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**Oxford City  
Council Local  
Plan 2036**

*Green Spaces*

BACKGROUND  
PAPER

## INTRODUCTION

1. Public open spaces and playing pitches provide opportunities for recreation, exercise and sport. As well as enabling healthy communities, they make an important contribution to townscape and help create a successful urban environment. The approach to green and open spaces has been to assess all of them in the Green Infrastructure Study. This study assesses sites against the range of green space functions that green spaces can perform, as well as looking at the level of use of the site and nearby provision. Many green spaces are identified as performing a green infrastructure network function (see policy G1 of the Local Plan). Spaces are also protected as allotments, for open air sports or for their nature conservation value (Policy G2, G4 and G5).
2. This background paper explains the approach to open space. The background papers concerned with biodiversity and the Green Belt Review explain the approaches to those specific types of green space.

## NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF)<sup>1</sup> AND PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE (PPG)<sup>2</sup>

3. Planning should encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production) (Paragraph 118).

### Green Infrastructure (Paragraph 20)

4. Local planning authorities should set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, making sufficient provision for green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is defined in the NPPF glossary as a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

### Natural and Local Environment (Paragraphs 170 and 171)

5. The planning system should protect and enhance valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national, and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.

### Sports and Recreation Provision (Paragraph 96)

6. Planning policies should be based on robust, up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments

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<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/779764/NPPF\\_Feb\\_2019\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779764/NPPF_Feb_2019_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provisions are needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.

7. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
  - An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
  - The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
  - The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

## **PROPOSED SUBMISSION LOCAL PLAN APPROACH**

### **Reasons for Looking at Open Space and Greenfield Sites**

8. The capacity to deliver new housing in Oxford is considerably below the total housing need (see the background paper on Assessing and Meeting Housing Need). Through the Oxfordshire Growth Board, agreement has been reached with the other Oxfordshire Local Authorities about the amount of Oxford's unmet housing need that will be met in surrounding authorities' current round of Local Plan. Assumptions were made about Oxford's capacity when apportioning the unmet housing need, and it is important that attempts are made to find sites suitable for development to get as close as possible to this need.
9. Chapter 5 includes Policy G1, which protects the Green and Blue Infrastructure Network; G2, which protect biodiversity and geo-diversity sites; G4, which protects allotments, and G5, which protects sites for outdoor sports. Most of these sites need to be protected in situ, except in exceptional circumstances and if stringent criteria are met. G5 allows replacement provision of sports facilities.
10. Because of their intrinsic value and policies that attempt to preserve sites in situ, a number of types of open space were ruled out of any consideration for development, as follows:
  - Sites with a nature conservation designation, including the Special Area of Conservation, SSSIs, Local Wildlife Sites and Oxford City Wildlife Sites
  - Sites identified as part of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Network
  - Allotments sites in active cultivation
  - Greenfield sites in Flood Zone 3b
11. The NPPF does not restrict the loss of open space outright or prevent the allocation of appropriate greenfield sites. The presumption was not to actively look at all greenfield sites but only consider those suggested through the call for sites or public consultation. In addition,

greenfield sites without any landowner intent to develop were not considered further. Greenfield sites with landowner interest in development were given further consideration for development if they would be classed as ‘Other green and open spaces’ (Policy G7). These sites do not meet any of the criteria for protection under policy G1, G2, G4 or G5. Also, sports pitches where put forward by the landowner and where the landowner has suggested that alternative provision can be made were given further consideration. If sites in the Green Belt would be considered to fall into either of these two categories, they were also considered further for development. The approach to Green Belt sites is set out in the background paper on the Green Belt Review.

12. Table 1 below shows sites containing open space that have been taken forward in the Proposed Submission document, with a brief description. Potential impacts on sports pitches, allotments and public open space are discussed individually in this background paper.

<b>Site</b>	<b>Site name</b>	<b>Description of site</b>
SP5	Summer Fields School Athletics Track	Seasonal athletics track painted onto grass for use of school only.
SP12	Sandy Lane Recreation Ground and Land to the Rear of the Retail Park	Site contains 2 adult football pitches and one junior pitch.
SP14	Edge of Playing Fields Oxford Academy	Several pitches at the school with communit access, but the allocated part is at a lower level to the other pitches, not well used and does not form part of the formal pitches.
SP16	Knights Road	Poor quality open space
SP19	Land Surrounding St Clement’s Church	Part of the site is brownfield, but most of it is greenfield site associated with the church.
SP23	Warneford Hospital	There is a disused playing field to the rear of the main site. No public access.
SP24	Marston Paddock	Land is a single pasture field without public access.
SP25	St Frideswide Farm	Agricultural land
SP26	Hill View Farm	Agricultural land
SP27	Land West of Mill Lane	Agricultural land
SP28	Park Farm	Land without public access used for horse grazing.
SP29	Pear Tree Farm	Agricultural land
SP30	Land East of Redbridge Park and Ride	Land without public access leased for horse grazing.
SP33	Bertie Place Recreation Ground and Land behind Wytham Street	Recreation ground with playground and vacant land
SP38	Former Barns Road East Allotments	Disused allotments
SP39	Former Iffley Mead Playing Fields	Former school playing field, now fenced off.
SP41	Jesus College Sports Ground	Private sports ground for Jesus College with some sports pitches.

SP43	Land at Meadow Lane	Paddock for horse/pony grazing, without public access
SP44	Lincoln College Sports Ground	Private sports ground for Lincoln College with some sports pitches (see table 4 below). No public access.
SP45	Littlemore Park, Armstrong Road	The site is private, overgrown and unused and includes a former playing field. No public access.
SP46	Manor Place	Disused private hard and grass tennis courts, abandoned allotments and an orchard. No public access.
SP48	Nielsen, London Road	B1 employment site with large field to the rear, which once included private playing pitches linked to the company.
SP53	Oxford University Press Sports Ground	Private sports ground (see table 4 below) used by local sports clubs on an ad hoc basis.
SP57	Ruskin Field	Green open space, fairly overgrown, no public access, not used by college.
SP62	Valentia Road Site	Part of a small park
SP65	Bayards Hill Primary School Part Playing Fields	Part of a school playing field
SP66	William Morris Close Sports Ground	Open space, with previous use as sports pitches for the Rover Sports and Social Club

### Impact on Sports Pitches

13. Sports pitches were only given further consideration for an allocation for development if they were put forward by the developer and if it seemed that an allocation would not adversely impact on playing pitch provision in the city, for reasons including (usually a combination of):
- facilities could be replaced nearby or retained on site
  - pitches are/were in private use/not included in the playing pitch strategy and contributions could be made to increase capacity of nearby provision
  - pitches are disused so not included in the playing pitch strategy, and contributions can be made to increase capacity of nearby facilities
  - the potential to secure public open space on a currently private site, with contributions also required that would increase capacity of nearby facilities, was considered to outweigh the loss of the pitch
14. Table 2 below sets out the sites within the Proposed Submission document that contain playing pitches and the status of these in the draft Playing Pitches Strategy.

**Table 2: Sites used or previously used for sport or recreation that are included in the Proposed Submission Document**

Site	Site name	Status in the draft Playing Pitches Strategy (2019)	Potential impact of the Local Plan site allocation
SP5	Summer Fields School	This is a seasonal, painted athletics	The track will be re-

	Athletics Track	track used only by the school, so it is not included in the Strategy.	provided elsewhere within the School's extensive grounds. No impact on pitch provision.
SP12	Sandy Lane Recreation Ground	This site contains 2 adult and 1 junior pitch	There is space on the site for pitch provision to remain on – site, which is required by policy SP12.
SP14	Edge of playing fields, Oxford Academy	2 adult football pitches, 1 senior rugby pitch, 1 senior cricket pitch. Secured community use.	The part of the playing field allocated is a small area of land at a lower level to the other pitches, not well used. Its development will not affect pitch provision at the school.
SP23	Warneford Hospital	The site once contained a cricket pitch linked to the hospital, with private access only, so it is not included in the Strategy.	The site is not included in the Playing Pitch Strategy and the potential for community use of the site is limited because of its use. The loss of the sports facility is considered justified because of the potential new uses that can be located here. The policy requires that the playing fields are re-provided or contributions made to improve nearby facilities to enhance their capacity.
SP33	Bertie Place Recreation Ground and land behind Wytham Street	1 Multi-Use Games Area. MUGAs are not included in the draft Playing Pitch Strategy.	No impact on provision assessed in the Playing Pitch Strategy. Much of the site is not developable and the MUGA would be moved to that area.
SP39	Former Iffley Mead Playing Field	This is a disused school playing field, which is not included in the Strategy.	No impact on provision assessed in Playing Pitch Strategy. Contributions to nearby provision would be required to compensate for the loss of the playing field.
SP41	Jesus College Sports Ground	Comprises: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 accessible senior football pitch – adhoc use</li> <li>• 1 accessible senior rugby union pitch – adhoc use</li> <li>• 1 accessible senior cricket pitch – adhoc use</li> </ul>	Potential impact on provision-see discussion below

SP44	Lincoln College Sports Ground	<p>Comprises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 accessible senior football pitch – adhoc use</li> <li>• 1 accessible senior rugby union pitch – adhoc use</li> </ul> <p>1 accessible senior cricket pitch – adhoc use</p>	Potential impact on provision-see discussion below
SP46	Manor Place	Disused tennis courts and never accessible to the public so not covered in the strategy	No impact on provision as not assessed in Playing Pitch Strategy.
SP48	Nielsen	This site contains a disused playing pitch that was in the employer’s private use. As such it is not included in the Playing Pitch Strategy	Because the sports facility was no longer in use and because of the need for and benefits of new housing, the loss of the former facility was considered justified. Requires facilities to be re-provided or a contribution made to facilities elsewhere (EC65a and EC65b). This ensures that any loss of facilities will be adequately mitigated.
SP53	OUP	<p>Comprises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 accessible senior football pitch – access restrictions apply</li> <li>• 1 accessible senior cricket pitch – access restrictions apply</li> <li>• 1 bowls green – no access, members only</li> </ul>	See discussion below
SP62	Valentia Road	This is an informal recreation area with a kick about goal with no formal pitch provision.	No impact on pitch provision. A recreation and playground area to be retained (and improved).
SP65	Bayards Hill	1 youth and 1 mini football pitch with secured public access.	The pitches would not be affected by the small housing development.
SP66	William Morris Sports Ground	This is a former private cricket pitch which has not been used for over 10 years and that was not fully community accessible or of the right size, so it is not included in the playing pitch study.	No impact on pitch provision

### *Oxford City Council's Draft Playing Pitch Strategy*

15. The City Council produced a Playing Pitches and Outdoor Sports Strategy (2012-2026). The strategy assesses current and future need for playing pitches in Oxford. It was developed through consultation with Sport England and other stakeholders. The draft Playing Pitches and Outdoor Sports Strategy found that the number of outdoor areas used for sport and physical activity that are accessible to the public include; 116 playing pitches, 12 Synthetic Turf Pitches, 58 tennis courts and 14 Multi Use Games Areas. The main conclusion is that there is currently a shortage of playing pitch provision in Oxford that has secured community use; however additional new pitches are not necessarily required to meet the shortfall, as securing community use at currently unsecured sites could result in adequate provision for all sports.
16. A new Playing Pitch Strategy is currently underway, using a methodology based on Sport England's most recent guidance. The initial stages of data collection have been undertaken, and provide enough evidence to support the Local Plan. The revised Strategy is showing similar results to the previous Strategy, which is that there is about the right balance of pitches, with a small surplus of capacity for nearly all pitch types, but that to meet predicted future demand, but secured provision of more pitches currently accessible only on an ad hoc basis, or with no guaranteed use, will be required (additional pitches are not required).

### *Sites SP41: Jesus College Sports Ground and SP44: Lincoln College Sports Ground*

17. Sites SP41: Jesus College Sports Ground and SP44: Lincoln College Sports Ground both contain the same facilities (1 senior pitch each for football, rugby union and cricket) and both are private college owned sports grounds which are accessible to the public only on an ad hoc basis, with some secured community use at Jesus College. Development of the pitches will not directly result in any sports being underprovided; however the potential to secure access later means that they could help to overcome any future shortfall. To compensate for this loss of potential future provision, policy requires that contributions are made to re-provide for the facilities/enhance capacity of nearby sports facilities. If facilities are shared or other improvements made to nearby facilities and this secures increased capacity and secure public access that will result in enhanced provision. Furthermore, public open space will be required on site, which would be an additional local public benefit.

### *Site SP53: Oxford University Press Sports Ground*

18. Site SP53: Oxford University Press Sports Ground contains a senior cricket pitch with access restrictions, a private bowls clubs with member access only (not included in the Playing Pitch Strategy), and 1 accessible senior football pitch. The site is large, so it is anticipated that re-provision should be achieved on site. Any loss should be compensated for as with Lincoln College Sports Ground and Jesus College Sports Ground, and the same impacts and mitigations apply.

## Impact on Public Open Space

19. Following the GI assessment, there were a number of areas of public open space for which Policy G7: *Other green and open space* would apply because they have not been classed as part of the Green and Blue Infrastructure network, and they do not have open air sport facilities, biodiversity protections or allotments. A few of these areas are public open space. In cases where there was landowner interest in development, sites were considered further for an allocation. Proposed sites with public open space are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Sites containing public open space that are included in the Proposed Submission Document**

Site	Site name	Description of open space	Potential impact of the Local Plan site allocation
SP12	Sandy Lane Recreation Ground and Land to the Rear of the Retail Park	The greenfield element of this site is used as sports pitches, and is discussed above.	This site is discussed above. It is anticipated that pitches can continue to be provided on-site.
SP16	Knights Road	This is an area of little used low-value open space.	The site adjoins other areas of open space that are well-used, including an Oxford City Wildlife site and well-used playground. There is significant alternative provision in the adjoining area and the local population will still be within easy reach of public open space. The site is allocated in the Sites and Housing Plan
SP33	Bertie Place Recreation Ground and land behind Wytham Street I couldn't find this in the list? Is it looking at MUGAs?	1 Multi-Use Games Area and a playground	This site is formed of two parts. The developable part contains the playground and MUGA. The larger part of the site is inaccessible vacant land. The MUGA and playground would be moved to that area, so there would be no loss of provision resulting from development on this site.
SP62	Valentia Road	This is a recreation area with an informal 'kick about' area and a playground.	Development would have no impact on the playground. Enhancement of remaining public open space would be required as part of development on the site.

### *Oxford City Council Green Spaces Strategy 2013-2027*

20. The strategy focuses on green space that is freely available to the public for informal recreation, allotments and play, irrespective of the landowner. It states that a green space standard linked to population (e.g. Core Strategy Policy CS21) is no longer appropriate. Instead, the focus should be on protecting and enhancing existing green space and ensuring that new developments contribute to the provision of high-quality, multi-functional green space where it is required most (e.g. financial contributions to improve the quality of existing spaces or on-site provision of new green space).
21. “Linking the green spaces identified within this study are the wide flood plains of the River Thames and the River Cherwell which comprise thousands of hectares of agricultural land and private land which together have the potential to form an integrated network of green infrastructure. Improving public access to these areas by collaborating and building partnerships with stakeholders is a key aim of this strategy.”
22. “Our aspiration is that people do not have to walk more than 1,900m to their nearest large park, not more than 750m to their nearest medium park and not more than 400m to their nearest small park. This standard will be applied to all new developments as well as existing residential areas.”
23. Two of the site allocation policies involving public open space have minimal impact on overall provision as facilities can be replaced on-site (SP12 Sandy Lane; and SP33 Bertie Place). Knights Road (SP16) and Valentia Road (SP62) are not well-used public open spaces, with no features that meet the criteria for the Green and Blue Infrastructure Network; no allotments; no sport or recreation facilities; nor biodiversity protections. They are in close proximity to significant other public provision, meaning that there is no impact on accessibility to green spaces for local residents. A small-scale development only is proposed on Valentia Road, which would also enable enhancements of the remaining open space.

### **Impact on Allotments**

24. There are 36 allotment sites currently in active use in Oxford. There is a fairly good spread of allotments around Oxford, and the South East of the city has the highest concentration of allotments. Allotments tend to be located on the edges of more suburban areas, close to where people live. There is no provision in the city centre. This is perhaps expected as this part of the city is predominately non-residential.
25. Current data shows that Oxford’s allotments are well used. There is some variation between allotment sites, with some having a small proportion of vacant plots available and others having a number of people on waiting lists. This may reflect varying levels of supply and demand across the city and the relative attractiveness of different sites to allotment users.

26. Most disused allotments in the city are ruled out of consideration for development because they are also in Flood Zone 3b, for example the small disused allotment plot on Abingdon Road. One exception is the Former Barns Road East Allotments (SP38). This is not in an area of flood risk or part of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Network. The allotments are not in use. They are next to an area of residential amenity space, with no clear separation on the ground. There are other allotments in proximity including Bartholomew Road and Barns Court.

## SUMMARY

27. This Background Paper has set out the rationale for allocating a limited number of greenfield sites. It has identified the sites that currently include public open space, playing pitches, and allotments and the approach used in assessing these sites. The findings of the City Council's existing and draft Playing Pitches Strategy have been used to assess the implications of the proposed policies and address and mitigate potential concerns about loss of green space provision.