

WELLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

NEIGHBOURHOOD OPEN SPACE REPORT

March 2023

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Report Structure:

- Introduction
 - Provides the context for the Neighbourhood Open Space (NOS) study and report, the extensive background and history of the development of the NOS concept and the rationale for the report supporting policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.
 - Provides some context with the South Worcestershire Development Plan and with the emerging Review
- Consultation Amendments
 - Summarises the evolution of the report through the consultations including the Regulation 14 Consultation in 2021.
- Site Locations
 - Listing, naming and mapping the location of the sites within the village setting.
- Site Description, Illustration and Appraisal
 - This section provides information on why each of these sites is of importance to community well-being through retaining and enhancing the biodiversity, landscape and amenity of the Neighbourhood Area.
- Conclusions
 - Summarising the case in support of the Neighbourhood Plan policy G2.
- Supporting data
 - Appendices and references

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared to support the WELLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (abbreviated to WNP in this document) Green Infrastructure Policy G2: Neighbourhood Open Space.

Background

Much of Welland is within or provides the setting to the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: the heritage of the village is as a rural agricultural community. During initial consultations, the protection and enhancement of green spaces emerged as a key priority with the village community. This desire to secure the village's rural landscape character and its green infrastructure became an established theme within the ongoing neighbourhood consultations. The local community champions the positive contribution that green space makes to well-being, the protection of habitats and wildlife corridors for future generations. The village's rural character and environment is frequently cited as a reason for living in or moving to Welland.

As part of the neighbourhood plan development, Little Malvern & Welland Parish Council (LM&WPC) and the Neighbourhood Plan Group (NPG), identified an initial list of local sites of important green spaces, from community recreation areas to a nationally important SSSI. The next step was to understand which of these sites merited the protection afforded by Local Green Space designation and other spaces which were also considered important and would be designated as Neighbourhood Open Spaces (NOS) under Policy G2 in the WNP. This doesn't necessarily mean that NOS are any less important to the local community but in many instances, they have other national designations affording them protection. Nevertheless, the NOS designation highlights a site's important contribution beyond its wildlife and biodiversity value.

In its policies SWDP 5 Green infrastructure and SWDP 38 Green Space, the South Worcestershire Development Plan sets out to conserve and enhance green spaces as vital community amenities. Policy G2 is a policy response consistent with that objective.

The SWDPR Review Regulation 19 publication contains policies with similar objectives and has identified green space sites to which those policies relate. The SWDPR Reg 19 publication interactive policies map, see abstract below, identifies a number of areas in Welland as green space and urban biodiversity corridors. Some of these areas coincide with proposed NOS designations.

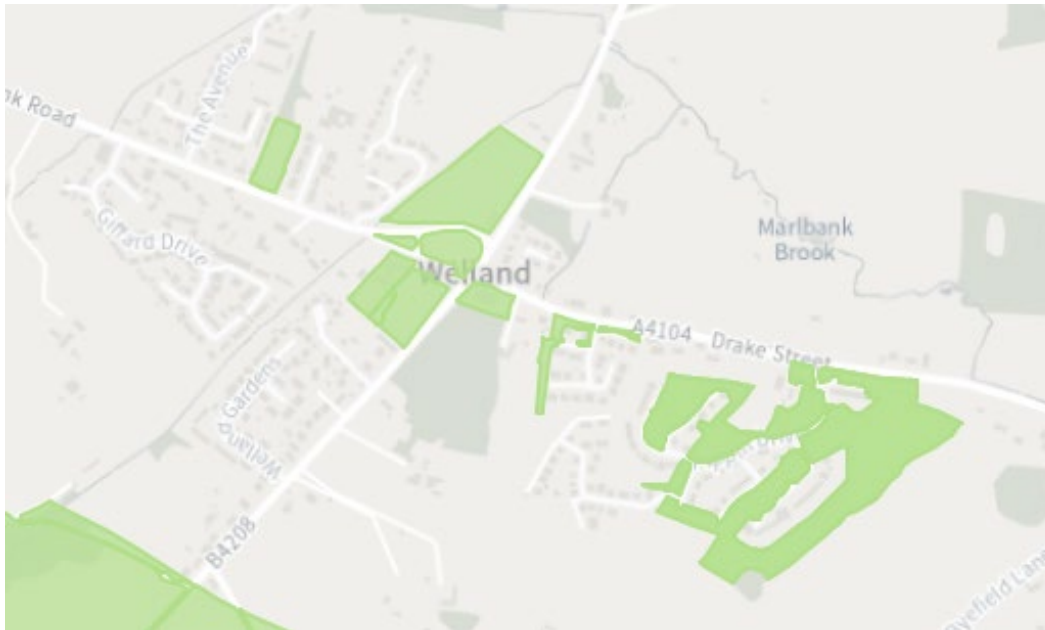


FIGURE 1 SWDPR INTERACTIVE POLICIES MAP - GREEN SPACES

Three of the sites proposed as NOS sites in this report coincide with Green Spaces shown on the 2022 Interactive Policies Map; Welland Cemetery, St James Churchyard and Spring Meadows SSSI Buffer. The fourth proposed NOS site, Giffard Drive and Blandford Close is not shown on the Interactive Policies Map although it is owned by Malvern Hills District Council as an open space amenity related to the Giffard Drive development.

The NPG have reviewed the recently published SWDPR evidence and have concluded that the proposals for designating NOS sites remain valid and will stand as sound evidence for the next Open Spaces Reassessment if the WNP, as drafted, is made.

The NPG recognises and supports the proposed designation of green space sites in the SWDP Review. The additional proposed designation for some of these sites within the WNP as NOS is not considered to conflict with the proposed green space designation. Where a proposed SWDPR green space designation has not been proposed for designation as a NOS does not mean that the local community does not value that site for its contribution to the Parish's Green Infrastructure.

Consultation

Little Malvern & Welland Parish Council and the NPG consultations, conducted from 2014 – 2021, employed a variety of methods to engage the community including: surveys, parish meetings, and a variety of drop-in events. As the village has had nearly 200 homes built in the last six years, mainly since 2016, the community consultations in 2020 gave the village's more recent residents the opportunity to share their views.

- The community were asked how important the maintenance and promotion of green, open spaces for reasons of biodiversity, landscape and recreational amenity - 68 % of respondents stated that protecting historic natural features is important and 73% of respondents also agreed that the WNP should aim to protect and enhance the built environment by promoting Green Infrastructure and Public Open Green Space.
- A representative comment the community was “Important that rural character of village & protect wildlife & ensure plenty of space locally for recreation for wellbeing of community.”

Landowners and other stakeholders were also consulted in 2020. This round of consultation also involved a green spaces site walk with a Malvern Hills District Council neighbourhood planning representative. The responses and information gathered provided additional insights to assess the merits of the designation of the various green space sites.

The community - both recent and longer-term residents - overwhelmingly expressed support for protecting open green spaces. The comments received (and provided in the Consultation Statement: *Regulation 14 Consultation Responses*) are representative of the importance given to protecting and enhancing Welland's Green Infrastructure.

The NPG reviewed all the responses and information obtained and undertook a further evaluation. The purpose of this review was to determine if the site would be proposed for Local Green Space designation or categorised as Neighbourhood Open Space under Green Infrastructure Policy G2 (named at the time of the Regulation 14 consultation as Policy WG2) within the WNP.

The WNP Regulation 14 Consultation Neighbourhood Open Space (NOS) Report contained information on the seven open spaces proposed for allocation under Policy WG2.

Regulation 14 Consultation Summary - WG2 Policy and incorporated sites

- Strong support from the Residents responding to Regulation 14 with 68 out of 72 responses stating they “Agreed with the Policy” WG2
- The Landowner of WNOS04 Lawn Farm requested that this be removed from the plan for reason of it being privately owned land with no public access
- Within the comments received from the Consultee bodies, there was some concern about the clarity of the Policy wording when applying it to a planning application e.g., what is the difference between Open Space, as defined in the NPPF and Neighbourhood Open Space (Policy WG2)
- In addition, the question of important/special sites that carried existing high levels of protection e.g., Mutlows Orchard SSSI and whether these should form part of the nominated Neighbourhood Open Spaces

The complete schedule of respondents’ comments the Regulation 14 Welland Neighbourhood Development Draft Plan Consultation (24 Sept -7 Nov 2021) Comments are included in the Consultation Statement

2. Responses to Reg 14 Consultation - Summary

The NPG Review of Policy WG2 in response to Regulation 14 WNP Consultation is summarized below. Details are included in Appendix 1 Reg 14 Consultation – NOS Amendments.

1. WG2 Policy and Reasoned Justification: to be updated for clarity and renamed as Policy G2 – see WNP Plan Document
2. NPG undertook a further assessment to test that the ‘protection’ proposed to be afforded to these valued open spaces was merited and necessary to fulfil the Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives.
3. Several previously allocated sites were removed from the Plan. Amendments are summarised below from detail set out in Appendix 1 Reg 14 Consultation – NOS Amendments.

Previous Allocation Ref.	Action	New Allocation Ref.
WNOS01 St James Church Yard	Retain	WNOS 01
WNOS02 Mutlows Orchard SSSI	Remove	
WNOS03 Spring Meadows SSSI Buffer	Retain	WNOS 02
WNOS04 Lawn Farm	Remove	
WNOS05 Drake Street Meadow	Remove	
WNOS06 Welland Cemetery	Retain	WNOS 03
WNOS07 Gifford Drive and Blandford Close	Retain	WNOS 04

3. Proposed Neighbourhood Open Space Sites

The following sites should be incorporated within the WNP Submission as Neighbourhood Open Space under WNP Policy G2

WNOS 01 St James Church Yard

WNOS 02 Spring Meadows SSSI Buffer

WNOS 03 Welland Cemetery

WNOS 04 Gifford Drive and Blandford Close (Two areas)

Locations Map

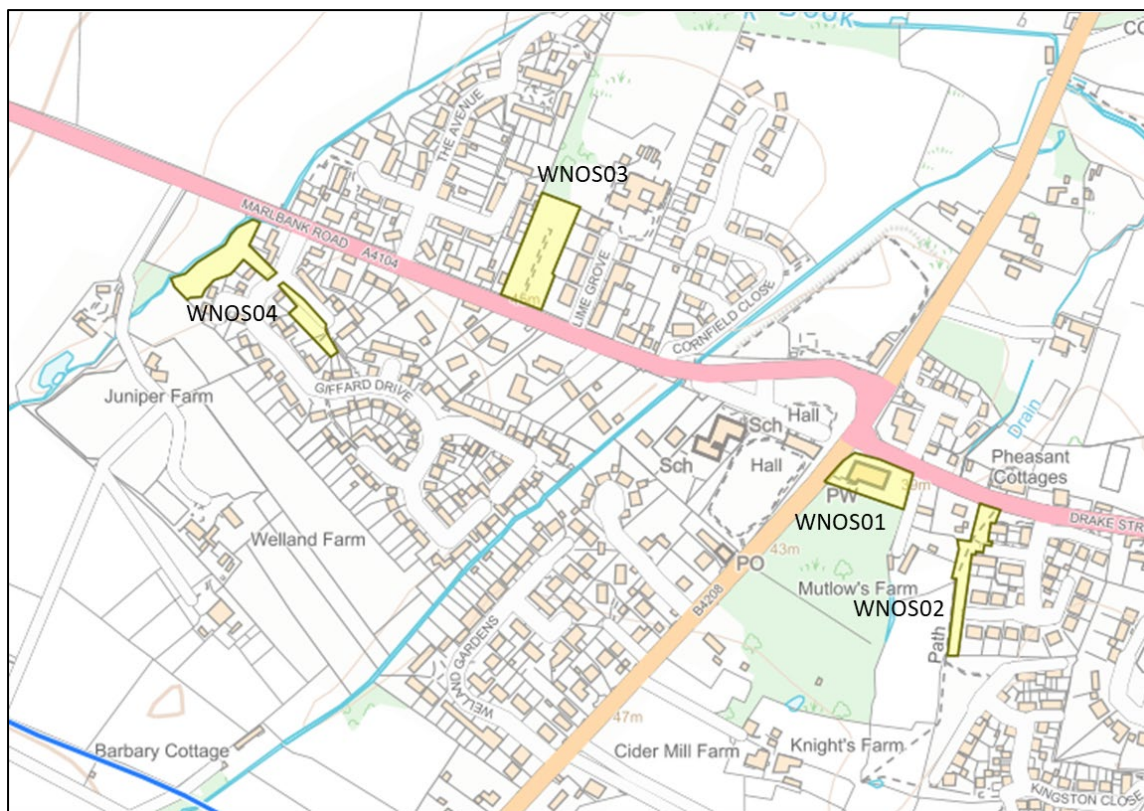


FIGURE 2 NEIGHBOURHOOD OPEN SPACES MAP

4. WNP - Neighbourhood Open Space - Site Descriptions

WNOS 01 St James Church Yard



FIGURE 3 WNOS 01 ST JAMES' CHURCH YARD



FIGURE 4 CHURCHYARD LOOKING SOUTH FROM GLOUCESTER ROAD

Site Description and Features

St James' Church yard is located at the centre of the village on the main crossroads. It lies within the grounds of St James Grade II listed church. The church yard is 0.2 hectares in area

and there are several ancient trees on the site. The Grade II listed St James Church is probably the most dominant and attractive building in the village and this and the adjacent traditional orchard create the church yard's unique character and setting.

Although, the church is Grade II listed, the churchyard is not included in the listing description. The neighbourhood planning consultation (2014-20) identified this as an important, historic green space:

“Mr. Abraham Watkins, Churchwarden, of Welland Villa (now Church Villa), generously gave the plot of land on which the new Church of Saint James was built. The work was commenced in 1873 and the foundation stone was laid on St. James' Day, July 25th of that year. It was consecrated on 2nd April 1875.”

The churchyard is an important element of Welland's Green Infrastructure and wildlife corridors: it sits across the road from Welland Park, Welland Village Green and Spitalfields playing fields, and is adjacent to Pursers Orchard and Mutlows Orchard SSSI.

WNOS 02 Spring Meadows SSSI Buffer



FIGURE 5 SPRING MEADOWS SSSI BUFFER



FIGURE 6 SPRING MEADOWS SSSI BUFFER LOOKING SOUTH

Site Description and Features

The Spring Meadows SSSI buffer strip runs along the western boundary of the housing development of thirty homes built in 2016/17. The site's area is 0.3 hectares.

At the time of the planning application to build 30 houses on this rural site Natural England expressed, via its input to the SWDP, concern about the impact on the adjacent SSSI. This led to the creation of the SSSI Buffer zone as part of the planning approval requirements for the Spring Meadows development.

A Public Right of Way (PRoW) runs through this site connecting with the existing public footpath running along part of Mutlows Orchard SSSI's eastern boundary. A gated entrance has been installed on Drake Street, approximately 200 metres from the centre of the village. Mature trees, shrubs and hedging populate the western boundary offering a protected wildlife corridor.

The buffer zone affords protection to Mutlows Orchard Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), one of Welland's most important habitats. It also provides the community with improved access to view and appreciate the charm and heritage of the SSSI: there is no public access to the SSSI; however, a public footpath runs alongside the site affording lovely views from the fenced public right of way.

It has been noted that the SWDPR R19 publication identifies this site as a part of the open space that extends east along Drake Street to the north of the Spring Meadows dwellings. Although that extended site was designated in the planning consent as open space the NPG has proposed only the western portion to be designated as a NOS due to its particular importance as an open space buffer to the Spring Meadows SSSI.

WNOS 03 Welland Cemetery



FIGURE 7 WELLAND CEMETERY



FIGURE 8 WELLAND CEMETERY LOOKING N.

Site Description and Features

The cemetery is within the Malvern Hills AONB. The site on Marlbank Road (A4101) is some 322m walking distance from the village's centre via the public footpath.

The cemetery's importance to the local community was reaffirmed in 2009 with the commissioning and dedication of the new lychgate at the entrance. The cemetery site is 0.38 hectares with numerous trees and its landscape character is in keeping with its rural setting. Welland Cemetery is a tranquil area and a quiet place for reflection.

The cemetery is included in the Welland Landscape Assessment (June 2015) as a site of special significance as part of village's Green Infrastructure and is a designated Local Wildlife Site principally for its grassland plant species.

The community and the Parish Council ensure the cemetery is well maintained and there are many personal touches in evidence.

WNOS04 Giffard Drive & Blandford Close Open Spaces



FIGURE 9 GIFFARD DRIVE AND BLANDFORD CLOSE OPEN SPACES



FIGURE 10 GD FACING SE BC FACING NW.

Site Description and Features

These areas of green space were incorporated in the design of the Estate to provide households with readily accessible amenity space. They are well connected the village via

the public footpaths along Marlbank Road. These spaces are within the Malvern Hills AONB. The sites are owned and are maintained by Malvern Hills District Council.

The development was built in the 1980s. The largest of the embedded green spaces is 0.26 hectares; it is accessed from Gifford Drive and has a restricted view across to Malvern Hills. The other smaller, 0.06 hectares, is accessed from Blandford Close.

Both sites are grassed and have mature hedges and trees. These spaces are particularly important for the residents as they offer opportunities to enjoy open green areas on their doorstep for recreation and relaxation.

These are mature sites with an established role within the village's Green Infrastructure and in supporting local wildlife. Immediately to the north west of the boundary of the larger green space is open countryside.

5. Conclusion

5.1 This report demonstrates the process of evaluating the proposed Neighbourhood Open Spaces and their value to the local community who wish to see them protected under Green Infrastructure Policy G2. The Policy is a locally derived criteria-based policy, in general accordance with paragraph 28 of the NPPF and policy 38 of the SWDP.

5.2 The Welland Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 14 Consultation response underlined the support for these valued open spaces with 68 of the 72 respondents stating agreement with Policy WG2 (as the policy was titled for that consultation), confirming the messages received over many years about the role that open spaces play in the wellbeing of residents.

5.3 Each of the sites proposed for designation as Neighbourhood Open Spaces is uniquely valued by residents. Through their current use, character and location the NPG consider that the value should be recorded in this way.

5.4 The NPG recommends that the sites identified here are included in the Welland Neighbourhood Plan as Neighbourhood Open Spaces under Policy G2

Welland Neighbourhood Plan Group

2023 03 10

Mapping.

By XMAP and Parish Online – Little Malvern and Welland Parish Council

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7. Appendix 1 Reg 14 Consultation – NOS Amendments

The complete schedule of respondents' comments the Regulation 14 Welland Neighbourhood Development Draft Plan Consultation (24 Sept -7 Nov 2021) Comments are included in Appendix ?? of the Consultation Statement.

Comments on the Green Infrastructure Policies are attached at the end of this Appendix.

Changes to the text of the WG2 Policy and Reasoned Justification: to be updated for clarity – see WNP Plan Document Submission version.

NPWG undertook a further assessment to test that the 'protection' proposed to be afforded to these valued open spaces was merited and necessary to fulfil the Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives. WG Policy responses set out in the accompanying table.

Several previously allocated sites were removed from the Plan as set out in this table. REG 14 proposed Neighbourhood Open Spaces WNP Policy Review	Post Regulation 14 Consultation Assessment Outcome - May - June 2022
WNOS01 St James Church Yard	Retain under policy WG2: The churchyard is an important element of Welland's Green Infrastructure and wildlife corridors: it sits across the road from Welland Park, Welland Village Green and Spitalfields playing fields, is adjacent to Pursers Orchard and Mutlows SSSI.
WNOS02 Mutlows Orchard SSSI	Remove from policy WG2: The SSSI designation affords a high level of protection for this significant site. Additional protection not merited.
WNOS03 Spring Meadows SSSI Buffer	Retain under policy WG2: importance as a protective buffer zone between Spring Meadows Close and Mutlows Orchard SSSI one of Welland's most important habitats.
WNOS04 Lawn Farm	Remove from policy WG2: This area forms part of the curtilage and setting of the GII listed Lawn Farm. It is located on land defined as open countryside. This will afford this land a high level of protection.
WNOS05 Drake Street Meadow	Remove from policy WG2 as its Special Wildlife Site designation affords a high level of protection for this significant site. It is also located within land defined as open countryside.
WNOS06 Welland Cemetery	Retain under Policy WG2 The cemetery is included in the Welland Landscape Assessment (June 2015) as a site of special significance as part of village's Green Infrastructure and is a designated Local Wildlife Site principally for its grassland plant species.
WNOS07 Gifford Drive and Blandford Close	Retain under policy WG2: important open space close to existing housing valued by the community for recreation, and established role within the village's Green Infrastructure/ corridors supporting local wildlife.