

Telford & Wrekin Local Plan

Green Network – Topic Paper

September 2025

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 This paper explains how the Council has reviewed and updated the Green Network definition and designation for the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan (2020-2040). The updated Green Network is shown on the Local Plan Policies Map and is covered by Policy NE5.

1.2 The Council is retaining the long established Green Network designation in the Local Plan but has revised the definition, justification and mapping to bring it up to date, to identify and remove errors and to bring the designation in line with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Green Infrastructure Framework (NGIF) and other government guidance.

1.3 This paper builds on evidence gathered from a previous review of the Green Network, and brings it up to date with the changes brought forward through this Local Plan review.

2 Introduction

2.1 This Topic paper is part of the background technical work to inform the Local Plan and explains, in greater detail than is possible in the plan itself, the process by which the Council has revised and updated the definition, justification and mapping of the Green Network.

2.2 This Topic paper should be viewed in light of Policy NE5: Green Network in the Submission Versions of the Local Plan and also the Green Network designation as shown on the accompanying Local Plan Policies Map.

3 The History of the Green Network

3.1 The Green Network is a local open space designation which was first introduced as part of the innovative design of Telford. It was adopted in the Telford Local Plan and was carried forward into the Wrekin Local Plan (1995 – 2006) and the Core Strategy (2007 – 2016).

3.2 The Green Network concept emerged through the planning of Telford as a "New Town." It was intended to protect important open spaces within the urban area from development and to maintain green spaces which were valuable to local communities. Previous surveys conducted by the Council demonstrate strong public support for the Green Network of Telford.

3.3 The Green Network is unique to Telford and is a concept ingrained in the identity of the town. Many of the open spaces, wooded pit mounds, Local Nature Reserves and recreational spaces are highly visible when travelling through the town and are valued by its residents. Engagement before and during the local plan review process revealed how highly the natural environment of the borough is valued.

3.4 The original Green Network mapping was carried out in the late 1980s and was digitised some time later from paper maps. The designation was then carried forward from plan to plan with some revisions but largely unchanged. In some areas it contained significant errors including roads, car parks and other development being included within the designation. There is no record of the original justification for the inclusion of individual parcels of land within the designation.

3.5 Before the previous update in 2016, this approach had become difficult to operate and the responsibility shifted from the developer needing to demonstrate why development in the Green Network was acceptable to the Council having to justify the protection of Green Network land.

3.6 Green Network land was not originally mapped using a justifiable, evidence based methodology and was not mapped against any recognised accurate base map, and in many areas even where the mapped land is green space it is difficult to measure its value when assessed against the six broad aims of the designation. The aims were largely subjective and, in some cases, difficult to assess. The original aims can be found in the Wrekin Local Plan text supporting policy OL3: Green Network.

3.7 The original Green Network approach was outdated, poorly evidenced and not in line with government policy or guidance such as the NPPF or Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network by Professor Sir John Lawton (September 2010). The principle of protecting a network of open spaces in the borough remains valid, accords strongly with the aims of Making Space for Nature, and the results of early public engagement shows strong public and political support for the concept.

3.8 The Green Network review conducted in 2016 updated the policy scope, reasoning, and mapping of the designation. This created a policy and mapped network which functioned very well for many years, however in recent years mapping became noticeably out of date in some areas. Also, as new development has come forward areas of accessible green space and habitat have been created, giving more reason for a review to extend mapped areas. The updated NPPF and emergence of the National Green Infrastructure Framework (NGIF) provided additional drive for an update to policy.

3.9 Another review of the Green Network designation was deemed necessary in preparing the Local Plan and was carried out in advance of a new draft of the Green Network being presented on the Policy Map.

4 Policy Justification for the Green Network

4.1 The Green Network has its origins in the vision of the Telford Development Corporation which was to produce a 'forest city.' Telford followed the pattern of other new towns which were masterplan-led and were intended to be laid out as settlements with extensive areas of green space and segregated land uses which would be attractive to new business, inward migrating residents and provided a welcoming natural environment(1).

4.2 The concept of a green network, whether under that name or not, has remained an important planning tool in New towns in England and can be either led by specific policies or as a plan principle shown on the proposals map.

4.3 Some other councils have sought to protect open spaces using policy tools similar to Telford's Green Network where open space policies are based on corridor, grid or network systems.

4.4 This review revealed the following initiatives among councils with pre-NPPF adopted Local Development Plans:

- The City of Sutherland Unitary Development Plan (1996) contains a saved policy for Washington New Town in Policy WA17: Environmental Identity that seeks to protect the unique design characteristics of the area including inter village walkways, the separation of potentially conflicting land uses and the provision of substantial landscaping, particularly between main roads and residential areas.
- The Stevenage Local Plan (2004) seeks to retain green links shown in saved policy EN10: Green Links and on the borough's proposal map. This principle is being preserved in the new replacement Local Plan Policies EN4 and NH4 in the emerging Local Plan.
- Welwyn Hatfield's Local Plan (2005) seeks in Policy OS1: Urban Open Land to retain and protect urban open land and to reinforce the openness of the Green Belt which surrounds Welwyn Garden City's urban boundary. Land covered by this policy is shown on the Policies Map.
- The Harlow Local Plan (2006) adopts Green Wedges in Policies NE1 and NE2 which are intended to preserve the form of the original landscape.
- The Redditch Local Plan No.3 (2005) seeks in policy R.1 to protect 'Primarily Open Space' defined in the policy and shown on the Policies Map from built development.
- The Bracknell Core Strategy (2008) identified in Policy CS7: Design the commitment to promoting a high quality of development across Bracknell Forest that builds on local character and protects Open Space of Public Value as well as Passive Space of Public Value.
- The Peterborough Core Strategy 2011 in Policy CS19: Open Space and Green Infrastructure and shown on the Policies Map seeks to protect open space from development and is informed by an early Green Grid Strategy report. This was translated in Policies PP14, PP15 and PP16 of the Planning Policies DPP (2012) which was adopted post-NPPF.

4.5 Some New Town planning authorities with post-NPPF Local Development Plans have also retained similar concepts:

- The West Lancashire Local Plan 2013 has a strategic policy covering Skelmersdale New Town (SP2) which seeks to regenerate the town while maintaining the network of green spaces through and around the original new town. Other development management policies on nature conservation (NE2), open space (EN3) and infrastructure (INF4) dictate how the spaces should be protected and promoted. Land covered by Policies EN2 and EN3 are shown on the Policies Map.
- The Halton Borough Core Strategy Local Plan (2013) covers Runcorn New Town. It has two policies which protect green spaces. Policy CS1: Halton's Spatial Strategy seeks to promote strategic green spaces in the town. Policy CS21: Green Infrastructure uses similar language to that in the Submission Version of the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan 'Halton's green infrastructure network will be protected, enhanced and expanded, where appropriate.' The extensive network of green spaces in the town is similar to that found in Telford.
- The Dacorum Core Strategy 2013 has policies specific to Hemel Hempstead New Town which seek to protect its distinct open character and to promote and protect other space including the New Town's Green Gateways, its urban wildlife corridor and strategic wildlife corridor.

- The Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015 recognises the value of the network of green infrastructure around which the new town was designed and built and in Policy ENV1: Green Infrastructure seeks to protect and enhance this resource.
- The Milton Keynes Local Plan 2016-2031 (2019) includes policy NE4 Green Infrastructure which echoes the principles of the Telford and Wrekin Green Network. Supporting a strategic network of green spaces which provide a wide array of ecosystem services

4.6 In Paragraph 8 of the NPPF the Government confirms the three objectives of sustainable development. The Green Network helps to deliver each aspect of the definition:

- Economic objective, the Green Network makes Telford an attractive area for inward investment and tourism as well as providing valuable ecosystem services;
- Social benefits creating a high quality urban environment with opportunities for recreation, improving health and wellbeing; and
- Environmental benefits as an invaluable green infrastructure resource supporting the natural environment and delivering a range of ecosystem services.

4.7 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF affirms that none of the aspects of the definition of sustainable development can be viewed in isolation. In Telford the protection and enhancement of the Green Network forms an integral part of the Clean, Green, Resilient offer, part of the Invest Telford economic strategy (2) with the aim of fair and inclusive economic growth.

4.8 In having policies which protect the Green Network the council is seeking a high quality of urban design to retain a high level of amenity for existing and future users of land and buildings in the borough, to help to provide differentiation between areas, to conserve and enhance the natural environment, to manage and reduce pollution, and to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

4.9 Section 15 of the NPPF makes multiple references to the need for planning policies to take strategic approaches to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure through the planning process. The Green Network includes aspects of ecological networks including core areas, corridors and stepping stones along with the other relevant principles and functions against which the land has been assessed.

4.10 The Green Network is particularly appropriate for the borough since it also helps to deliver a number of wider council strategies. The Green Network:

- Supports sustainable transport by providing opportunities for walking and cycling; Promotes high quality living environments and good design;
- Promotes healthy communities by promoting healthy, inclusive environments;
- Helps to secure the protection of green and open areas that are valued by local people;
- Contributes to the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes;
- Contributes to the provision of ecosystem services;
- Contributes to the protection of the borough's heritage assets.

4.11 The council is confident that the maintenance of the Green Network in the submission version of the Local Plan does not harm economic development or the government's desire to increase significantly the supply of housing since a range of sites suitable for allocation covering 716ha has been identified in the Local Plan.

5 Revisions to the Green Network for the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan (2021 – 2041)

5.1 The Telford & Wrekin Local Plan (2021 – 2041) seeks to update, maintain and expand the Green Network designation which is seen by many as a key policy tool in protecting and maintaining open green land within the urban area of Telford. The Local Plan seeks to bring the designation in line with the NPPF, the NGIF and the Lawton Report, to revise the definition and aims and to update the mapping of the Green Network shown on the Local Plan Policy Map.

5.2 The Local Plan also extends the protection of valuable open green land through the Green Network designation to the market town of Newport. Although it is appreciated that Newport is a traditional market town and did not emerge by the same mechanism as Telford as a New Town, it is clear that there are green spaces in Newport which contribute to the principles of the Green Network and are valuable to local communities.

5.3 The Green Network remains an urban designation and has not been extended beyond the urban boundaries of Telford and Newport. Ecological Networks, as described by the Lawton Report, extend through both urban and rural environments and are given weight by NPPF and will be protected in the rural environment by the Local Plan through policies on biodiversity and trees and woodlands. Development in the borough is focused through the Local Plan to Telford, Newport and a limited number of named rural settlements and it was not appropriate to extend the Green Network designation, which has always been limited to urban areas, to rural areas.

6 Revisions to the definition and aims of the Green Network

6.1 The Wrekin Local Plan Green Network definition read "The Green Network is an inter-linked system of open land and landscape within the Town, which has a collective value for ecology and nature conservation, recreation, access and visual quality".

6.2 The Local Plan defines the Green Network as a "strategic interconnected network of open spaces within the urban areas of Telford and Newport." This definition was established as part of the 2016 review, but remains relevant following this updated review.

6.3 The definition was primarily amended in order to bring it in line with the NPPF, and the Lawton Report which use the language of functioning networks for ecology and ecosystem services. The references to ecology, nature conservation etc. have been removed from the definition since they are covered under the five principles functions which underpin the designation. Additional elements are also included within the principles and associated functions to expand the reach of the definition, and bring considerations in line with a structure outlined by the National Green Infrastructure Framework.

6.4 It should be noted that the Green Network is intended to be a strategic network and, therefore, does not include all areas of open space or land with biodiversity value in the urban areas. The designation is intended to protect an interconnected network and to work alongside Local Plan policies on biodiversity, trees and public open space. It is recognised that some smaller incidental open spaces also have value to local communities but do not necessarily qualify for inclusion in the designation.

6.5 There were originally six aims of the Green Network included in the Wrekin Local Plan which ranged from "maintaining the borough's image as an attractive place to live" to "providing easily accessible 'green lungs' to promote urban cooling." These aims used outdated and subjective language and were not in line with NPPF or the Lawton Report. Concepts such as urban cooling have returned in some capacity to the Green Network aims and are covered within the updated principles and functions.

6.6 The original six aims were revised as six functions of Green Network through the previous review in 2016. The assessment of each parcel of land within the Green Network against the updated functions provided a new level of justification against which the Green Network could be interrogated.

6.7 The six functions provided a robust framework for the Green Network and enabled the implementation of the policy more effectively through the plan period. With increasing attention around green infrastructure more generally and the emergence of the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework (NGIF) a further update and refinement of the policy was deemed necessary. The NGIF sets out several metrics for the concepts and measurements of green infrastructure. Within the framework the 'Why' principles were identified as particularly applicable to the Green Network designation. The five 'Why' principles were extracted from the NGIF and adapted to the Green Network designation to regard the original aims and build on the functions of the previous policy. The six functions of the Green Network established through the 2016 review have been included and expanded to support the five principles within the supporting text of Policy NE5.

6.8 The new five principles of the Green Network are:

- a. Nature rich, attractive, ecologically valuable spaces and networks throughout the urban areas;
- b. healthy, linked, active spaces;
- c. thriving spaces which promote heritage, geology and community identity;
- d. spaces for natural water management; and
- e. resilient, carbon and climate positive spaces.

6.9 The functions, linked with the principles, associated with Green Network areas include:

- a1. To provide visual amenity value in the form of views over green open areas, water bodies or woodland.
- a2. To maintain, protect and enhance the borough's ecological value in terms of natural habitats and species by providing ecological networks, including corridors and stepping stones by which wildlife can move through, and thrive within, urban environments.
- b1. To provide an appropriate supply of open land to meet the diverse recreational needs of an expanding population, combining the more formal parkland and recreation areas with wider landscaped areas valuable for informal recreation.
- b2. To provide open space linkages through which footpaths, cycleways and green corridors can connect different parts of Telford or Newport forming accessible 'green ways' through urban areas and encouraging sustainable travel.
- b3. To provide space for trees and shrubs to grow and filter the air, removing pollutants and improving local air quality.

- b4. To provide buffers between highways and built up areas to reduce noise pollution and provide quieter spaces for people, and wildlife to enjoy.
- b5. To provide spaces for healthy lifestyle practices and benefit the mental and physical health of Telford and Newport residents and visitors.
- c1. To provide separation between built up areas which helps to retain and enhance the individual identity of local communities.
- c2. To maintain, protect and enhance the unique geological, historical, and archaeological features within the borough.
- d1. To provide spaces for the drainage and storage of water, reducing flooding of property and infrastructure as well as enabling the natural management of water.
- e1. To provide natural, shaded cool spaces throughout Telford and Newport to aid in mitigation and adaptation to climate change for people, and wildlife.
- e2. To provide natural habitat and enable carbon sequestration to mitigate emissions produced by the urban settlements of Telford and Newport.

6.10 In order to assess each parcel of land within the revised Green Network against the five principles, quantifiable criteria have been set against each of the principles. These build on the criteria established within the 2016 review and have been expanded to reflect the broadening of the Green Network scope. The intention of these criteria is to make it possible for Telford & Wrekin Council officers, developers and members of the public to easily see and understand the reasons why a particular areas are included within the Green Network designation.

Table 1

Principle	Qualifying Criteria
Nature rich, attractive, ecologically valuable spaces and networks throughout the urban areas	<p>Land with identified ecological value including land which meets the criteria for core areas, corridors and stepping stones set out in the Lawton Report including:</p> <p>A) Designated sites (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites); or</p> <p>B) Areas of natural or semi-natural habitats; or</p> <p>C) Areas with an assemblage of historical species records held by the Shropshire and Telford Environmental Records Centre; or</p> <p>D) Areas with the potential to act as wildlife corridors or stepping stones.</p>
Healthy, linked, active spaces	<p>Public access sites and areas which allow linkages for walking, cycling and/or horse riding in natural or semi-natural habitats within, between or linking urban areas including:</p>

	<p>A) Sites with Public Rights of Way; or</p> <p>B) A registered or formal park; or</p> <p>C) A Local Nature Reserve or proposed Local Nature Reserve; or</p> <p>D) A playing field or sports facility; or</p> <p>E) A children's play area; or</p> <p>F) Allotments; or</p> <p>G) A Telford & Wrekin Council owned site protected under the Council's "Green Guarantee" for public use in the long term; or</p> <p>H) A place of rest, including churchyards, cemeteries, and other burial grounds; or</p> <p>I) A site with established public access agreed by the land owner.</p>
Thriving spaces which promote heritage, geology and community identity	<p>Land with identified geodiversity, and archaeological value including:</p> <p>A) Local Geological Sites; or</p> <p>B) Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated for geology; or</p> <p>C) Scheduled Ancient Monuments; or</p> <p>D) Sites known locally for their archaeological or local heritage interest (including industrial heritage).</p> <p>And natural or semi-natural habitat separating one group of buildings from another of at least:</p> <p>E) 100m between two residential areas; or</p> <p>F) 50m between land used for employment and a residential area; or</p> <p>G) 30m between a major road (motorway, A or B road) and a residential area.</p>

Spaces for natural water management	<p>Areas of natural or semi-natural habitat enabling the drainage, storage and management of water, including:</p> <p>A) Areas of natural or semi-natural habitat; or</p> <p>B) Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS); or</p> <p>C) Priority habitat ponds; or</p> <p>D) Other non-priority habitat waterbodies.</p>
Resilient, carbon and climate positive spaces	<p>Natural habitats within the urban area which sequester high volumes of Carbon Dioxide, including:</p> <p>A) Wetland and natural waterbodies; or</p> <p>B) Biodiverse grasslands.</p> <p>And natural or semi-natural habitats providing shaded areas and creating cool spaces through the urban areas, including:</p> <p>C) Woodland; or</p> <p>D) Urban trees and rural trees.</p>

6.11 The Local Plan also incorporates Green Network land in Newport. Newport was not originally included within the Green Network but the Local Plan recognises and protects areas of land in Newport which meet to the Green Network definition and contribute to delivering its five principles.

7 Updating the Green Network mapping

7.1 The mapping which is shown on the Local Plan Policies Map has undergone a rigorous desk based assessment to:

- Identify and remove areas of land which were included in error or due to historic lack of accuracy in mapping techniques (roads, car parks, buildings etc.);
- Identify and remove areas of land where development had been permitted through the planning process;
- Identify and remove areas of land where planning permission has recently been granted;
- Assess parcels of land within the designation against the five principles of the Green Network and to remove areas of land where inclusion cannot be justified; and
- Justify the mapping against OS MasterMap to increase accuracy of boundaries.

7.2 The assessment work began in advance of the Regulation 18 consultation on the draft Local Plan and continued in preparation for the Regulation 19 publication period.

7.3 The updated mapping has been largely carried out using a desk based methodology making use of best available aerial photography, OS MasterMap and Telford & Wrekin Council's internal mapping data.

7.4 It is appreciated that this methodology is limited by the age and quality of resources available, particularly aerial photography, and challenges with aerial photograph interpretation and some ground truthing has been carried out across the network. It was not possible, with the time and resources available, to visit every area of the Green Network.

7.5 The justification of the designation against OS MasterMap is vital to accuracy and fundamental to the designation being fit for use in the planning process. Previously the Green Network boundaries crossed parcels of land and land uses without justification, included roads or parts of roads and other areas of non-green land and the boundaries wavered from obvious features on the ground without justification.

7.6 Figures 1 and 2 below show an area of the Green Network in Dawley, Telford. Figure 1 shows the area with the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan (2011 – 2031) Green Network where development of housing, a school and highways has taken place since mapping was completed and are now included in the Green Network. Figure 2 shows the Local Plan Green Network for the same area with all the issues resolved.

Figure 1: Telford & Wrekin Local Plan 2011-2031 Green Network mapping
Dawley, Telford.



**Figure 2: Telford & Wrekin Local Plan 2021-2041 Green Network mapping
Dawley, Telford.**



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7.7 The Local Plan Green Network mapping has been subject to some internal consultation with officers across the Council and the Regulation 19 Publication Period. Following the Regulation 19 Publication Period a small number of further cartographical errors have been identified and these changes will be made shown on the final version of the policies map.

7.8 Each area of land within the Local Plan Green Network is justified against the five principles and the attribute data behind the mapping will identify which of the five principles each area of land meets.

7.9 The Local Plan is accompanied by a printed version of the Policy Map which shows the Green Network designation and this is considered to be the definitive version of the network. Following adoption of the plan the Council reserves the right to make further alterations to the Green Network, for example where new areas have been identified, and will seek approval for the update version of the policies map as appropriate.

7.10 The dynamic nature of the Green Networks allows for development within the urban area to contribute to the designation and expand linkages through the urban environment. Expansion of the Green Network should be something considered through design phases of development, with areas created following the principles set out in the revised policy. Where areas of the Green Network are to be impacted by development, sound justification of impacts should be provided along with proposed measures to create and/or enhance linkages through the site. Some developments for purposes such as education and healthcare can be argued to have an overriding public interest; in these instances, the release of Green Network land will be considered. However, it would still be expected for development to consider the Green Network principles, avoid and mitigate against impacts where possible.

7.11 The Council will also produce an interactive version which will be located on the Telford & Wrekin Council website. This is an online mapping tool which allows users to interrogate the Green Network mapping down to a site level. This will be maintained up to date with the dynamic designation and include attribute data and justification for Green Network areas.

8 Conclusion

8.1 The Council proposes the ongoing protection of the long established Green Network under Policy NE5 of the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan Submission Version. This protection is in line with the NPPF and is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.