



EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

Local Green Space Designation

General Comments

Local Green Space is very important to local communities, as they provide areas of fields, woodlands and general green area for people to utilise in their everyday lives for exercise, enjoyment and general health & wellbeing, which is so important for mental health. Local Green Space not only provides visual amenity to the community, it also provides much needed habitat and green corridors for animals and wildlife. Local Green Space, especially where there are trees is a huge benefit to the environment providing oxygen, anti-pollution barriers and protection and it is vital that the areas are protected as Local Green Space, so they remain in place to support initiatives to tackle the Climate Emergency.

As part of Earley Town Council's submission to Wokingham Borough's Draft Local Plan Update, 11 areas of Green Space were identified and shadow assessments at the time were carried out in accordance to Section 3: Methodology for Assessment of the Local Green Space Topic Paper.

The 11 areas identified were as follow:-

Chalfont Woods & Chalfont Park



Chalfont Park and Woodland area is a well-established green space enjoyed by local residents with two sides of the park in close proximity to local housing. The park is used for sports activities, including two football pitches supporting local football teams. There are also two designated play areas that are used by young families. The park is frequently used by dog walkers which also provides for great social interaction. Complementing the park, over decades, the woodland area has naturally grown into a substantial haven for local wildlife. Trees and wild foliage also provides a bio-diversity to support our green environment. Some review comments received have been "As a regular dog walker and a local resident it such a pleasure to walk around" and "Chalfont Park is now a well maintained tree-fringed oasis of green space that provides my family with an opportunity to escape from the urban sprawl of Lower Earley, and enjoy our own tranquil little piece of nature."

Events Field, off Kilnsea Drive



Kilnsea Events field is an area that is well used by children and adults for leisure activities, dog walking and there is a very good play area. The field is also used for large community events such as Family Fun Days, organised in recent years by the Lower Earley Baptist Church. The field has also been used in the past for the Earley Carnival, a circus and fairs, which have been well attended.

The Wilderness area & Harris Gardens on the University of Reading Campus



This area of land is demonstrably special and historically significant. It still offers a glimpse of the past splendours of the Whiteknights Estate, once one of the most celebrated estates in the country.

We can still see much of that beautifully laid out woodland and garden developed by the 5th duke of Marlborough in the 18th century. As the Wilderness woodland borders Wilderness Road (a main route which is often congested) the woodland gives protection from pollution, particularly important for the residents on Wilderness Road.

The whole area is very important for local biodiversity and the Wilderness woodland has recorded over 100 species of birds. Rare and unusual trees can still be found dating back to the 1800's. The Harris gardens, (established 1972 and supported by the Friends of Harris Gardens charity) are botanical gardens offering an amazing resource to residents with twelve acres of meadow interspersed with streams, copses and cultivated gardens.

The area contains thousands of plant species with many rare and unusual plants from around the world. The gardens are beautiful and the whole area offers a peaceful place to walk, so important for resident's health and wellbeing. It is also used weekly by the community for Health Walks organised by Wokingham Borough. The whole area is well used by the residents of Earley and is a highly valued amenity and the area fulfils the five criteria set out for the designation of Local Green space.

Laurel Park



Laurel Park has 3 fields made up of two large playing fields and a smaller field behind a playground. The park is home to sporting events such as football with a pavilion that offers changing rooms, toilets and a kitchen, as well as a car park with approximately 50 spaces. The park is also popular with local walkers. The park is also used for the annual firework display and has been used for a 10K run. Laurel Park is located within close proximity to a significant number of residential properties, so is easily accessed by many residents.

Laurel Park is an integral part of our local community, as it offers open space for local residents and is close to Maiden Erlegh Lake. This allows walkers the added value of not only enjoying a walk in Laurel Park, but to continue on or from Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

Loddon Fields



Much of Loddon Fields lies on a floodplain; therefore development on this area would have a serious impact on flooding, putting properties at risk. The fields provide a much needed sound barrier between the M4, Lower Earley Way and residential housing. The fields are an area well used by dog walker and used for general leisure. There are many trees in this area which provide oxygen and remove CO2 in the atmosphere, so are a great environmental benefit to the local area. WBC recently planted a very large area of wild flowers and repaired the footpaths which had not been maintained very well for the last 30 years. This wild flower area has been very much appreciated by local residents who are now having picnics nearby. The whole area is a haven for wildlife and the recent addition of the wild flower area has considerably improved biodiversity. The area also forms part of a country walk that runs from the Blackboy roundabout to Loddon Bridge which was envisaged when Lower Earley was built.

London Road (the green area between the A4 and the houses along London Road)



This area serves as screen between a busy dual carriageway and main arterial road into Reading from the east. As such it counters the traffic pollution and provides a safety barrier between the road and the community of North Earley and Whitegates, particularly the dwellings on London Road. It is not an extensive stretch of land but has been threatened by potential development in the past. It should be retained as an open green space.

Pearmans Copse



Pearman's Copse is contiguous with Loddon Fields . In contrast to many of our open green spaces, this area is mostly woodland, which improves air quality (something that has extra importance so close to a motorway), it supports bio-diversity and offers a refuge for wildlife. Aside from its aesthetic and environmental qualities, it is also a much loved area for local residents to walk and for children to explore. It absorbs sound from the M4 and busy Lower Earley Way West, helping to reduce environmental and noise pollution for a large number of Earley and Shinfield resident.

Sol Joel Park



Sol Joel Park is 7.3 hectares in size and is located on the north of Wokingham Road, west of Mays Lane, and east of Church Road, Earley. St. Peter's Church and Earley St. Peter's CE Primary School are on its north-western boundary. Beyond its northern boundary, in a cutting, lies the Reading to Waterloo and Gatwick railway lines. Sol Joel Park was given by way of a charitable endowment to Reading Borough Council by Solomon Joel in 1927 on trust, in perpetuity, for it to be used as playing fields or for similar purposes of exercise and recreation. Sol Joel Park has been held as public open space for those purposes since that time; it is also a protected space by Fields in Trust. The Park is managed by Earley Town Council, under a 50 year lease

The site is located within close proximity to a significant number of residential properties, within easy walking distance to many residents. Sol Joel Park is considered not to constitute as an extensive tract of land, as it is well contained by Wokingham Road, Mays Lane, Church Road, St. Peter's Church, Earley St. Peter's CE Primary School and the railway. Within its boundaries are mature trees; within its southern boundary is a hedged, informal garden area of bushes and trees; and there is a pavilion (constructed in 2012 as part of a Queen's Jubilee project) – all contributing to a sense of enclosure.

The site has a recreational value for many reasons; for formal recreation, as a playing field with pitches available for hire for football and cricket matches. Other sports and activities are also undertaken by a great many people visiting the park and the Park also offers additional recreation in the form of a skate park, a street running (Parkour) facility, a basketball facility, and a children's play area, which also includes an area for children with additional needs. Sol Joel Park has been particularly valuable to the physical and mental health of the local community during the period of lockdown due to Covid 19; there has been a significant increase in the use of the site for informal exercise and recreational purposes by people of all ages during this time.

Although SJP is public open space and therefore protected by national and local policy, the site is considered to be demonstrably special to the local community because of its recreational value and its historic value, having been recreational space for the local community, for almost a century. Sol Joel Park provides visual amenity to the community and is important to the setting of St. Peter's Church. It provides wildlife habitats and corridors to the benefit of birds and wildlife. It provides a sense of local identity and an element of distinctiveness to the area, warranting its designation as a Local Green Space.

Thames Riverside (from the Waterside Centre to Kennet Mouth)



Save Our Ancient Riverside (SOAR) a campaign group has already expressed its disappointment that WBC might not consider the Thames Riverside eligible for Local Green Space designation. Earley Town Council and many residents support their case.

See https://drive.google.com/file/d/12uBMxdJSuyucCBmUT-J6_Nd5Uv8CMvKM/view for their submission.

The executive summary states: ‘This valuable and essential piece of open space alongside our river Thames must be protected as Local Green Space for generations to come. It fulfils all the NPPF planning criteria, [particularly] it demonstrably has huge significance to the communities it serves, witnessed by the many thousands of signatures on the petitions to Reading and Wokingham Council against building over it. The evidence presented in the Topic Paper on Local Green Space is partial, misleading, factually incorrect and completely omits any mention of the enduring efforts of local people to protect the space over decades that provides ample proof of the importance of the space to local people.’

The Riverside is very heavily used by walkers, runners and cyclists. One of its main attractions is that it provides a route that is free from motorised traffic that runs between trees and green space on one side and the River Thames on the other. The users can be divided into commuters and recreational. For commuters the path provides an important link for active travel between Reading and Wokingham. The land also provides a backdrop to users on the River Thames. As the Wokingham Waterside Centre is down stream of the site, the Dreadnought Reach of the Thames that borders the land is frequently used by canoeists, paddle boarders and dragon boat enthusiasts who value the green space on each side of the river as a setting for their sport.

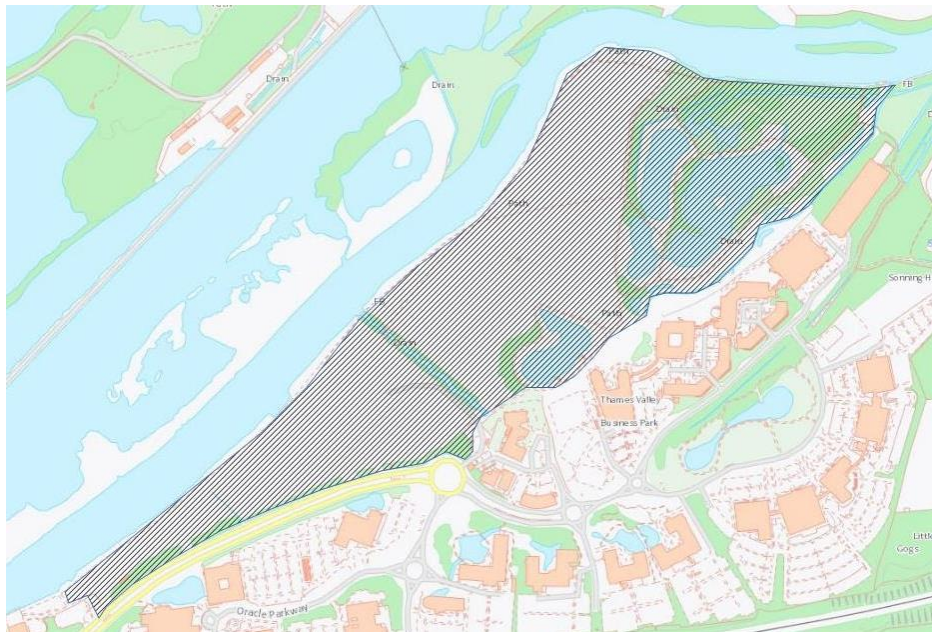
As the land is adjacent to the mouth of the River Kennet it has held a significant historical role for thousands of years. The headwaters of the River Kennet form a concentration of Neolithic monuments. As such the site meets the NPPF criteria and should be protected as Local Green Space with a stronger policy definition as suggested by Earley Town Council.

The Drive (green triangle)



This area has recently been planted by Earley Town Council as a wildlife and pollinator site. It is a small space that serves the local community and should not be subject to any development, but retained as an open space for the community to enjoy.

The Nature Reserve at Thames Valley Park



The River Thames contribution to the setting and landscape of the borough, stretching from north east from Thames Valley Park, via Henley-on-Thames towards Remenham. The Thames is a popular location for tourism, recreation and sporting activities, including boating activities and walkers using the popular Thames Path. The Thames Waterway Plan and Thames River Basin Management Plan, alongside other relevant documents together play an important role in maintaining and enhancing such a valuable natural asset. (LPU 10.100.)

Thames Valley Park nature reserve is a stretch of wetland habitat alongside the River Thames with routes for cyclists (including National Cycle Route 4) and walkers, including the Thames Path, which is directly connected to the network of trails through the wetland area. The Park is used by a range of leisure groups from model aircraft enthusiasts to running clubs, park runs and fitness camps for local business staff.

The reserve has extensive areas of wildflower-rich grassland, several ponds surrounded by reed beds and a wide variety of native trees and shrubs. It is home to a diverse range of wildlife, with almost 40 different species of birds. Reed warblers and reed buntings make their homes here in summer and winter visitors include bittern, water rails and ducks such as the shoveler and gadwall. Dragonflies and damselflies abound, with 18 species recorded, as well as the common toad and the harmless grass snake. Although very rarely seen, Otters have been recorded along this section of the Thames and freshwater mussels can be spotted amongst the gravel at the river's edge. Pontoons and other viewing areas are in place for all visitors.

To the west of the wetlands lies an extensive area of wildflower-rich floodplain grassland. In the summer grasshoppers and crickets are audible and the rare Skylark can also be heard here. These meadows are cut for hay in late summer and are regularly under water in winter, as the river rises, bringing the nutrients that make this such a special place for wildlife.

As such the site meets the NPPF criteria and should be protected as Local Green Space with a stronger policy definition as suggested by Earley Town Council.

Earley Town Council recommends the following sites as additional areas for Local Green Space designation. It is considered that these also meet the criteria in the Methodology for Assessment of the Local Green Space Topic Paper.

Land east of Maiden Erlegh Lake



This is a small area of green space close to the playground in Laurel Park. It has an important social use for people needing a quiet space. It has a variety of bird life including Jays and other less common species. The wooded area that surrounds the field provides a habitat for a thriving number of mammals and is an important feature environmentally. The location is very popular with walkers and there is a small play area situated within this parcel of land which provides enjoyment and outdoor activity for children.

Radstock Lane (Green Triangle with Beech Lane)



This area of land was originally the junction between Beech Lane and Radstock Lane before Redhatch Drive was constructed. It contributes to the "Green" environment that makes Beech Lane such an attractive road. It provides a habitat for many species of birds, squirrels and hedgehogs. Also the stream that feeds Maiden Erleigh Lake runs in culvert under this land.

Reservoir Area (on Elm Lane)



The Reservoir Area on Elm Lane is largely occupied by a covered reservoir and pumping station, which cannot be developed for the foreseeable future. Bounded by residential developments on two sides and on part of its third side along Elm Lane, and by the grounds of Whiteknights School to the south-west, this is a welcome open space in a heavily developed part of Earley. It contains a mature woodland within the south-western and north-western boundaries and a small area has been planted with saplings. There is an abundance of wildflowers, and the location is well used for play and exercising dogs. Any additional access to and from Elm Lane would exacerbate traffic problems on that already very busy road.

Redhatch Copse



Redhatch Copse is a remnant of the woods, which dotted Berkshire in historic times. When Sibly Hall, one of Reading University's then halls of residence, was built in about 1970, Redhatch Copse was incorporated in the grounds of Sibly Hall. In the early part of the last decade, when the University was expanding its stock of residential accommodation on the main Whiteknights campus and in Reading itself, Sibly Hall became redundant. As a consequence, Sibly Hall was demolished and its grounds sold for development, with the proviso that Redhatch Copse remained basically untouched, albeit with a mobile phone mast erected on its edge, so it could be enjoyed by the general public. The Copse has now recovered from the effects of being adjacent to a building site and with the undergrowth being of only moderate density, the copse is an excellent place for walking and getting away from the humdrum.



The combination of playing fields, open space with associated tree cover, woodland and allotments provides an important contribution to the local character, townscape and urban form. The site provides a diverse range of uses and habitats which provide a significant open and undeveloped space within an attractive green setting, which act as a 'green lung' between the settlements of Woodley and Earley. This site is also designated as a Site of Urban Landscape Value (SULV) in accordance with Policy NE7 of the local plan due to its distinctive, local and special qualities associated with High Wood Local Nature Reserve and the Local Wildlife Site²⁵.

Earley Town Council welcomes and supports the designation of Local green Space in the Plan, specifically the land south of Reading Road, Bulmershe, and Earley. We support the proposal to treat the site as two separate parcels both of which meet the national criteria of Local green Space. In our view the Policy needs to be more concise and focused. As formulated it is too permissive given that it must impose a high level of constraint upon development consistent with Green Belt. In addition greater clarity is needed to ensure consistency and certainty of future management decisions, based on a generic policy to protect recreational open space, as adopted recently by Reading Borough Council.

The Town Council suggests that the wording of policy HC4 should be replaced by 'Proposals that would result in the loss of any of these areas of open space, erode their quality through insensitive adjacent development, or jeopardise their use or enjoyment by the public, will not be permitted.' This is supported by the local residents' association for North Earley and Whitegates.

Meadow Park



Meadow Park is an area which is neatly tucked away and you would not necessarily know it was there unless you live there. The park is positioned between two residential roads and is accessible by foot. The park has a playground area for children and is located not far from a school, so is a popular place to visit after school for parents and children.

Maiden Erlegh Lake and Woods



Maiden Erlegh Lake and Woods (MENR) is some twelve hectares in extent and is classified as a Local Nature Reserve. It is located south of Silverdale Road and east of Beech Lane, to the south of the park is Instow Road and to the east is Laurel Park.

The lake was originally part of the Maiden Erlegh Estate purchased in 1903 by Solomon Barnato Joel. The estate Mansion stood between Silverdale Road and Crawford Close to the north of the lake. When millionaire Solomon Joel died in 1931, the 750-acre estate was divided up and the land developed for housing. The mansion itself was demolished in 1960 after Cooper Estates Limited purchased the site. In response to the demands of local residents, Cooper Estates agreed to sell Maiden Erlegh Lake and the surrounding woodland to Earley Parish Council in return for being allowed to build on another greenfield site. Old Lane Wood, at the rear of Sellafeld Way, was acquired from the then Wokingham District Council. The woodlands within the Park are of great historical and ecological importance, with Oak wood dating from a least the 16th Century and containing some 18 indicator species associated with old woodlands.

The Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve is a very popular location for local residents of all ages for an array of activities such as walking, jogging, fishing, bird watching and for general enjoyment. The lake is surrounded by trees which offer much needed habitat to animals and wildlife. The lake itself is home to fish, swans, geese and ducks. The Reserve is also an important educational place for children to come and learn about the natural world, as they will see a variety of things.

In August every year, Earley Town Council holds their Green Fair on the green area nearest to Beech Lane, which is a very popular, well supported event for stallholders and local residents

This concludes the comments of Earley Town Council

Dated: 18th June 2020