



The Plan for Stafford Borough Part 2

Examination Statement – Issue 8 – Local Green Space

June 2016

Issue 8: Local Green Space

8.1 *Is the most appropriate way for designating Local Green Space (LGS) through Neighbourhood Plans? Why would it be inappropriate to include LGS in PSB2?*

8.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (P2-F1) enables local communities to identify, for special protection, green areas of particular importance to them. It goes on to state that:

'By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances'.

(Paragraph 76)

8.1.2 Local Green Space (LGS) is a restrictive and significant policy designation. The Framework requires the managing of development within LGS to be consistent with Green Belts. Effectively, LGS, once designated, provide protection that is comparable to that for Green Belt land. The NPPF (P2-F1) is explicit in stating that:

'The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space'.

(Paragraph 77)

8.1.3 The requirements for designated LGS is set out in paragraph 77 of the NPPF and is as follows: that the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves; it is demonstrably special to the local community and holds particular local significance; and it is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land. Given that the NPPF is very precise in its defining of these criteria, it is essential when allocating LGS that the Borough Council can clearly demonstrate that the requirements for its allocation are met in full. In the context of the NPPF's criteria, it is the Council's view that this appears to be largely intended to cover green space within the built up area that perform an important community function.

8.1.4 The Plan for Stafford Borough Part 2 Proposals document (P2-G1) included Policy SB3 on the protection of LGS. This identified areas of proposed LGS were shown on the accompanying inset maps for Stafford, Stone and the Key Service Villages (P2-G3 to G14) as well as identified in tables within the document. These sites all fell within the proposed Settlement Boundaries.

8.1.5 A number of representations were received, proposing the designation of LGS at two sites that had not been identified in the Proposal Document (P2-G1), namely at land adjacent to Tilling Drive which falls within the Settlement Boundary for Stone (P2-A3); and also at land adjacent to the Falmouth Avenue, located to the east of Stafford which falls outside of the Settlement Boundary for Stafford (P2-A2).

8.1.6 By way of background it is important to note that the land adjacent to Falmouth Avenue in Stafford was previously within the Residential Development Boundary of the Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001 for the

development for up to 100 residential dwellings. However the site was not developed during the Plan period. An outline application for the construction of up to 97 houses was refused on 11 August 2014 (P2- L29). The application was refused as the Council could demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land, including a 20% buffer. Furthermore it was also refused on the grounds that it was contrary to adopted Spatial Principle SP7, which states that only where insufficient sites on previously developed land in sustainable locations are available to meet development requirements, should greenfield sites be released.

- 8.1.7 The vast majority of LGS identified in the Proposals Document (P2-G1) did not receive responses from the local community, and therefore the Council was unable to assess adequately how these LGS's might meet the criteria set out in the NPPF, notably bullet point 2 of paragraph 76 which states the following: *"where the green area is 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"*.
- 8.1.8 Even where comments were received, as in the case of Falmouth Avenue and Tilling Drive; the Council could not easily distinguish local views about the relative importance of protecting land as greenspace from general expressions of opposition to further local development. This would run counter to the Government's position that green space designations should be *'consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential service'* (NPPF paragraph 76).
- 8.1.9 The Plan for Stafford Borough Part 2- Publication (P2-A1), therefore removed the policy on designating LGS altogether, on the basis that the Council considers that Neighbourhood Plans are the most appropriate way to designate LGS in order to satisfy the second bullet point of paragraph 76 in the NPPF. A number of Neighbourhood Plans in Stafford Borough have identified Local Green Spaces at Gnosall, Eccleshall, Hixon, Great Haywood and Little Haywood / Colwich through this process of community engagement.

8.2 Why would it be inappropriate to include LGS in PSB2?

- 8.2.1 Following the removal of the policy on LGS in the Plan for Stafford Borough Part 2 – Publication (P2-A1), whilst a number of representations were received in respect of designating Falmouth Avenue as LGS, no other representations were received in respect of removing this policy.
- 8.2.2 As LGS is linked to community value, which must be demonstrated through community nominations, it is recognised that this process has not been undertaken across the Borough in the preparation of Part 2. Part 2 is the second part of the Local Plan for Stafford Borough and guides where new development will take place across the borough. The purpose of Part 2 is principally to define the settlement boundaries for Stafford, Stone and the Key Service Villages in context of Spatial Principle policies SP3, SP4 and

SP7 (P2-C1). As stated in paragraph 8.1.2 the designation of LGS is a strategic issue, as it confers the same level of protection a Green Belt land. For this reason and as stated above, the Council does not consider it is appropriate to include LGS within Part 2 of the Plan for Stafford Borough and instead it should be promoted by the local community through Neighbourhood Plans. As part of the Local Plan Review process, Local Green Space will be considered as a strategic issue as there could be other sites in addition to Falmouth Avenue in the borough where no Neighbourhood Plans are proposed such as at Weston. This will include a detailed study of the evidence required through the National Planning Policy Framework, and it is noted that other local planning authorities in the preparation of their Local Plans have undertaken a 'call for sites' exercise such as Bath and North East Somerset Council and Craven District Council.