

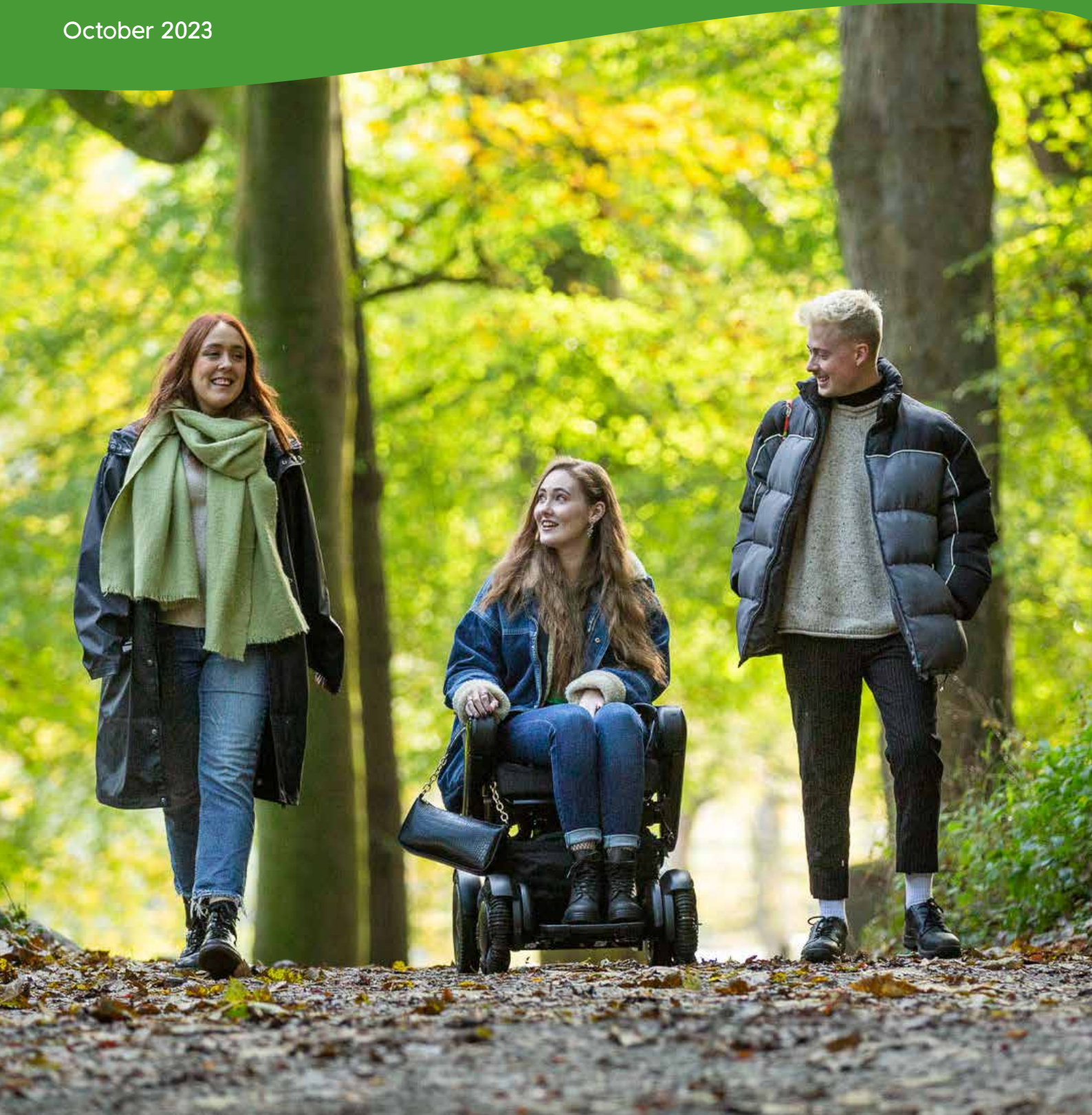


The
countryside
charity

Local Green Spaces 2023

Increasingly important for community well-being
and nature recovery

October 2023



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive summary | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Analysis | 7 |
| Overview | 7 |
| Overlay analysis of Local Green Space and other designations | 9 |
| Local Green Space (neighbourhood plans) | 11 |
| Local Green Space (local plans) | 13 |
| Access to Local Green Spaces | 16 |
| Wider benefits of Local Green Spaces | 19 |
| Conclusions and recommendations | 20 |
| Methodology | 22 |
| References | 23 |

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Executive summary

Introduced in the 2012 National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF), policies allowing for the creation of Local Green Space (LGS) designations are set out in paragraphs 101-103 and footnote 7 of the 2021 version of the NPPF and provide the same level of protection as Green Belt to areas of green space that are particularly valued by their local communities.

Approximately

80% (79.6%)
of LGS

have been designated in
neighbourhood plans with

20% (20.3%)

being designated in local plans.

There have been an additional

771 LGS

designated from June 2021 to June 2022.

It is evident that Local Green Spaces have great value to the community. Since the inception of Local Green Spaces in 2012, on average 662 are designated each year. The reporting year for this report has an above average designation.

Research into green spaces has shown that they have a wealth of physical, mental and social wellbeing benefits. Local Green Space designation can ensure that green spaces are protected and continue to be vital assets to the community they serve.

Introduction

This year's report follows on from CPRE's 2022 [Local Green Space report](#). The report highlighted the number of Local Green Space (LGS) designated since the introduction of the national policy in 2012 as well as geographical spread of LGSs across England. This 2023 report furthers the analysis.

The reporting period for this report is neighbourhood or local plans made or adopted to June 2022. There have been 771 additional Local Green Spaces in the period June 2021 to June 2022. The Government announced a consultation at the end of 2022 on the National Planning Policy Framework, however Local Green Space designations will not be changed.

This report provides updated figures of Local Green Space designations in England from the 2022 report. An overlay analysis was conducted on LGSs to other land designations and areas with concentrations of high deprivation. The report highlights the range of benefits that Local Green Spaces provide communities.

What are Local Green Space designations?

The Local Green Space (LGS) designation was introduced in the 2012 National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF). These designations are set out in paragraphs 101-103 and footnote 7 of the 2021 version of the NPPF and provide the same level of protection as Green Belt to areas of green space that are particularly valued by their local communities.

LGSs can be allocated during the preparation or review of local plans and neighbourhood plans.

A government consultation at the end of 2022 proposed no changes to the policies on Local Green Spaces so they are expected to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.



Paragraphs 101-103 of the NPPF defines Local Green Space policy:

101. The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.
102. The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the 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), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
 - c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.
103. Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts

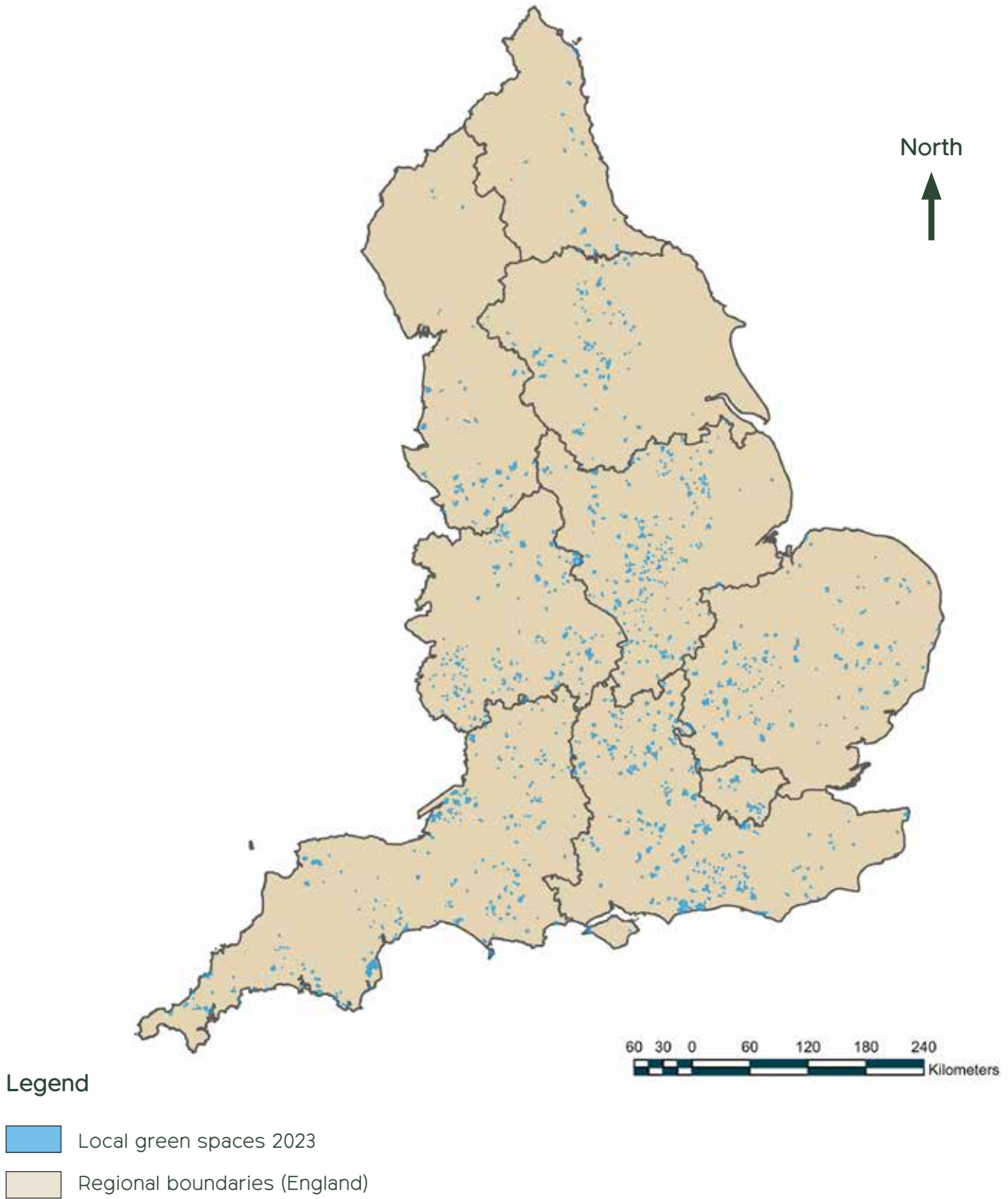
What protections they provide

Local Green Spaces can relate to one or a more of a selection of uses of land that benefit the local community. The designation provides protections in line with Green Belt policy. Local Green Spaces found in local and neighbourhood plans have more weight to them than any local landscape designations. Not all Local Green Spaces necessarily have right of access for the public as the “green areas are valued because of their wildlife, historic significance and/or beauty,” and designation of Local Green Space “does not in itself confer any rights of public access over what exists at present.” Private land can be designated as a Local Green Space, but the landowner would have the right to make their views known on this through the plan making process and would need to give permission for any new rights of access to be created.¹

There are other related land designations such as Green Belt, Common Land and Town & Village Green, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserves. Each of these land designations has its own protection, process for designation and criteria for it to be awarded; some designations are statutory, and some are derived from planning policy. Local Green Spaces have a unique combination of reasons that need to be applied to a site in local and neighbourhood plans.

Map 1.

An overview of Local Green Spaces in England mapped for this report..



Analysis

Overview:

Table 1 shows the total number of local green space designations ratified by made neighbourhood plans and adopted local plans since the 2022 report.

Overall, approximately 80% (79.6%) of LGSs have been designated in neighbourhood plans with 20% (20.3%) being designated in local plans.

There have been an additional 771 LGSs designated since June 2021 to June 2022. It is evident that Local Green Spaces have great value to the community. Since the inception of Local Green Spaces in 2012, on average 662 have been designated each year. The reporting year for this report has an above average designation.

| Development plan documents | Total number of designated Local Green Spaces '22 | Total number of designated Local Green Spaces '23 |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Made neighbourhood plans | 5,401 | 5,803 |
| Adopted local plans | 1,114 | 1,483 |
| All Plans | 6,515 | 7,286 |

Table 1
The total number of neighbourhood plans and adopted local plans

The region which saw the largest percentage increase was London (64%), which in quantitative terms was 75 new designations.

The London boroughs which designated the new Local Green Spaces were Brent and Camden. This adds further protection to parts of the 47% of Greater London which is 'green'.ⁱⁱ The Mayor of London and London Assembly intend to make more than 50% of London greenⁱⁱⁱ and Local Green Space designations will help achieve this goal. Yorkshire & The Humber saw a 42% increase in LGS designation, and the North West saw a 27% increase. There is a slight proportional increase in new LGS designations within regions outside southern England.

The regions which saw the lowest percentage increase in LGS designations are those which already had a large quantity of LGSs.

The South West had the lowest percentage increase with 0.7%, however it maintained its ranking as the region with the second highest number of LGSs. The East Midlands and South East both saw a 5% increase in LGS designations. These three regions count for over half of all LGS designations.

| CPRE Region | Count of Local Green Spaces '22 | Count of Local Green Spaces '23 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| East | 663 | 789 |
| East Midlands | 1,271 | 1,337 |
| London | 117 | 192 |
| North East | 100 | 118 |
| North West | 418 | 531 |
| South East | 1,456 | 1,535 |
| South West | 1,340 | 1,350 |
| West Midlands | 748 | 861 |
| Yorkshire and The Humber | 402 | 573 |
| Grand Total | 6,515 | 7,286 |

Table 2
The total number of Local Green Space designations in England in each region.

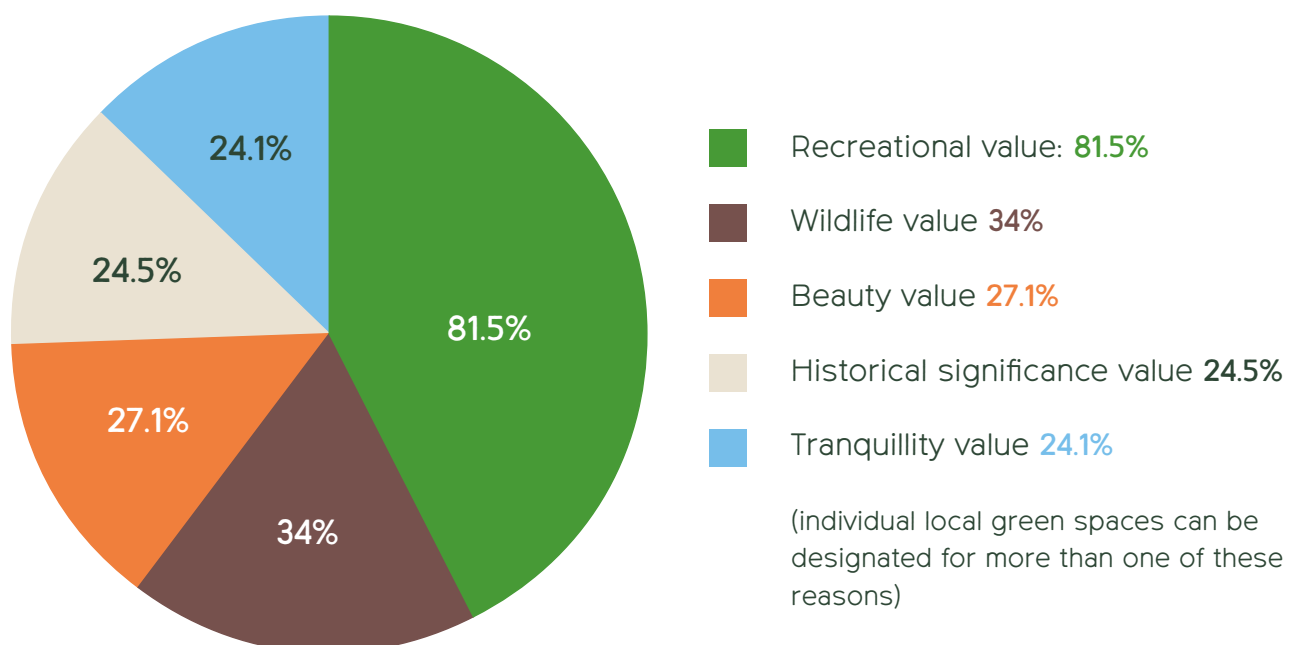
The proportion of Local Green Spaces that are designated for one or more reasons are largely unchanged from our first report, although there has been a reinforcing trend of recreational value being the most common reason for designation.

Figure 1 shows recreational value is by far the most significant reason for designation (81.5%) suggesting its importance. Wildlife is also shown to be a common reason for designation (34 %) suggesting local communities value their surrounding natural environment. Nearly a third (27.1%) of LGS designation were given beauty as their reason for protection. Historical significance and tranquillity reasons were

given to roughly a quarter of Local Green Spaces (24.5% and 24.1% respectively). Communities which have LGS value the open green space as they voted to adopt or make the development plan, it is an amenity to not only them but to wildlife. By virtue of being a green space, LGS designations have a positive role in helping mitigate climate impacts in across England alongside other social benefits. These will be explored later in the report.

Where the reasoning for the LGS designation was not made clear in planning policy documents, the individual sites have been omitted from this analysis.

Figure 1
Local Significance reasoning



Overlay analysis of LGS and other designations

An overlay analysis was undertaken on Local Green Spaces on three related land use designations. These were Common Land, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Nature Reserves to investigate the relationship between land covered by these designations and a local green space designation. The analysis shows that the level of direct overlap is small with less than 3% of all local green spaces (179 in total) covering areas already designated as local nature reserves, 149 with SSSIs and less than 1% (52) covering areas of designated common land. In turn, individual local green spaces tend to cover a much smaller area than individual local nature reserves or common land sites, and where there is overlap, a multiple number of local green spaces can be found overlapping with a single local nature reserve or area of common land. We found that only 27 local nature reserves (out of an overall total of 1,666 in England^{iv}), 28 SSSIs (out of a total of 4,100) and 11 registered units of common land (out of 8,675) contained areas also designated as local green space. Also, it is often the case that Local Green Spaces tend to cover areas surrounding common land or a nature reserve. Overall, our analysis suggests that local green spaces are playing an important role in protecting a larger area of undeveloped land and (where they buttress nature reserves) helping create an ecological network.

| Other land designations | Number of overlapping Local Green Spaces | Number of sites with other land designations containing areas also designated as local green spaces |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Local Nature Reserves | 179 | 27 |
| Sites of special scientific interest | 149 | 28 |
| Common Land | 52 | 11 |

Table 3
Overlay Analysis
count to other land
designations

| Reason for designation | Count |
|------------------------|-------|
| Beauty | 58 |
| Historic significance | 38 |
| Recreational value | 95 |
| Tranquillity | 61 |
| Richness of wildlife | 85 |

Table 4
Local Green Spaces
that overlap with Local
Nature Reserves and
the occurrence of
different reasons for
designation of those
sites.

| Reason for designation | Count |
|------------------------|-------|
| Beauty | 36 |
| Historic significance | 32 |
| Recreational value | 72 |
| Tranquillity | 30 |
| Richness of wildlife | 43 |

Table 5
Local Green Spaces and Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the occurrence of different reasons for designation of those sites

| Reason for designation | Count |
|------------------------|-------|
| Beauty | 12 |
| Historic significance | 3 |
| Recreational value | 36 |
| Tranquillity | 4 |
| Richness of wildlife | 13 |

Table 6
Local Green Spaces and Common Land and the occurrence of the different reasons for designation of those sites

We also conducted a further analysis of overlaps considering the reasons for designation of local green spaces. Only 85 LGS sites designated for the richness of their wildlife overlap with local nature reserves, compared to the approximate 2,400 LGS overall, and 1645 LGS found in neighbourhood plans alone, that have been designated wholly or in part because of wildlife interest.

Further investigation and collaboration will allow an understanding of the area of LNRs, SSSIs and Common Land shared with LGSs. Similarly, to the information found in figure 1 across all the other land designations, recreational value and richness of wildlife were the most prominent and second most prominent reasons for designation that occurred throughout the sites.



Local Green Space (neighbourhood plans)

What is a neighbourhood plan?

A neighbourhood plan

“gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.”^v

“A neighbourhood plan allows communities to choose where they would like to see new homes, shops and offices to be built and what infrastructure is necessary to support the community. Additionally, communities have a voice on the design of the developments and grant planning permission for the new developments they want to see go ahead.

Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development to meet their community’s needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.”

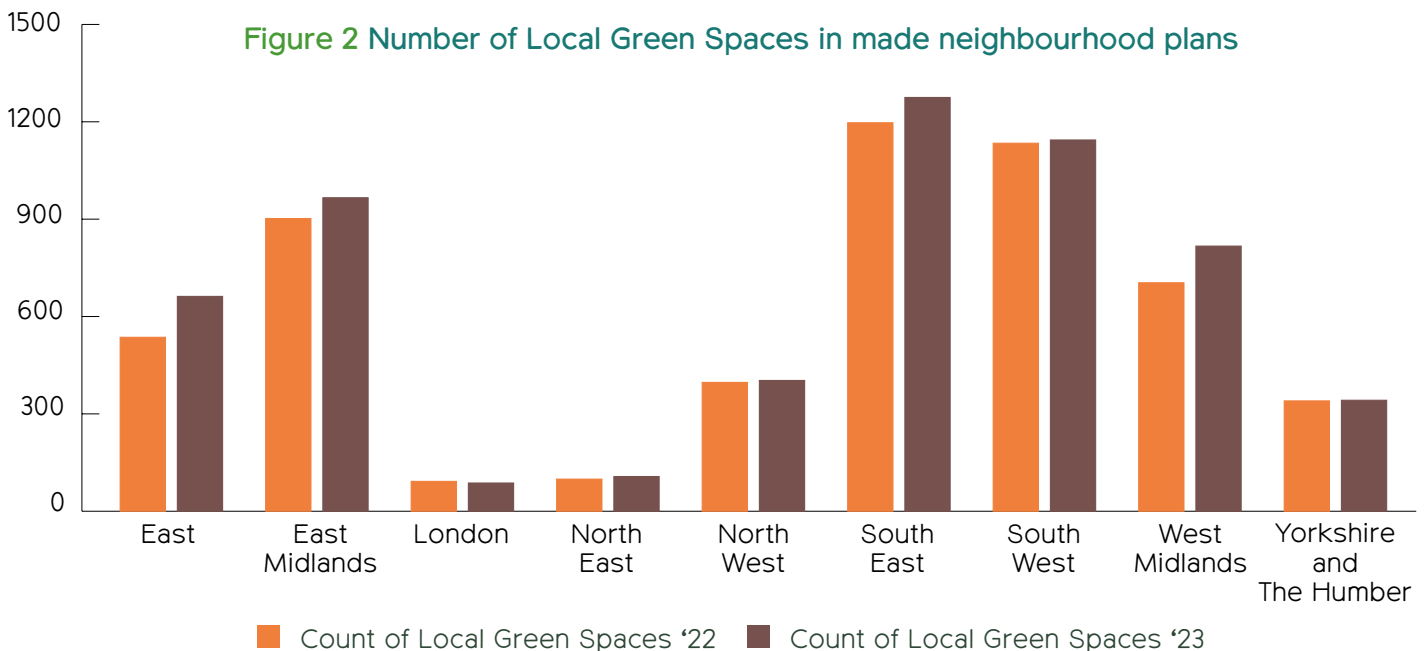
- Made (i.e. finalised or adopted) neighbourhood plans contain the majority of LGS designations; 80% of all LGSs are designated via these. This may be down to time dedicated for the specific neighbourhood planning area and a greater community involvement with the parish council that is developing the plan.
- There has been an increase in local green space designation within neighbourhood plans (over 400) since the previous report.
- The South East (1275) and South West (1144) still dominate, with 41.5% of all LGS designations being found in these two regions.

Table 7

Total number of Local Green Spaces per region in neighbourhood plans

| Region | Local Green Spaces |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| East | 662 |
| East Midlands | 966 |
| London | 87 |
| North East | 107 |
| North West | 403 |
| South East | 1275 |
| South West | 1144 |
| West Midlands | 817 |
| Yorkshire & The Humber | 342 |
| TOTAL | 5803 |

- Outside of London, the regions with the lowest designated Local Green Spaces were the North East (107) and Yorkshire & The Humber (342).
- London has the lowest number of LGS protected in neighbourhood plans, due mainly to relatively low take up of neighbourhood planning overall in the capital. Figure 2 shows the regional increase of LGSs designated in neighbourhood plans since the previous report in 2022. There have been just over 400 new LGSs in 140 neighbourhood plans.



Case study:

The Secret Garden

Nestled away in Prince's Gate Garden East, the Imperial College's Secret Garden brings together students with a passion for the environment and spending time in nature. The garden is a bubble of nature hidden in between the beautiful buildings of South Kensington. It provides students with an opportunity to escape from the stress of academia and get their hands dirty in weekly gardening sessions.



Entering the Secret Garden may feel like leaving the city for some, though for a much cheaper price tag since it only requires an annual £2 membership. With activities like building a terrarium and making lip balm from beeswax, students are able to slow down and disconnect from the bustling rhythm of central London. Despite being managed by the university's Environmental Society, the garden is also accessible to neighbours which makes it an important community asset. After all, it was designated as a Local Green Space in the Knightsbridge neighbourhood plan due to its recreational value to residents.

For Tina, the Head Gardener, the Secret Garden is 'a piece of the puzzle' when it comes to clearing her head. Her responsibilities include maintaining the garden,

planting and harvesting, as well as tending to the garden's pond and bee colony. Though Tina sees the garden as 'a little bit like a community' where she can socialise with peers, it is also a solace that allows her to ground herself and enjoy her own company. Making this space part of her routine has encouraged her to do manual activities that she had not previously had the opportunity to undertake and to finally fulfil a long-term desire to spend more time in nature. Having regular access to this Local Green Space has also positively impacted her wellbeing and academic performance.

In essence, the Secret Garden serves as a haven where students can develop deeper connections with themselves, their community and their environment.

Case study:

Young people in rural areas and Local Green Spaces

Rural areas often lack the required services and activities to keep young people engaged in their local communities. This combined with limited employment and educational opportunities can drive them away from rural areas^{vi}. Despite having relatively easy access to the countryside, rural communities still benefit greatly from Local Green Spaces, with over half of all LGSs found in predominantly rural areas^{vii}. Beyond the numerous benefits for children's health and wellbeing, LGSs can also be great spaces for young people to connect with each other and foster a sense of belonging in their community.

In Shropshire, the Idsall School and Shifnal County Primary School playing fields hold a LGS designation due to their recreational value for local residents. The school allows its sports facilities to be used outside of school hours and often holds community activities like sports festivals. This use of LGS can encourage young people to stay in the countryside and potentially rejuvenate the area. Preserving this area as a protected space ensures that children and teenagers will not lose an important space of recreation as they continue to grow.

Research has demonstrated that 65% of young people believed that green spaces were the best part of living in rural areas^{viii}. Therefore, any commitment to support and retain young people in rural areas must consider the value the younger population attaches to Local Green Spaces and their socialising and entertainment functions.



Local Green Space (local plans)

What is a local plan?

The NPPF provides an explanatory definition of local plans as 'a plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. In law this is described as the development plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.' Local planning authorities are usually district, borough or unitary local authorities.

“Local plans are a key component of the planning system. They shape how land use and places will change and develop in the future. Planning applications need to be in line with local plans otherwise they are unlikely to receive planning permission.”

“Local plans have a key role in delivering sustainable development:

- They have an economic role (planning for prosperity) – they help to ensure that sufficient land of the right type, and in the right places, is available to allow businesses to set up and grow, and to be supported by infrastructure such as roads and railways.
- They have a social role (planning for people and places) – they can promote strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing for housing, leisure and recreation facilities, shops and schools.
- They have an environmental role (planning for the environment) – they help to protect and enhance landscapes and wildlife, historic buildings and archaeology, and they can help to ensure that water, minerals and energy are used more efficiently.”^{ix}

Approximately 20% of Local Green Spaces are designated in local plans.

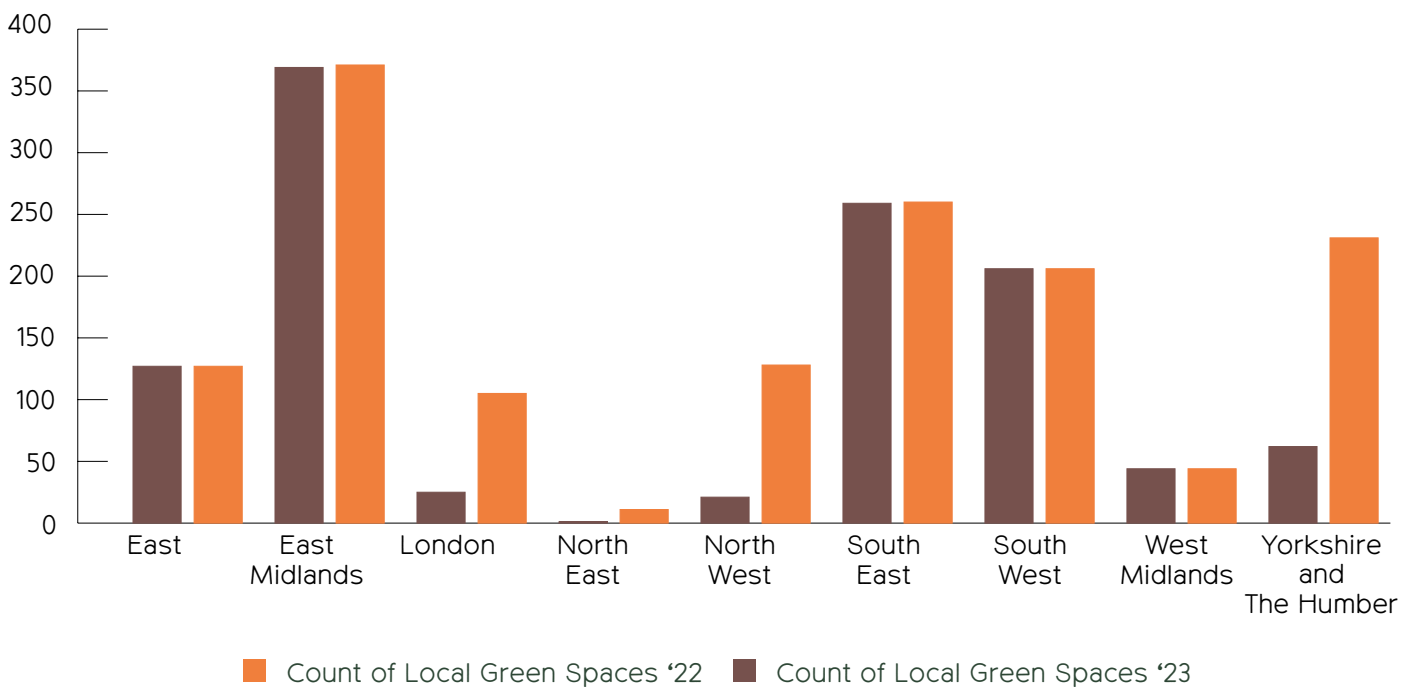
There has been an increase in LGS designated however, the designation is still not as prevalent as in neighbourhood plans. The North West saw the largest increase in LGS designations with an 509% increase. This could be down to a flurry of local plans being adopted during the reporting period. A similar situation occurred in Yorkshire and the Humber which experienced a 281% increase in LGS designations.

The East Midlands and South West dominate in total number of LGS designations, however, these regions have not seen such an increase as evidenced in Table 4. Local plans are a longer bureaucratic process to form as they cover a wider area to neighbourhood plans which may give explanation to the lack of increase across the board. Alternatively, some of the areas may already be in their adopted plan period. Therefore, no new Local Green Spaces will be identified.

Table 8
Total number of Local Green Spaces per region in local plans

| Region | Local Green Spaces |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| East | 127 |
| East Midlands | 371 |
| London | 105 |
| North East | 11 |
| North West | 128 |
| South East | 260 |
| South West | 206 |
| West Midlands | 44 |
| Yorkshire & The Humber | 231 |
| TOTAL | 1483 |

Figure 3 Number of Local Green Spaces per region in Local plans



Case study:

Local Green Spaces (or lack of) in Kingston Upon Hull

Hull is the second largest city (after Leicester) in England without a designated Green Belt around it. But with over 100 parks, 26 conservation areas, 2 registered parks and many other open spaces^x, residents in Hull are spoiled for choice when it comes to greenery. In fact, green spaces are celebrated by locals; they are home to community activities, children's sports, wildlife education centres, and more.

The importance of green spaces is becoming increasingly more apparent in the wake of the pandemic, especially for deprived communities. In a 2022 council poll, parks and green spaces were recognised as one of the most important elements in making a place good to live in by deprived young families in council housing.^{xi}

Young people and residents from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds in Hull have been particularly interested in growing food in local green spaces as a means to tackle food poverty during a cost-of-living-crisis^{xii}. In this sense, green spaces are not only vibrant hubs for recreational purposes, but also serve as a potential solution to pressing challenges amid difficult economic times.

For decades, Hull city council has understood the inherent value of a flourishing, green environment. Back in 2000, the local plan identified 376 areas of urban greenspace, and recognised their significance and positive impact on local communities. The plan laid out policies to preserve green spaces through designations such as Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and Open Spaces that gave these areas a certain level of the protection against development.

However, the local authority has not taken advantage of newer and stronger forms of protection for green spaces. Indeed, Hull's most recent local plan has not introduced Local Green Spaces (LGS) as a new designation that offers these valued green areas protection akin to that of Green Belt land. This makes Hull one of the very few local authorities across the country with no LGS designations.

Considering that most of Hull's unbuilt land is categorised as urban greenspace^{xiii}, it is therefore more vulnerable to increasing pressures for development.

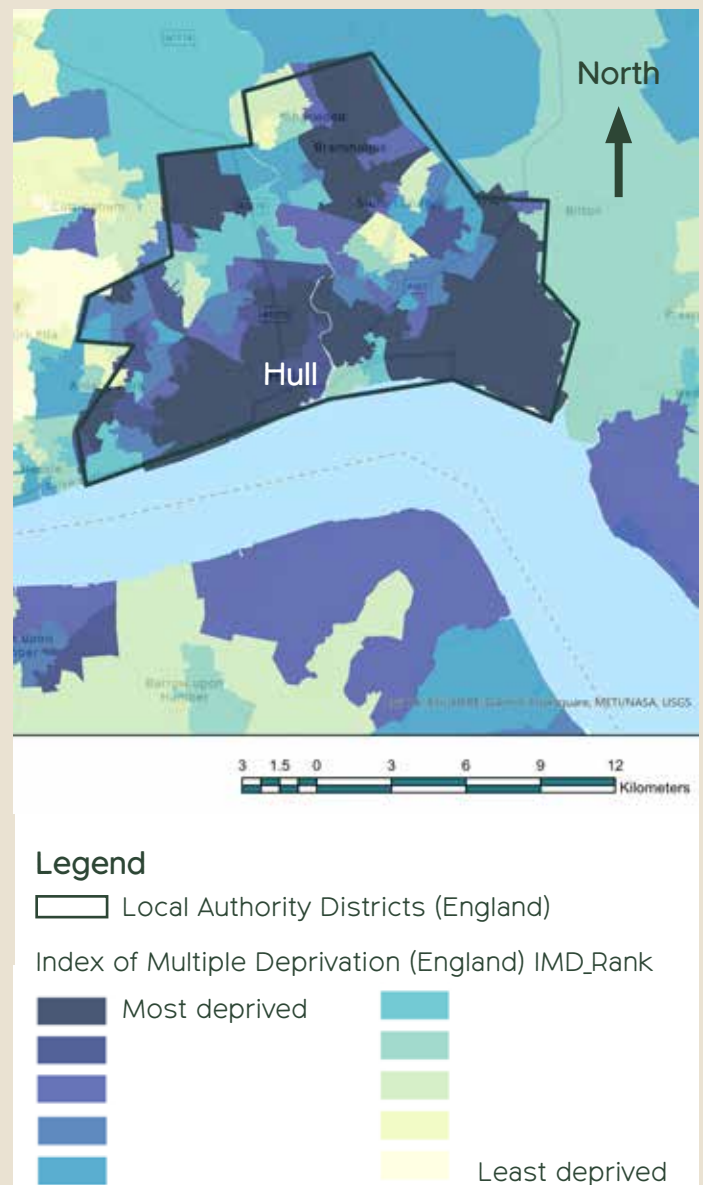
A survey focusing on the local plan revealed that, when asked about new schemes - whether they are car parks, new housing, or commercial developments - most people stated that protecting and maintaining green spaces should be prioritised^{xiv}. When asked what they would like to have a say on in terms of influencing

local decision-making, one in three people said green spaces and parks. At the same time, 57% of people admitted that they had never heard of the Hull Local Plan. The fact that local people do not seem to be actively participating in the planning process of their localities suggests that they have limited control over their environment, and consequently their livelihoods.

Whilst it is evident that local people in Hull cherish their green spaces, there is a clear disconnect between community sentiment and active participation in their protection. Encouraging civic awareness and emphasising the need for LGS designations ahead of the upcoming review of the local plan will prevent green spaces from falling victim to growing plans for development in Hull.

Map 2.

A zoomed in view of Kingston upon Hull and the Index of Multiple Deprivation



Access to Local Green Spaces

Access to good quality green spaces and their subsequent designation as Local Green Space in local and neighbourhood plans can provide a variety of benefits to people. However, in England alone approximately 10 million people live in areas with poor access to green space, nearly 40% of those people being Black, Asian or minority ethnic^{xvi}. Research has shown that Black Asian and minority ethnic people experience health inequalities compared to their white counterparts as well as disparities between different ethnic groups^{xvii}. In April 2021, cross-government funding amounting to £5.77 million and policy guidance was provided to public health workers to practice green social prescribing to assist in improving health and wellbeing as well as access to green space.

Green social prescribing

An applied uses of green spaces is green social prescribing, which encourages people to engage in nature-based activities to improve their health and wellbeing. This may include community gardening initiatives, green gyms, and local walking groups. (NHS England)

Deprivation and Local Green Spaces

Map 3.

The total number of Local Green Spaces and their spatial distribution in relation to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Legend

Local green spaces 2023

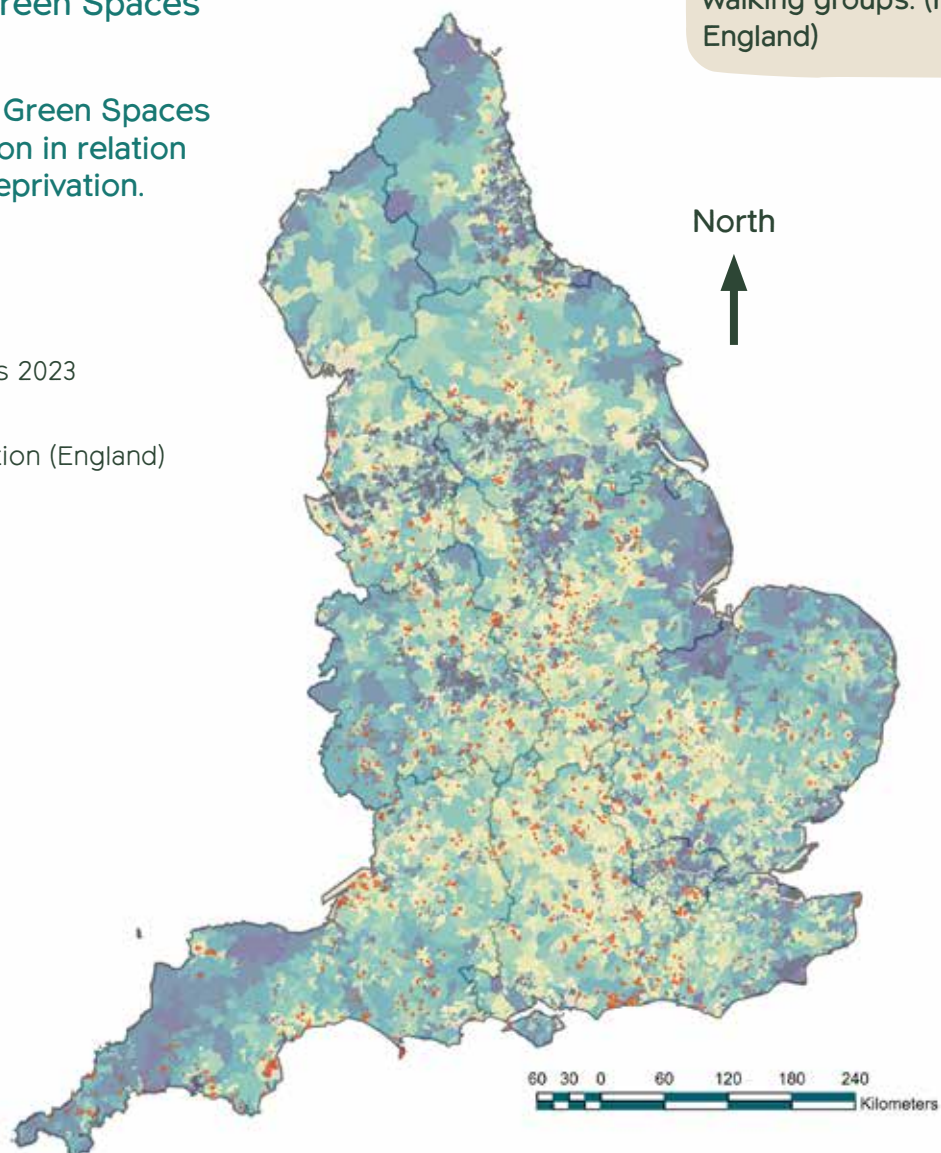
Index of Multiple Deprivation (England)

IMD_Rank

Most deprived

Least deprived

Regions (England)



Further analysis conducted on the 100 council areas with the highest number of deprived neighbourhoods show there has been an increase in LGS designation from 925 to 1272. 48% of these councils are now benefiting from the LGS designation. As seen in Map 3 the areas with high deprivation still have less LGS found in them compared to the areas of low deprivation, although our updated figures suggest that the gap is narrowing. It is noticeable there are pockets of low deprivation which have a high number of Local Green Space designations, while being surrounded by wider areas of high deprivation.

Case study:

Deprivation and access to green spaces in Lancashire

With the lowest life expectancy in the country and ranking in the 10% most deprived authorities^{xviii}, Blackpool exhibits an intrinsic link between health, deprivation and access to green spaces. Research conducted by ISGlobal has placed Blackpool on top of the list when it comes to mortality due to a lack of green spaces^{xix}. Indeed, a shocking 73% of Blackpool's population have little to no access to green areas. Due to its densely urbanised nature, the remaining undeveloped land is limited and fragmented, often in the form of playing fields and recreation grounds. These serve as venues for sports activities and provide leisure and visual amenities for local communities^{xx}.

Figure 4

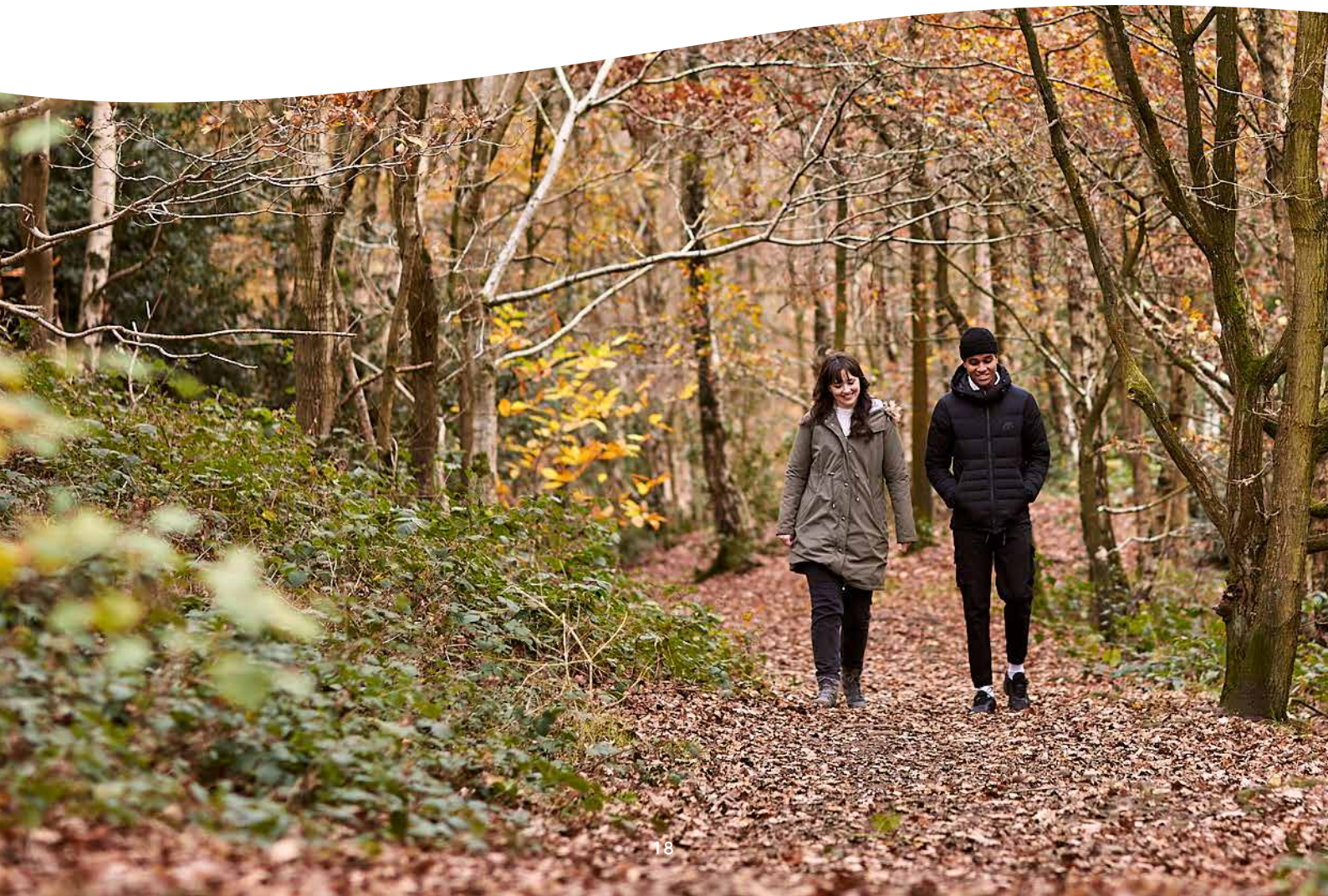
An aerial view of Blackpool, Lytham St Anne's, and their surrounding areas with Local Green Spaces highlighted in orange.



Despite these circumstances, Blackpool does not yet have any designated Local Green Spaces. Its only neighbourhood plan, Marton Moss, saw an initial consultation on seven possible LGSs but the neighbourhood planning body ultimately determined that only one met the necessary criteria. This designation is awaiting confirmation as the neighbourhood plan has not yet been made^{xxi}. This implies that not only there is a scarcity of green spaces for communities, but the quality of existing spaces is also subpar.

A short drive away lies Lytham St Anne's, in the neighbouring authority of Fylde. The latter has been consistently one of the least deprived authorities in Lancashire for the past two decades^{xxii}. In terms of health deprivation rankings, NHS Fylde and Wyre rank 55th, whereas Blackpool sits in 1st place making it the most health deprived in the Lancashire area. A Lancet study^{xxiii} confirmed that the gap in life expectancy in urban environments between poor and rich areas is staggering partly due to access to and quality of green spaces. According to our research, Fylde also boasts the majority of designated local green spaces in the entire county. In this case, it appears that positive health indicators and access to protected green spaces go hand in hand.

While deprivation and green spaces do not exist in isolation, as there are many elements that contribute to and influence both, it is important to understand disparities within the same county and seek to bridge that gap. Lancashire's Green Infrastructure plan seems to be working in that direction, aiming to offer all residents access to high quality Local Green Spaces. Blackpool's Local Plan acknowledges the significance of green space on health outcomes, particularly in areas of concentrated deprivation and inequalities. Although it does not have the best available green spaces within its urban boundaries, one of its core policies is to connect residents to neighbouring green spaces and adjacent countryside. Efforts to improve walking and cycling facilities to these areas have been made thanks to the Department for Transport's Active Travel fund^{xxiv}.



Wider benefits of Local Green Spaces

What are the benefits of Green Space and why it is important for their designation?

Health and wellbeing

Outside of their designation, Local Green Spaces are part of the networks of green infrastructure, such as allotments, gardens, parks, street trees and woodlands.

Access to good quality green spaces provides several benefits to humans and nature. Most Local Green Spaces provide a venue to increase physical exercise through the use of sports pitches or, where there is some provision for public access, spaces for walking and cycling. They also provide the opportunity for increased social interaction and relaxation, improving mental well-being and social and community cohesion as well as improving intergenerational relationships in communities and reducing loneliness in elderly people.

Nature and biodiversity

The presence and protection of green space provides a habitat to support a multitude of species of wildlife and can act as a wildlife corridor between their location and wider rural environments. Some Local Green Spaces, for example, protect a wider area of land around local nature reserves. Alongside the health and well-being benefits of green spaces, people have found that they enjoy green spaces more when there is a high level of biodiversity^{xxv}. Therefore, the designation of Local Green Spaces allows communities to ensure wildlife in their local area is enhanced and protected, as well as reducing any biodiversity loss to development.

Climate

Our State of the Green Belt 2023^{xxvi} report outlines how England's Green Belts can act as a cooling belt and store carbon (carbon sequestration) for the towns and cities they surround. Green space situated in urban and rural settlements is capable of carrying out the same role by providing a cooling effect to their surrounding areas and sequestration of carbon due to human activities. With Earth experiencing its hottest day on 6th July 2023, it is evident that the climate crisis is not slowing down and nature-based solutions such as the implementation of green public space can play a vital role in the adaptation and mitigation of climate change^{xxvii}. As the rise in temperatures affects everyone, the implementation and designation of Local Green Spaces in plans will help make the cooling and carbon capture benefits of green spaces more widely available for future generations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

It is positive to see that Local Green Space designations are continuing to be increasingly taken up. There has been a 771 increase in LGSs since 2022 across all regions of England, with more designations being found in northern regions. There has been an increasing amount of LGS designations in areas of high deprivation showing that access to Local Green Spaces is growing, and the benefits will reach more people within communities.

There is scope to take a more consistent and standardised approach to the process of designating local green spaces, and this would make it much easier for members of the public and groups such as CPRE to see when and how the designation is being, or can in future be, used. For example, there appears to be a lack of an objective interpretation of the categorisation as some development plans do not use the criteria options of “beauty” or “richness of wildlife”, whereas other plans use these two criteria often. However, there is great disparity as what constitutes as ecologically valuable. For example, wildflowers are deemed suitable in urbanised areas, whereas in other developments plans, there is a need for large fields or ancient woodland to be protected. Inconsistencies arise when some urban areas have LGSs approved whereas others do not apply the designation due to the lack of criteria met, despite the undesignated sites sharing similar attributes.

Some development plans use their own justification such as “amenity value”, “community value”, or “landscape”, which fit within the community significance requirement of the NPPF, but these vague wordings do not entirely match with the justification wording used within the NPPF. In addition, not all development plans clearly state a Local Green Space designation, instead they mention “green space”; some Local Green Spaces may therefore be missed due to the lack of clarity in the given designation.

It is positive to see a strong use of the ‘wildlife’ designation reason with over a third of all LGS sites noting this. This use of LGS designation can provide spaces for nature recovery and developing an ecological network across the country. A Local Green Space designation has a multitude of benefits across social, environmental, and economic which all local authorities should look to enhance and protect.



Recommendations

CPRE believes that the following policy changes can help increase take up of the Local Green Space designation.

- 1 Retain, reinforce and further support neighbourhood planning, especially in the north of England and in urban areas.** This includes expanding additional funding for deprived areas to nurture neighbourhood planning groups and streamlining the review and updating of neighbourhood plans through continued support and guidance. Draft LGS designations in emerging local or neighbourhood plans should also be given great weight in planning decisions if they are underpinned and supported by robust evidence of need or use.
- 2 Encourage local planning authorities to promote and maximise the use of the LGS designation as a means to support local strategic policy aims and to boost public participation in local development plan preparations.** This includes exploring opportunities to designate LGSs in the local plan review or preparation, particularly where neighbourhood planning activity is low.
- 3 Introduce compulsory standards for access to nature into planning law and policy and add an indicator on access to nature to the Index of Multiple Deprivation to facilitate targeted support and level up access to nature for all people.** These binding standards can be based on the existing Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) and would enable further initiatives needed to ensure human health, wellbeing and equality is embedded in the planning system, as stated in the sixth of the Better Planning Coalition's six tests for planning.
- 4 Expand the list of possible reasons for local significance cited in the NPPF:** the reasons for local significance listed in paragraph 102 b) of the NPPF should be expanded to include the role of green spaces in contributing to (i) climate change adaptation and mitigation; and (ii) to the functioning of wider places and systems (such as wildlife corridors, views and settings, and natural drainage areas).
The possibility of attributing collective designation to a group of locally valued green spaces that may not be demonstrably special on an individual basis but which, as a network, help define the character of a place, should be specified.
- 5 Clarify what evidence is needed for land to be designated as Local Green Space:** guidance should be amended to give greater clarity about the evidence required to support an LGS designation, in particular that such evidence can be qualitative rather than quantitative. The fact that the examples for local significance cited in the NPPF do not constitute either a binding or an exhaustive list of possible reasons for local significance should also be made clearer.
- 6 Amend NPPF policies to ensure that the categories of development deemed appropriate on LGSs are more suitable to their scale than those defined in Green Belt management policies.** Any form of development on a designated LGS should be considered inappropriate unless very special circumstances outweighing the harm to the space and the potential impact on the community can be shown.

Methodology

The reporting period for this report has included any made neighbourhood plans and adopted local plans from the end of June 2021 to June 2022.

1: Mapping of the LGSs found in neighbourhood and local plans.

A team of up to 15 volunteers were recruited using Survey123 on ArcGIS to input the data for each Local Green space designation found in neighbourhood plans which then corresponded to a polygon on the ArcGIS map 1 and other maps found throughout this report. The data required was made/adoption date and criteria given for LGS designation. Local plan data was also input in the same fashion as the neighbourhood plan data. Freedom of information (FOI) requests were put forward to local authorities and neighbourhood forums to provide shapefiles of LGSs to be input into map 1. In addition, Land Tech supplied us with a large dataset of green spaces in England.

2: Spatial analysis

Once the total number of Local Green Spaces were mapped, a spatial analysis exercise was conducted which investigated the spatial distribution of LGSs, the incorporation of index of multiple deprivation and the interaction of LGSs with other designations such as Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Common land. This report has provided us with initial analysis and CPRE will be conducting further investigation into the information acquired.

3: Case Studies

Upon reviewing the spatial analysis of LGSs, a conscious effort was made to incorporate the areas that benefit the least from the protection the designation offers with a particular focus on youth representation and deprivation measures. A combination of primary and secondary research was conducted to inform the case studies. A formal, structured interview with open questions based on personal experiences surrounding green spaces was carried out with a representative of the Imperial College Environmental Society. Since the value of LGSs lies in the community, it was important to have a direct conversation with young people actively involved in environmental matters in the local area. Informal conversations with a regional planning policy consultant and a local council advisor helped to consolidate the direction of other case studies. Secondary research in the form of online local government databases, academic reports and news articles was employed to produce the content.

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