



## LOCAL GREEN SPACE

### BACKGROUND, DESIGNATION PROCESS AND EVIDENCE

#### (1) SUMMARY

- (1.1) This paper aims to explain the background to Local Green Space (LGS) and the process that leads to designation.
- (1.2) It then sets out evidence to support designation of Rowley Fields as LGS.

#### (2) BACKGROUND

- (2.1) Local Green Space is a statutory designation that is available for areas of open land that meet various criteria. It was introduced in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paras.76 to 78, published in March 2012. The Government has issued a Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) note, last updated in March 2014, which expands the NPPF information.
- (2.2) The purpose of LGS is to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities. Designation gives protection consistent with that of the Green Belt (PPG para.020).
- (2.3) NPPF para. 76 states “Local communities, through local and neighbourhood plans, should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as LGS, local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. Identifying land as LGS should therefore be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. LGS should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period”.
- (2.4) Three criteria need to be satisfied to achieve designation as LGS. They are set out in NPPF para. 77 and are:
- (2.5) **The proposed LGS must be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves.** There is no definition of this in the NPPF and it will be up to individual planning authorities to define. It may vary depending on the size of the community served, the size of the green space or the value placed on it by the community. The land must not be isolated from the community and would normally be within easy walking distance.
- (2.6) **The proposed LGS must be demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance.** Examples to support this might be beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of wildlife.

(2.7) **The proposed LGS must be local in character and not an extensive tract of land.**

(2.8) Para. 78 explains that local policy for managing development within a LGS should be consistent with policy for Green Belts.

### (3) **DESIGNATION PROCESS**

(3.1) Reviewing the PPG notes, the logical sequence of steps that need to be satisfied appears to be :

(3.1.1) The proposed land should not be “an extensive tract of land” (NPPF para. 77 & PPG para. 015).

(3.1.2) The proposed land should be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves (NPPF para. 77 & PPG para. 014).

(3.1.3) Designation of the proposed land should be consistent with overall development policy (NPPF para. 78 & PPG para. 007)

(3.1.4) The proposed land should be demonstrably special to the local community (NPPF para. 77 & PPG para. 009).

(3.2) Potential LGS has to be identified and included within Local or Neighbourhood Plans.

(3.3) The local planning authority undertakes the actual designation. In the case of Rowley Fields, this is Stratford District Council.

(3.4) So far, the Town Council has prepared a draft Neighbourhood Plan. This identifies the part of Rowley Fields that is adjacent to, but not part of, the Green Belt.

(3.5) Stratford District Council was contacted to ascertain if it has any policies or processes regarding LGS. A reply from the Planning Department stated that as things stand, the Council is not intending to identify LGS in its Development Plan and has not produced any definitions or guidance to identify such areas. Their appropriateness will be assessed through the examination of the Stratford NP by an independent examiner.

(3.6) Annex 1 explains how Rowley Fields meets the criteria for designation as Local Green Space.

(3.7) Annex 2 sets out evidence that shows how Rowley Fields is demonstrably special to its local community.

## Annex 1

### HOW ROWLEY FIELDS MEETS THE CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION AS LOCAL GREEN SPACE

	<b>Designation criteria</b>	<b>How Rowley Fields meets the criteria</b>
3.1.1	The proposed LGS must be local in character and not an extensive tract of land.	The size is identified and mapped in the draft Neighbourhood Plan. This demonstrates that it forms a natural link between the edge of the town and the Welcome Hills.
3.1.2	The proposed LGS must be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves	<p>The proposed area of RF is sited next to the community it serves, being merely the width of a road away.</p> <p>The community enjoys good and easy access, whether by foot, wheelchair or vehicle. Parking is readily available for people that need it.</p>
3.1.3	Designation of the proposed land should be consistent with overall development policy	<p>The land has not been identified for development in any local plan so far.</p> <p>The draft Neighbourhood Plan identifies it as LGS.</p>
3.1.4	The proposed LGS must be demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance.	There is substantial evidence that supports this point. Due to the volume, it is detailed separately in Annex 2.

## **Annex 2**

### **EVIDENCE TO SHOW THAT ROWLEY FIELDS IS DEMONSTRABLY SPECIAL TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

#### **Evidence to demonstrate recreational value**

##### **Results of User Surveys**

A survey of users was undertaken at the main entrance gate over the weekend of 14 & 15 February 2015. The weather was dull and overcast and with the sunset at 1720, there were no evening visits. Despite this, 419 people used the land for leisure and recreation over the two days.

The timing of the survey identified a minimum numbers of users. In good weather and long summer days, the numbers are likely to be much higher.

The age range of users was wide – 7% below 18, 65% between 19 and 60 and 28% over 60. The pattern of use showed that no less than 31% of users visited the land daily. The survey also ascertained that 98% of users were against development on the land.

In addition, a further 240 signed statements were obtained from residents that live nearby. These statements evidence regular use for recreation and leisure, everything from dog walking to kite flying.

The survey and statements clearly evidence that the land has significant value to the residents of Stratford upon Avon for recreation and leisure.

All survey forms, statements, film, user organisations and reference material mentioned in this evidence are available on request.

#### **1. Extensive network of active supporters**

An extensive network of supporters has grown. Three groups now exist:

- Friends of Rowley Fields. This unincorporated association has over 70 paid up members. It has a constitution, action plan, financial resources, website and regular newsletters. It liaises with the owners, Stratford Town Trust (STT), and lobbies them regarding future action and site maintenance. The Friends has identified short, medium and long term actions to maximise the recreational benefit that the land provides. It has hosted a number of community events including a community picnic, nature walk, bat walk and family treasure hunt.
- Facebook supporters group. This is a dedicated support group operated via Facebook. It has over 1100 followers and hundreds of posts. It provides regular news and information to its members regarding the land.
- Rowley Fields Forever. This is an informal group, established in 2013, with the aim of highlighting potential plans to build on part of Rowley Fields.
- Rowley Fields has received support from several political parties from across Stratford upon Avon.

During early 2015, Friends of Rowley Fields interviewed a range of users and produced a film highlighting the importance of Rowley Fields to the local community.

## **2. Direct provision of benefit to disadvantaged members of society**

The land is flat and therefore easily accessible to people with mobility issues. There is a limited supply of such land elsewhere in the town. Access is available via a Radar locked gate and a block-paved path provides a safe surface to benches for sitting. Free parking facilitates regular and frequent visits, as evidenced by the user survey.

Students with Special Needs and disabilities from the nearby Welcome Hills School directly benefit from Rowley Fields. They learn from the new situations that it offers, such as wildlife and people. They also learn about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle from it.

Socially isolated people benefit from the opportunities to meet others, particularly dog walkers, in the open environment of the land.

In 2015, research demonstrated that having access to green spaces significantly reduced the gap in well being between richer and poorer people (Centre for Research on Environment, Society and Health). In 2012, the National Trust commissioned a report, which found that between 1970 and 2010, the area in which British children were permitted to play unsupervised shrank by 90%.

## **3. Local action taken when threatened with development**

STT, the landowner, made an initial proposal for development of the site. When the District Council issued a "Call for Sites" as part of their Core Strategy process, STT put forward the whole site as suitable for development.

As a result, the local community expressed massive concern.

Action included:

- Complaints to the Board of Trustees;
- Letters of objection to local press and radio;
- A "street" coffee morning and protest held at the site;
- Protests outside the Trust's office;
- Significant objections to Trustees and officers at the Trust's Engagement Event;
- Lobbying of local politicians;
- Collation of petitions and user statements;
- The requisition of an Extra-Ordinary General Meeting of the Trust by members.

The User Survey detailed above ascertained that 98% of users were against development. The overwhelming objection resulted in STT withdrawing 7.8 acres of Rowley Fields from the Call for Sites. STT have also publicly stated that they do not object to LGS designation for this part of the land.

## **Evidence to demonstrate historic significance**

### **1. Role in meeting an objective of the Charity that owns it**

Rowley Fields directly fulfils a charitable objective of STT – the body that owns the land. The Trust’s objectives are set out in its Memorandum of Association. They are the reasons why the charity exists and why it enjoys the benefits that a Registered Charity brings.

Specifically, object 4 states “to provide or support (with the object of improving the conditions of life for beneficiaries in the interests of social welfare) facilities for recreation and other leisure-time occupation”. Rowley Fields has been fulfilling this object since the Trust was created in 2001 and for many years previously when the land was owned by the then Town Council.

The beneficiaries are set out in the Memorandum of Association and are “those living in the Town of Stratford upon Avon”. In particular, the disadvantaged members of society identified previously should have their social welfare directly benefit from object 4.

In summary, Rowley Fields is directly linked to the whole community of Stratford upon Avon and has provided facilities for recreation for many years. This role was recognised by the Charity Commissioners when they created the current STT.

### **2. Provision over the long term**

Many respondents and user statements demonstrate use of the land dating back decades. Many people using the land today recall their parents and grandparents using the land for recreation and leisure in times gone by.

### **3. Use by clubs and societies**

Schools, scouts, guides, brownies and beavers, the local athletic club and many other societies have and continue to use the land regularly.

### **4. Relationship to historic landscape**

The northern perimeter of the land is bordered by “The Dingles”, believed to be a geological fault that once used to supply water to a mediaeval settlement. The nearby small hill situated next to the Welcombe Hotel is thought to be an early Norman Motte and Bailey and may be linked to this settlement.

### **5. Relationship to historic buildings**

The land borders a grade 2 listed building, constructed in the International Modern style and adjoins the Stratford upon Avon Conservation Area. It is overlooked by Clopton House Tower, a belvedere and listed building built circa 1850.

## **Evidence to demonstrate richness of wildlife, beauty, and tranquillity**

### **1. Natural haven for wildlife**

The site adjoins the Welcome Hills and Local Nature Reserve. It complements and harmonises with that area by providing additional and more varied wildlife habitat. What marks the land as particularly important is that there are areas not regularly crossed by walkers, where insects can flourish undisturbed. The margins are extensive, enhancing this feature.

There are no physical barriers between the two areas, which facilitates the flow of wildlife by providing safety, food and shelter. A frequently seen Barn Owl hunts along the perimeter of both areas and the proposed LGS is part of its territory. Any restrictions could cause the creature to hunt elsewhere and that would be a great loss.

The owl and other birds, such as kestrels, feed on voles that flourish in the margins of the land. Its flora is characteristic of meadow, where a variety of grasses, umbellifers, vetches and other common plants support a good variety of insects. These include meadow brown, small tortoiseshell, marbled white, ringlet, skipper and even common blue butterflies. Bumble bees, orb spiders and crickets thrive.

During 2015, a range of community led events focussed on the land's beauty and wildlife have taken place, including community picnics, nature walks and bat walks. In previous years, events have included hedgehog rambles and tree planting by local children.

### **2. Beauty and Tranquillity**

The land provides a peaceful area for all to enjoy throughout the year. It provides unrestricted views across the Welcombe Hills towards "The Obelisk", a historic monument erected in 1876. In the other direction, it provides visual links to the historic Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

To walk the fields early in the morning is to experience them at their best. In Autumn, low lying mists hang just above the grass, where heavy dew reveals hundreds of spiders' webs. The hedges turn red and gold and are laden with blackberries, elderberries, crab apples and sloes. Heading eastwards, the sunrises are a wonderful reward for being up so early.

In Winter, they are even better, enhanced by the black silhouettes of trees and shrubs in the foreground, the view unspoilt by buildings. On cold mornings, the frost patterns on grass and leaves are amazing and well worth photographing. Moreover, who does not like to be the first to crunch through untrodden snow?

Spring begins in the fields with the white froth of blackthorn blossom in the hedges, closely followed by the cow parsley by the noticeboard, which always beats its rivals into flower by at least two weeks. Everything then follows far too fast – buttercups and dandelions (resulting in yellow shoes by the end of the walk!) and then elder, crab apple and hawthorn blossom in the hedges.

Summer brings the dog roses out and the land buzzes with bees. The grass is high and huge clouds of pollen follow every dog that runs through it. The paths through the grass almost disappear and the wear and tear from winter walkers is repaired. Butterflies go about their business and the occasional grass snake is startled and slithers into deeper cover. People chat and linger, dogs and children play.

Designation as LGS will help many more generations to do the same.