





## 6. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

### Natural Environment Objectives

- To protect and enhance biodiversity, responding to the threat of climate change
- To protect the richest and most versatile agricultural land within the Parish
- To create and enhance public green open spaces
- To conserve and enhance identified Local Green Spaces

### Introduction

- 6.1 The preceding section on Broomfield’s Landscape Setting outlined the importance of the landscape and rural setting of the Parish and the reasons for describing the Neighbourhood Plan as landscape-led.
- 6.2 This section explores other aspects of the natural environment as a resource to help manage the effects of development growth within the Parish. It includes policies and aspirations to ensure that, wherever possible, growth is linked to improvements in quality of life, health and well-being and biodiversity.

### Residents’ Questionnaire

- 6.3 This section responds to the following aspects of the natural environment evidenced in the feedback from community consultation (percentages indicate the proportion of responses saying this aspect was important or very important):

Tranquillity	99%
Opportunity for recreation (eg walking, jogging)	96%
Wildlife	96%

### Climate and Ecology Emergency

- 6.4 This section also responds to widespread concern about the effects of climate change on ecology and biodiversity, noting that Chelmsford City Council declared a Climate and Ecology Emergency on 16 July 2019.
- 6.5 Climate change both presents a threat to the natural environment (eg through increased flooding and loss of habitats) and highlights the importance of the natural environment. For instance, through

increased tree planting for carbon capture, extending hedgerows to support habitats, and protecting the best and most versatile soils to limit dependence on unsustainable food supply chains.

- 6.6 Therefore, the first part of this section illustrates how Broomfield will contribute to these local/national aspirations, linking to local/national policies as appropriate.

### Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy

- 6.7 Chelmsford City Council and other local authorities in Essex have prepared the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) which has been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) by the City Council. This sets out the mitigation strategy necessary to protect the birds of the Essex coast and their habitats from increased visitor pressure associated with new residential development in combination with other plans and projects. It also sets out how this strategy will be funded, with the Planning Obligations SPD adopted by the City Council providing the mechanism for collecting contributions associated with the mitigation strategy from residential development in the Chelmsford administrative area.
- 6.8 In addition to payment of the RAMS tariff, all development sites over 100 dwellings should include provision of well-designed open space/ green infrastructure, proportionate to its scale, to avoid likely significant effects from recreational disturbance alone. Such provisions can help minimise any predicted increase in recreational pressure on habitats sites by containing most of the recreation within and around the development site, away

from habitats sites. New Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANG) should include:

- high-quality, informal, semi-natural areas
- a circular dog walking route of 2.7 km
- dedicated 'dogs-off-lead' areas
- dog waste bins
- signage/information leaflets to householders to promote these areas for recreation; and
- a commitment to the long-term maintenance and management of these provisions.

6.9 The Neighbourhood Plan Area falls entirely within the zone of influence of the RAMS area and all proposals for residential development in the Neighbourhood Plan area will be subject to the overarching RAMS policy set out below.

### **POLICY BFD3 - RECREATIONAL DISTURBANCE AVOIDANCE AND MITIGATION**

Where appropriate, residential development should make a financial contribution towards mitigation measures, as detailed in the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) Supplementary Planning Document, to avoid adverse in-combination recreational disturbance effects on European Sites.

All residential development within the zones of influence should deliver all measures identified (including strategic measures) through project-level Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRAs), or otherwise, to mitigate any recreational disturbance impacts in compliance with the Habitats Regulations and Habitats Directive.

#### **Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows**

6.10 Local Plan Policy DM17 and supporting paragraphs (8.104 – 8.107) reflect the importance of trees and woodland and their contribution to the well-being of the public and the environment. In particular:

'the provision of shelter and shade, stabilisation of soil, filtering air pollution, reducing noise, improving and softening the landscape, and creating and connecting wildlife habitats.' (para 8.104).

6.11 The starting point for the consideration of all development proposals should be to avoid the unnecessary loss of, or damage to, established trees, woodland and hedgerows and to include measures that will supplement these features. Where new or replacement planting is proposed, the specification should use native species of a size that, when mature, are appropriate to the location. Policy BFD4 and community action CA3 give effect to this policy.

### **POLICY BFD4 - TREES, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROWS**

Development proposals should avoid the loss of, or substantial harm to, important trees, woodland and hedgerows. Where such losses or harm are unavoidable:

- i. the public benefits of the development proposal must be demonstrated to clearly outweigh any harm; and
- ii. suitable mitigation measures, which may include equivalent or better replacement using native species, will be required.

Where a new access is created, or an existing access is widened, through an existing hedgerow, replacement hedgerow of native species shall be planted a minimum of 1m behind the visibility splays to maintain the appearance and continuity of hedgerows in the vicinity.

Wherever practicable, the planting of additional trees and boundary hedges within development proposals should incorporate native species.

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals which adjoin the Rural Area, should incorporate new woodland on its rural boundaries designed to mitigate visual impact, reduce noise and light pollution, create and connect wildlife habitats, and provide opportunities for walking and leisure.



6.12 Through the Neighbourhood Plan process, the promoters of SGS8 'North of Broomfield' site have been encouraged to create a significant new woodland belt on the western boundary of the site. This forms an important aspiration in the Plan, specifically aimed to:

- provide a net benefit to wildlife by creating a new corridor from Sparrowhawk Wood to Puddings Wood
- limit the visual impact and noise/light pollution of new development when looking from the higher Pleshey Farmland Plateau land to the west
- thereby protecting the amenity of residents in the western part of Woodhouse Lane and Partridge Green
- provide a woodland leisure and walking trail for the benefit of new residents within the development.

The Parish Council is grateful to King Edward VI Grammar School for agreeing to extend planting onto the eastern edge of Bedford Fields (which will remain the School's private land).

6.13 The Parish Council has supported tree planting over many years (for instance Centenary Wood; and the Tree for Life scheme). The Council will seek more opportunities to plant woodland and hedgerows, for instance by planting hedgerows alongside new cycle paths.

### Community Action CA3 - Creation and Maintenance of Woodland and Hedgerows

The Parish Council will seek to establish a new belt of woodland on the western boundary of the 'North of Broomfield' strategic site, creating a wildlife corridor and green buffer between Sparrowhawk Wood and Puddings Wood.

The Council will also look for other opportunities to create new woodland and copses during the lifetime of the Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, working with landowners, it will seek to establish a group of volunteers to support and encourage good maintenance of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows for the benefit of wildlife and the public.

Where new cycle paths are created in the countryside, new hedgerows of native species should normally be planted so that both sides of the path are lined with hedgerow. The purpose is to create new habitats and wildlife corridors; discourage trespass and crop damage on adjacent land; and minimise the visual impact of the cycle path.

6.14 Wildlife depends on (and is part of) a wider network of biodiversity, which includes woods, hedgerows, streams and varied types of soil/land use. There could also be merit in carrying out a biodiversity mapping assessment or natural capital assessment. These studies define core assets and map the main opportunities for enhancing biodiversity. They would enable a better understanding of the biodiversity value/potential of the natural environment in Broomfield; how it can be enhanced; and the likely impact of any new development (see Community Action 4)



**Protecting the Highest-Grade Agricultural Land**

6.15 The NPPF requires planning policies to protect and enhance the natural environment by (amongst other things): 'recognising the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.' (Para. 180). The Best and Most Versatile Land is defined nationally as Grades 1, 2 and 3a. This is reflected in Local Plan Strategic Policy S4:

'The Council will seek to minimise the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) to major new development.'

6.16 Other City Council Planning Documents such as the Solar Farm Development SPD also recognise development pressures on the best agricultural land, as well as the importance of protecting it. The Local Validation Requirement List requires an agricultural land classification survey for planning applications on agricultural land which are for major development. Nonetheless, part of SGS8 'North of Broomfield' strategic development site is located on Grade 2 agricultural land. The Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) calls for sites indicate the continued interest of developers in developing high grade agricultural land in Broomfield.

6.17 The Climate Emergency increases the importance of protecting high-quality agricultural land, so that food production can take place as close as possible to consumption and limit reliance on importing food, which increases carbon emissions.

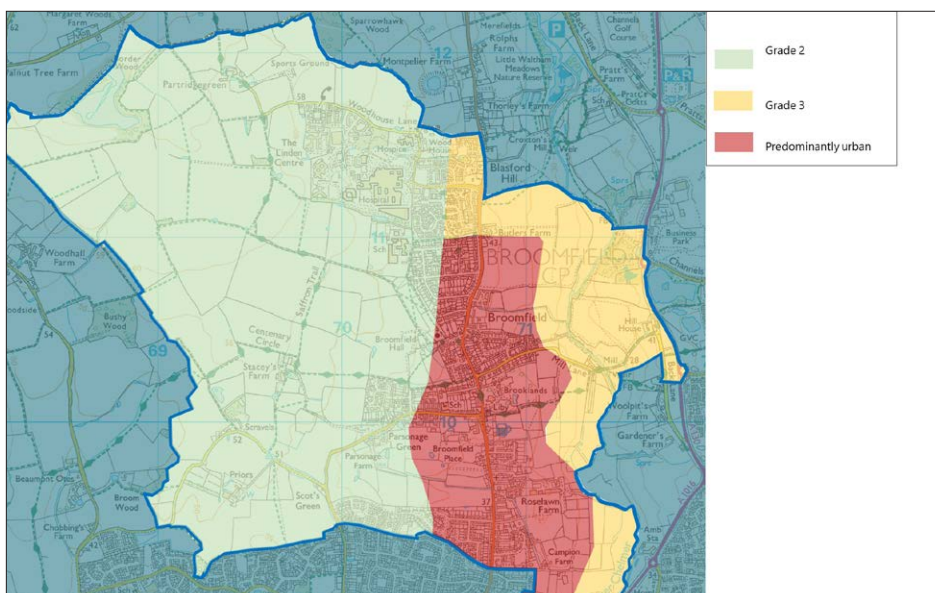
6.18 Map 7 shows that most of the agricultural land in Broomfield Parish is classed as Grade 2 Very Good, with the remainder as Grade 3 Good to Moderate.

6.19 It is important that the best agricultural land in Broomfield is protected from major development. Building on Strategic Policy S11 of the Local Plan, the following policy is designed to provide additional protection to Grade 2 land.

**POLICY BFD5 - PROTECTING THE HIGHEST GRADE AGRICULTURAL LAND**

Where development is proposed on Grade 2 agricultural land, as defined in the Natural England Agricultural Land Classification Maps, and outside the Broomfield Settlement Boundary or Chelmsford Urban Area Boundary, proposals will be supported where they are:

- i. replacements for existing buildings or structures; or
- ii. previously developed land; or
- iii. essential to support an existing agriculture, forestry, equestrian or other land-based rural business; and
- iv. supported by evidence, to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority, that the proposed development cannot reasonably be accommodated on land other than Grade 2 agricultural land.



Map 7 - Agricultural Land Quality in Broomfield

## Tranquillity

- 6.20 99% of responses to the residents' questionnaire considered tranquillity to be an important or very important benefit of the countryside. Since then, COVID lockdowns have further highlighted the importance of accessing tranquil spaces in maintaining mental health.
- 6.21 The Blandford Landscape Character Assessment (2006) also notes the strong sense of tranquillity of the Pleshey Farmland Plateau (the rural area to the west and northwest of Broomfield village). It shows this landscape area is the only area around Chelmsford where the sense of tranquillity is not adversely affected, at least in part, by major roads or the railway line.
- 6.22 DEFRA statistical data on road and rail noise (2017 – shown on Map 8) also illustrates Broomfield's role in offering tranquil countryside that is accessible to many people across Chelmsford. This is clearly an important environmental asset both for Broomfield and the wider area which should be valued and conserved, as it offers a means of mitigation for the impact of new development. While planning policies can help to conserve this kind of community benefit, tranquillity can also be affected by other factors, such as national infrastructure proposals, changes to flight paths and airport expansion.
- 6.23 Given these pressures, it could be helpful to study and give expression to these qualities through 'tranquillity mapping' or a 'tranquillity audit'.

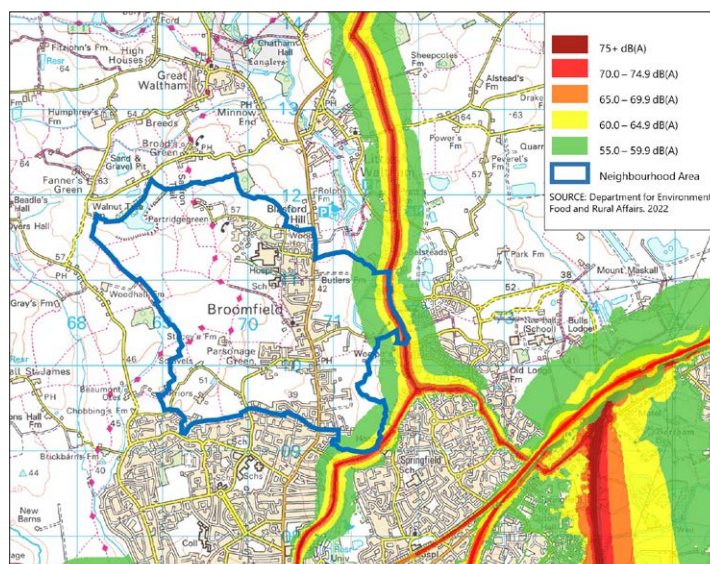
For examples of this approach see:

<https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/mapping-tranquillity> and <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/app/uploads/2018/05/New-Forest-National-Park-Tranquil-Area-Mapping-Report-March-2015-FINAL2.pdf>.

The purpose is to better describe the importance of this aspect of the natural environment and be able to evaluate and express the impact of development proposals.

### Community Action CA4 - Further Study of the Natural Environment

The Parish Council will investigate the potential benefits of tranquillity and biodiversity mapping, as a means to better understand, conserve and enhance these aspects of Broomfield's natural environment.



Map 8 - Road and rail noise levels averaged over a 24-hour period (source DEFRA)

## New Accessible Open Space

- 6.24 Chelmsford Local Plan identifies a number of Open Spaces, Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) and Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves, all of which can be found in Broomfield. Designated open spaces also include playing fields that are not attached to a school. All of these can be found in Broomfield, both in the Green Wedge and other areas.
- 6.25 As indicated above, feedback suggests that 'opportunity for recreation (eg walking, jogging)' is an important or very important aspect of the countryside for 96% of the local community. In response to this feedback, the Neighbourhood Plan proposes two new areas of publicly accessible open space on the settlement/rural area boundary.

## The Chelmer Valley

- 6.26 This area of the Parish is part of the Green Wedge, covered by Local Plan Strategic Policy S11b which states:

'The Green Wedge has an identified intrinsic character and beauty and is a multi-faceted distinctive landscape providing important open green networks, which have been instrumental in shaping the City's growth, character and appearance. These networks prevent urban sprawl and settlement coalescence and provide for wildlife, flood storage capacity, leisure and recreation, and travel by cycling and walking, which allows for good public access which will be further improved through the requirements of development allocated in the Local Plan.'

6.27 The northern part of the Chelmer Valley from the Parish Council and Football Club playing fields northwards, has been identified as Valued Landscape and enjoys good public access for leisure and recreation, travel by walking and (along Mill Lane) travel by cycling. There is some scope for further enhancement, as set out in the following Community Action:

**Community Action CA5 - Extension to the Local Nature Reserve**

The Parish Council will work with the landowner and the Essex Wildlife Trust to investigate the possibility of expanding the Newlands Grove Nature Reserve. It will also explore whether some of the informal footpaths in this section of the Chelmer Valley could be formalised.

6.28 However, the southern part of the Chelmer Valley has no public access, so offers no opportunities for leisure, recreation or travel by either cycling or walking. The Neighbourhood Plan identifies this as a significant deficiency. This should be addressed in order to support recent/planned development within the Parish and mitigate its impacts.

6.29 Opportunities have arisen through the Plan consultation to improve this situation, by creating:

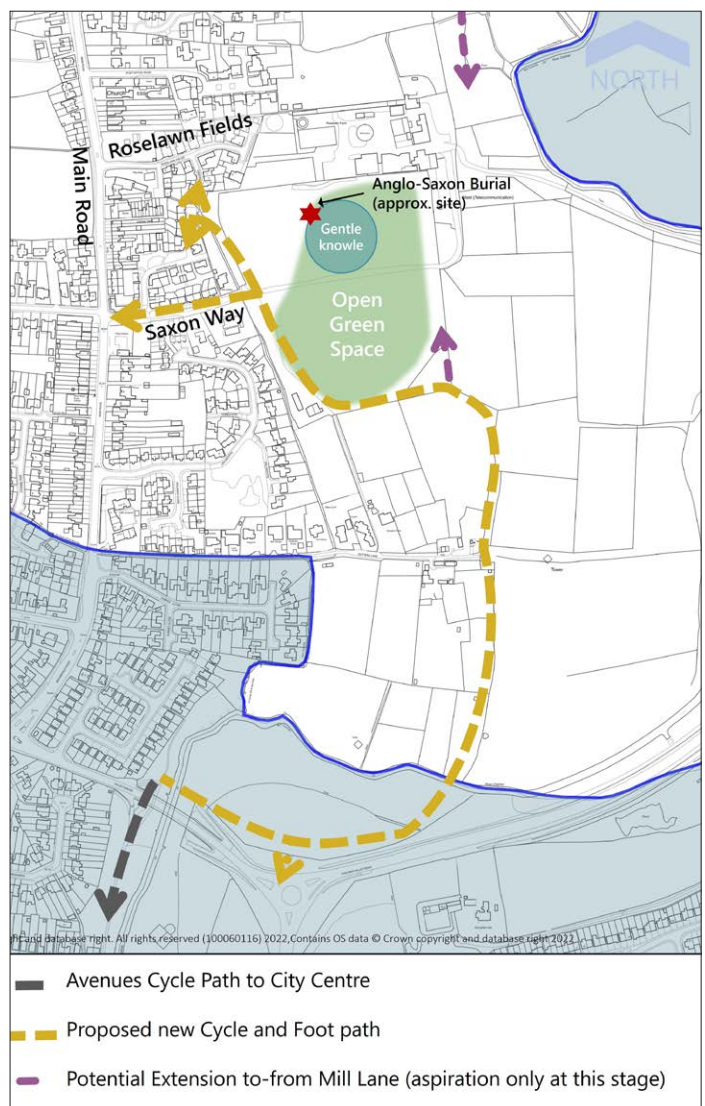
- access for walking and cycling
- accessible open space for leisure and recreation
- scope for projects to enhance biodiversity and reduce the risk of surface water flooding.

These opportunities are shown in **Map 9**. and outlined in the following paragraphs.

**Cycle and Footpaths**

6.30 The proposal is to create a new cycle path and footpath from Valley Bridge to Saxon Way and Ashford Place (marked as a dashed yellow line in **Map 9**). This would link to the existing Avenues cycle path that leads to the City Centre, railway station and university, making it possible to walk or cycle safely from Broomfield village to the centre of Chelmsford. It would form a commuting as well as a leisure route.

6.31 The cycle path route shown would form part of the wider network outlined in Section 11. It has been discussed with the relevant landowners. Discussions will continue and final agreement will be subject to contract in the normal way. There may be possibilities in the future to extend the route to Mill Lane (as indicated by the purple dotted line in **Map 9**) but this does not have support from all the necessary landowners at the moment.



**Map 9 - Improving Access in the Chelmer Valley**



### Public Open Space

- 6.32 There is also an opportunity to create public open space on land at the east end of Saxon Way. This land is currently degraded grassland on the site of former gravel workings. It has no agricultural use and is divided by a rough track leading to light industrial/ service units at Roselawn Farm. The track is not a public right of way and there is no public access to the land.
- 6.33 The land includes the site of the Anglo-Saxon Princely Burial, an archaeological site of national importance which was discovered in the 1880s. The current archaeological position is outlined in M. Gee, 'Broomfield Barrow Pit', in Essex Archaeology and History, 3rd Series, 17 (1986), pp.144-7. This shows that, apart from a small 'unquarried ridge', there is no known archaeology left to discover, as the whole site has been excavated for gravel. But it presents an opportunity to create and celebrate a local historic focal point, in line with Policy DM15 of the Local Plan.
- 6.34 If acquired for public use, there would be a more detailed consultation beforehand about exactly how the site could best be used. Given its location on the rural edge, informal space for walking and wildlife might be more appropriate than formal uses (such as sports pitches), though the site is large enough to accommodate several uses. It would be important to enhance landscape quality, which could include planting around the boundaries to protect the amenity of neighbouring properties. There would be scope for biodiversity projects, including sustainable drainage ponds to promote the management of surface water issues in the wider area.
- 6.35 There may also be scope to re-align and upgrade the existing rough track to make it less prominent and more serviceable, though this would need to be discussed and agreed with all the landowners affected.

### Securing and Funding New Access and Open Space

- 6.36 This project is supported by Policy BFD6 and Community Action CA7. In terms of funding, it could be supported by:
- the Parish share of Community Infrastructure Levy or CIL (money from development). Parishes with an adopted neighbourhood plan receive a greater proportion of CIL
  - Lottery funding and charitable grant funding for heritage and biodiversity projects
  - funding to improve cycle path infrastructure.

- 6.37 However, these are unlikely to be sufficient by themselves and will require a direct contribution through development. This is one reason for the small community housing project proposed in Policy BFD10 (see section 7 for further details).

### Community Action CA6 - Improving Public Access to the Chelmer River Valley

The Parish Council will continue discussions with relevant landowners in order to create new cycle paths, footpaths and community open space at the east end of Saxon Way.

### POLICY BFD6 - BROOMFIELD GREEN WEDGE

Proposals that secure enhanced access for recreational uses, including footpaths and cycle routes, in the Green Wedge will be supported, subject to the development being in accordance with the relevant strategic policies of the adopted Local Plan.

#### Land South of Broomfield Place

- 6.38 New accessible public open space of 10 hectares will be created as part of a wider allocation for community facilities on land south and west of Broomfield Place. This is shown in Figure 12 and described in Para.s 10.10 – 10.19 of Section 10 Community Facilities.

#### Local Green Space (LGS)

- 6.39 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) enables the designation and protection of land of particular importance to local communities as Local Green Space (LGS) in neighbourhood plans. Such designations rule out new development on them other than in very special circumstances. Paragraph 106 of the NPPF states that the designation should only be used where the green space is:

- in reasonably proximity to the community it serves
- 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
- where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

The designation of Local Green Spaces should not be used simply to block development.



6.40 It's also important to note that **LGS is not the same as public open space**. Whilst LGS may include forms of public access, such as public footpaths, the designation does not give the public further rights of access. Existing rights and restrictions must therefore continue to be respected. Also, designation as LGS does not imply any changes in existing land use.

**Process for identifying LGS.**

6.41 The residents' questionnaire asked Question 19: Are there any specific pieces of land you would like to see designated as green space, to prevent them from being developed?

Many answers suggested extensive rather than specific pieces of land, so do not meet the criteria for designation as LGS. However, some more discrete, specific pieces of land were proposed (see Appendix 4). This helped to indicate which pieces of land are demonstrably special to the local community.

6.42 The Broomfield Landscape Appraisal identified that in addition to the Local Plan designations mentioned above *'there are a number of other areas of open space within the Parish and within the urban fabric of the settlement which are important areas which have significance due to the aesthetic quality, historic significance, recreational value, biodiversity and sense of place'* (Para. 5.4.1).

6.43 In the course of considering the suitability of land for development, the AECOM Site Allocation Document noted which sites might, in their judgement, be suitable for allocation as LGS.

6.44 In light of all this, the Review of Local Green Space, Valued Landscape and Key Views (the Review) was commissioned to examine (amongst other things) which sites meet the criteria set out in the NPPF for designation. The Review looked at 26 sites with potential for LGS and concluded that 22 of them met the criteria. These are set out in Section 2 of the Review. Also, an additional site *'Open space to the north of Hospital Approach within existing new housing'* (para.2.2.1, 4th bullet point) was identified as suitable, if the Parish/NPA boundary was amended to include the whole site.

6.45 Finally, 3 further criteria were applied to the sites recommended in the Review:

- effect of the subsequent amendment to the Parish NPA boundary (agreed July 2022)
- whether the recommended site was already covered by an equivalent designation that would offer the same degree of protection

- whether significant changes could be made to the recommended site without the need for planning permission, in which case designation would be rendered largely ineffective.

6.46 These 15 sites are designated in Policy BFD7 (the numbers in brackets relate to the numbering of the LGS in Section 2 of the Review). Should development proposals come forward on these sites they will be considered against the Green Belt policies of the NPPF and Local Plan.

## **POLICY BFD7 - LOCAL GREEN SPACES**

The following Local Green Spaces are designated in the Plan and identified on the Policies Map. Management of development within the Local Green Spaces will be consistent with national policy on the management of development in Green Belts.

- a. Newland Grove Nature Reserve and adjoining land (1)
- b. Centenary Wood (7)
- c. Roselawn Play Area (8)
- d. Vellacotts Green (9)
- e. Scot's Green (13)
- f. Play area/linear landscape at Cowlin Mead and Oat Leys (14)
- g. Daffy Wood (16)
- h. Night Pasture and Broom Pightle (18)
- i. Old Church Avenue Playground (19)
- j. Church Avenue open space and grass verges (20)
- k. Open space between Mandeville Way and Court Road (22)
- l. Linear green space and woodland south of Nash Drive (23)
- m. Long Shapely Belt (24)
- n. Puddings Wood (26) (excluding the section where planning consent has already been granted for the proposed new access road)
- o. Open space to the north of Hospital Approach, at Petty Croft (n/a)

6.47 Where land is designated as LGS for its special nature and local significance, there may be costs in conserving and enhancing its character, for instance in terms of its beauty, historic features, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife. Where appropriate, the Parish Council will consider making grants towards the maintenance and enhancement of such features.

**Community Action CA7 - Conserving and Enhancing the Special Features of Local Green Spaces**

The Parish Council will consider grants towards the conservation and enhancement of designated Local Green Space (LGS). Grants must relate to the special features and characteristics which have led to the designation, as outlined in the 'Review of Local Green Space, Valued Landscape and Key Views'. Routine maintenance unrelated to special features or character will not be eligible.



a. Newland Grove



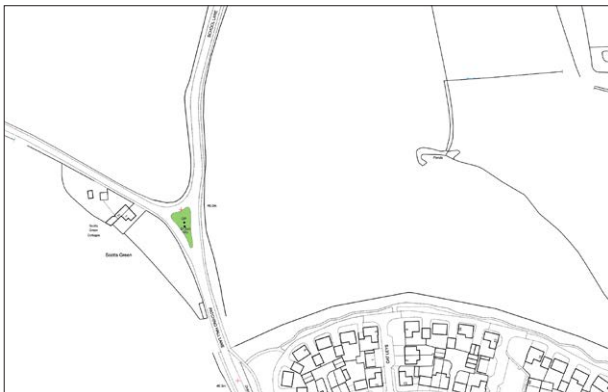
b. Centenary Wood



c. Roselawn Play Area



d. Vellacotts Green



e. Scot's Green



f. Cowlin Mead and Oat Leys





g. Daffy Wood



h. Night Pasture and Broom Pightle



i. Old Church Avenue Playground



j. Church Avenue



k. Mandeville Way and Court Road



l. Nash Drive



m. Long Shapley Belt





n. Puddings Wood



o. Petty Croft