

Green Spaces Technical Note

Introduction

This Technical Note considers the background and context of Green Spaces within settlements in the Scottish Borders. It also looks at the current policy on the topic and considers the local issues that require to be taken into account in the formulation of any policy on Green spaces for the Scottish Borders context. Furthermore it provides recommendations on future Green Space policy to be contained in the Local Development Plan (LDP) and how it can be used to guide long term planning within the Council area.

Context

Green space, also called open space, can be either formal or informal and can be within or on the edges of a settlement. It can include allotments, parks and gardens, play spaces or civic spaces such as market squares.

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) states that *“access to good quality open spaces can encourage people to be physically active and aid health and wellbeing”*. Furthermore the SPP acknowledges that *“networks of linked, good quality open space are important for their contribution to amenity and their role in nature conservation, biodiversity, recreation and physical activity”*.

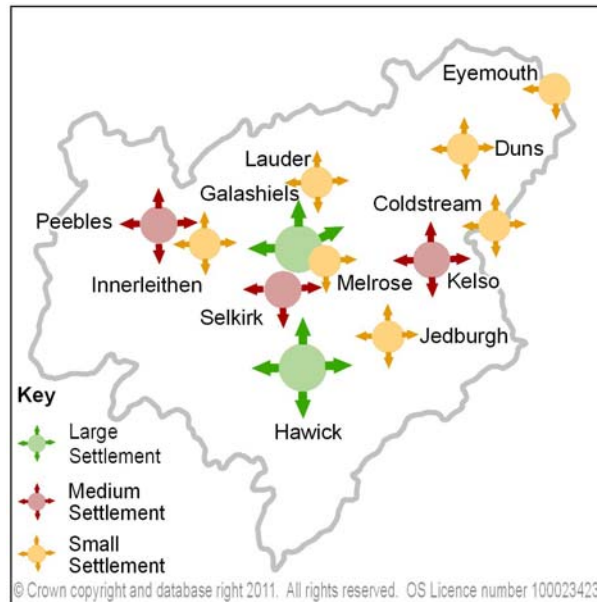
The SPP also states that *“Open spaces which are identified in the open space audit and strategy as valued and functional, or which are capable of being brought into functional use to meet a need identified in the open space strategy, should be identified and protected in the development plan”*.

In addition to the SPP, Planning Advice Note 65: Planning and Open Space (PAN 65) states that *“Development plans should safeguard important open spaces from development in the long term and identify spaces that require significant improvement”*.

The current policy on open space contained within the Scottish Borders Consolidated Local Plan 2011 gives protection to a wide range of defined types of open space within settlements and aims to prevent their piecemeal loss to development. It also aims to ensure that where development is proposed, the loss is justified and that compensatory provisions are made. The current policy approach starts from a position that values open spaces equally and does not seek to impose a hierarchy. It recognises that some open spaces will come under greater pressure than others, particularly green spaces within residential areas. Equally however, it recognises that open space may be required to meet development needs through infill development.

A Green Space Strategy incorporating the green space audit was adopted by the Council in the form of a Supplementary Planning Guidance in October 2009. The Council's vision for green space, sport and recreation facilities is set out in the Green Space Strategy:

“The Scottish Borders will have a network of accessible, high quality and highly valued green spaces creating communities and settlements to be proud of, promoting sustainability, supporting biodiversity and extensively contributing to the economic, social and environmental aspirations of the region”.



Green Space Strategy: Strategic Green Space Network

The audit not only identified the amount of open space within settlements but also considered its quality and value. The ‘quality’ relates to the range of facilities or features on site, and covers factors such as site accessibility, safety and security, management and maintenance and the presence of planting, seats and other facilities. Whilst ‘value’ relates to the contribution the site makes to local amenity, recreation and well being, bio-diversity, cultural heritage, community or other strategic objectives.

The Green Spaces in the Scottish Borders

In considering the identification of Green Spaces within settlements in the Scottish Borders and in line the SPP, consideration of the value and function of green spaces is crucial. As the Green Space Audit which was incorporated into the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Green Space already identifies many of the green spaces that exist within settlements, it is not considered appropriate to replicate this information within the LDP. It should be noted however that the green space audit also includes scoring on ‘Quality’ and ‘Value’. Therefore in line with the SPP only those spaces that are most “valued and functional” will be identified within the LDP.

Definition and Aim

Greenspace Scotland state that: *“greenspaces are the 'green lungs' of our towns and cities contributing to improving people's physical and mental health by providing places for informal recreation - walking, cycling, sitting, socialising and children's play - and 'breathing spaces' to take time out from*

the stresses of modern life. They bring the countryside into our towns and cities, and make it accessible from our 'backdoors'.

PAN 65 sets out the different types of open space (green space). The document states that there are 11 different types of open space. The types named are: Public parks and gardens; Private gardens and grounds; Amenity greenspace; Playspace for children and teenagers; Sports areas; Green corridors; Natural/semi natural green spaces; Allotments and community growing spaces; Civic spaces; Burial grounds; and Other functional green space.

The aim in the identification of green spaces in the LDP is to protect and safeguard the most important spaces within settlements. This is in line with PAN 65 which states: "*Development plans should safeguard important open spaces from development in the long term*".

Assessment of Green Spaces

This section of the technical note considers what makes a green space worthy of identification in the LDP and merit gaining its protection.

Due to the sheer coverage of the Scottish Borders, the number of settlements within the Borders and in line with PAN 65, it is considered that only the most important green spaces within settlements will be identified and safeguarded through the LDP. This is not to say that those spaces not identified within the Plan will fail to receive protection, as they will remain to receive protection through the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Green Space.

As noted above the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Green Space incorporates a green space audit that considered and scored the 'quality' and 'value' of green spaces within settlements. It is therefore suggested that this is the first point to consider in seeking to identify those green spaces for inclusion in the LDP. Therefore, it is recommended the LDP should consider spaces within the green space audit that are of both 'high quality and high value' in identifying those spaces to be included within the LDP. In addition however, where a settlement may only have green spaces identified as 'low quality and high value' these too should be identified in the LDP. This would then allow for greater protection of those individual spaces, and also potentially allow for future enhancement to be directed and focused on those green spaces that the community considered most valuable.

However, where a settlement may only have spaces that have been audited and are categorised as 'low quality and low value' and it is considered that it would be to the detriment of the settlement if one or more of those spaces were lost, then they too should also be identified.

Finally, given the many benefits gained with keeping an allotment of which include community, health and environmental benefits, it is suggested that these too irrespective of their scoring within the green space audit should also be identified and protected within the LDP.

Key Green Spaces

It is therefore recommended that based on the above, that the LDP identify the key important spaces within settlements that will be protected from the development. The spaces identified will be those that are considered to be of greatest value to the community.

It is also recommended to develop a policy that will protect green spaces within settlements and will acknowledge that some spaces, i.e. those identified within the LDP, are considered to be more important to communities than others which are included within the green space audit.

Alternative Approach

An alternative approach that the Council could promote is to continue with the current policy approach where the LDP will not identify the key important green spaces within settlements. This is not our preferred approach as it will not meet the requirements of the SPP.

Conclusions

It is proposed that the LDP will identify the key important spaces within settlements that will be protected from the development as identified in Appendix A5. The spaces identified will be those that are considered to be of greatest value to the community.