**EMBARGOED until 00:01 on Wednesday 2 February 2022**

**Spokespeople and case studies available for interview**

**Ensure local parks and green spaces are given the same protection as national parks, says CPRE**

* Little known rule gives communities the power to protect their parks and other small, locally valued green spaces from development
* The obscure ‘designation’ is key to levelling up and a cornerstone of local democracy, but so far southern England has benefited from it far more than the north
* It is one of the most powerful tools in the box for local communities to protect the green spaces they value – now they must be supported to use it

There’s huge untapped potential to level up access to nature for people living in our towns and cities by giving local parks the same sorts of protection from development as national parks. A little known yet hugely powerful rule allows local communities to ringfence their recreation grounds, community gardens, fields popular with dog walkers and other locally valued green spaces from development. And yet this provision – contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and designed specifically to protect the pockets of nature most valued by local people – is, curiously, close to unknown.

That is why CPRE, the countryside charity, is calling on the government to encourage all local authorities to promote the use of the Local Green Space designation as widely as possible. It is a unique clause in planning rules that empowers local people to apply national park-style protection from development to their most valued local green spaces. And yet, in the most nature-deprived neighbourhoods, where it could have huge value for poorer communities, it is a tool that is barely ever used.

New research by CPRE has, for the first time, mapped the total number of Local Green Spaces protected. Over 6,500 have been created since 2012, often to protect valued land on the edge of villages. But the research shows that inner cities and densely populated urban areas, which are more likely to be populated by poorer communities and people of colour, are the least likely to have benefited. Wealthier parts of the south and Midlands had the majority of Local Green Space designations, while the poorest regions in the north had the least. That’s why this is such an important mechanism for levelling up – much more needs to be done to help all communities, and particularly those in the north, preserve their last, and often only, patches of green.

Local Green Spaces are small parcels of land, close to where people live, that are demonstrably special to their community, for reasons that can include their beauty, historical significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of wildlife. It is a neighbourhood planning tool with unique power, because it implies being valued by local people is in itself a strong enough reason to protect small patches of green space.

**Crispin Truman, chief executive of CPRE, the countryside charity, said:**

‘This is a solution to levelling up that has been hiding in plain sight; a planning superpower in the hands of ordinary people. All that people have to prove is they use and value the land for it to be eligible to be protected like it’s a national park. Unfortunately, there is a sliding scale of injustice when it comes to who is benefitting. Put simply, the poorer you are and the more nature-deprived your neighbourhood already is, the less likely you are to have any protected Local Green Space. It’s time to address this imbalance and level up everyone’s access to nature.

‘That is why we’re calling on the government to promise the equivalent of a national park for every neighbourhood. Local Green Space designation is a powerful way to protect vulnerable slices of nature, particularly in deprived areas. It has the added benefit of nurturing neighbourhood planning groups so that local residents get more of a say in what gets built locally.

‘Our iconic national parks are rightly celebrated and protected. But research repeatedly shows they are not accessible to all – and that the poorest in society benefit the least. That’s why it should be a national priority to protect our local parks and green spaces so that everybody, no matter where they live, has access to the benefits of nature.’

Despite its fantastic potential as a tool to protect recreational or nature-rich urban areas, much more could be done to improve the usefulness of Local Green Space designation.

Key recommendations to ensure Local Green Space designation delivers on levelling up urban areas, particularly in the north, include:

* Making climate change adaptation and mitigation an explicit reason for land to be locally valued;
* Embedding compulsory standards for access to nature within planning law;
* Strengthening of protections against development on sites with Local Green Space designation; and
* Furthering support for neighbourhood planning across England, particularly in areas with low take up, and encouraging public participation throughout the planning process.

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

The Local Green Space designation was introduced in the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) following a pledge made jointly by the then Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg in the Coalition Agreement.

As set out in paragraphs 101-103 and footnote 7 of the 2021 version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), this designation provides the same strong level of protection from development as Green Belts and National Parks to areas of green space that are particularly valued by their local communities.

These spaces can be designated through the preparation or review of local plans and neighbourhood plans and should remain protected within and beyond the end of the plan period (usually 15 years). To be designated as Local Green Space, a given space needs to be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves, local in character and not an extensive tract of land.

**Methodology**

Information about the name, location, size, reason(s) for designation and corresponding local development plan of each designated Local Green Space was collected, in part, via Freedom of Information Requests sent out to all local planning authorities, and, in part, by searching through all made neighbourhood plans and adopted local plans (with June 2021 as a cut-off point). This data was analysed in order to identify the spatial distribution of LGSs, their estimated average and total size, as well as main reasons for designation. Analysis was also carried out against other datasets, including Friends of the Earth’s Green Space Deprivation Rating (see Green Space Gap 2020 report) and the 2011 Rural Urban Classification developed by the Office for National Statistics. For more details, see pages 25-26 of the Local Green Space report.

**For further information or to interview a spokesperson, please contact:**

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**About CPRE, the countryside charity**

CPRE is the countryside charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone’s benefit, wherever they live. With a local CPRE in every county, we work with communities, businesses and government to find positive and lasting ways to help the countryside thrive - today and for generations to come. Founded in 1926. President: Emma Bridgewater. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. [www.cpre.org.uk](http://www.cpre.org.uk/%22%20/)