or land can be designated as an **Asset of Community Value** if its main use is (or has recently been) to further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community and could do so in the future. The Localism Act states that 'social interests' include cultural, recreational, and sporting activities.

One of the main benefits of the **Asset of Community Value** designation is to give the local community the right to bid, if the owner of the property decides to sell.

### **Examples of Assets of Community Value in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**

Each district or borough council should maintain a list of **Assets of Community Value**. For example, in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough the list includes green spaces such as Thriplow Village Green, Peakirk Allotments, and Isleham Community Orchard.

### **Applying for Assets of Community Value designation**

As with **Local Green Spaces**, the relevant authority for approval of the **Assets of Communities Values** designation is the district or borough council. Local community organisations including parish councils, neighbourhood forums, community groups of at least twenty-one members, and not-for-private-profit organisations can nominate land and buildings for the **Asset of Community Value** designation.

After successful application, an **Asset of Community Value** is listed by the local authority for five years. At the end of the five-year period, any **Asset of Community Value** is de-listed, and another application must be made for a new five-year period of listing.

### **Eligibility criteria**

The types of property that can be listed include pubs, shops, community facilities, libraries, swimming pools, village shops, markets, and areas of open space. A **Local Green Space** can be registered as an **Asset of Community Value** which would then give community interest groups an opportunity to bid if the owner wants to dispose of the land.

### **Village Greens**

A **Village Green** can be any land on which a considerable number of people have engaged in recreational activity. Greens arose from the old manorial system and, through custom, became the area of the village where local villagers indulged in 'lawful sport and pastimes'. Like other customary rights, the courts started to recognise and protect these areas and the rights of people to use them for recreation (one of the earliest cases dates from 1665). Many of today's town and **Village Greens** were registered in the late 1960s under the Commons Registration Act 1965.

### **Examples of Village Greens in Cambridgeshire can be found on the interactive map**

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/countryside-access/common-land-town-and-village-greens>

## Applying for the Village Green Designation

The relevant authority for approval of the **Village Green** designation is Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC). Detailed guidance and application forms are available on the CCC website at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/countryside-access/common-land-town-and-village-greens>

### Eligibility criteria

To register a piece of land as a **Village Green**, evidence of twenty years of public use (for lawful sports and pastimes) is needed.

## Local Nature Reserves

**Local Nature Reserves** are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally. These can be ancient woodlands, meadows, chalk streams and their habitats or other wetlands, or almost any area where distinctive or threatened species are found.

### Examples of Local Nature Reserves in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

There are many **Local Nature Reserves** in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. They include Ring's End near Guyhirn, Mare Fen, Swavesey, Beechwoods in Cambridge and Eye Green in Peterborough.

### Applying for the Local Nature Reserve designation

The relevant authorities for approval of the **Local Nature Reserve** designation are county, district and borough councils who must consult with Natural England. Town and parish councils may be able to approve **Local Nature Reserves** if the district council has given them the power to do this.

### Eligibility criteria

The site should be locally important for wildlife and/or geology, and should be available to the public for education and enjoyment without disturbing wildlife. Brownfield land, historic cemeteries, agricultural land, and orchards, as well as commons and other accessible green spaces can become designated as **Local Nature Reserves** if they have wildlife or geological interest.

The management plan for a **Local Nature Reserve** must include protecting its natural features and maintaining its accessibility for the public.

Natural England has produced a useful reference guide with more information: [Local Nature Reserves in England: A guide to their selection and declaration](#)

### What next?

At CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough our mission is to protect and promote our beautiful countryside for everyone. As part of this, we want more local communities to be able to protect their local green spaces from inappropriate development. If you would like to find out more or get involved go to <https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/how-to-help/>

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