

A guide to saving a Green Space in London under threat from development



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This practical guide is developed by CPRE London to help you respond if a local park, playing field or other green space is at risk of being lost or severely diminished due to a planning application being submitted.

CPRE London deals with many threats to green spaces every year. While we try to assist where possible, here we provide some simple steps you can take to increase your prospects for success.



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Legal & Planning

One of the best ways to protect a green space in London is to get it officially recognised as a special area for its natural, cultural or community importance. This is known as ‘designation’ or ‘protection’.

There may then be restrictions on activities that might adversely affect a designated or protected area such as building on or near the site. Even if a green space near you isn’t currently under threat, it is a very good idea to get it designated to protect it against potential future developments.

Different types of designation provide different levels of protection which are defined in both national policies set by Government and local policies. See the glossary at the end of this document for more information about the different designations.

But even if your green space isn’t currently protected, don’t give up! This guide will show you how you can spring into action.



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1. Dealing with a live planning application

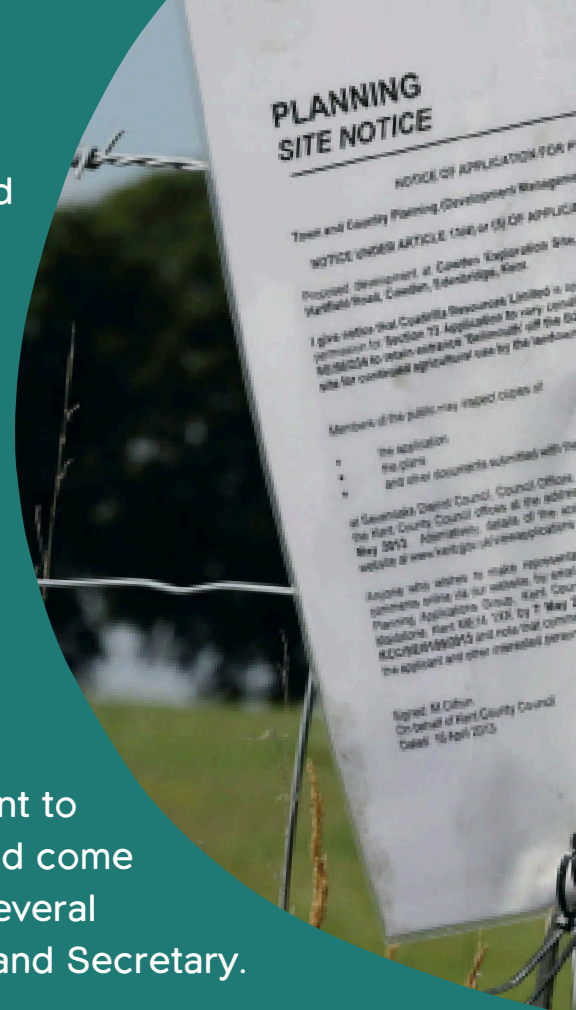
If a green space near you is currently under threat from a planning application, it is a good idea to check if there are any designations, rights of access, deeds and related covenants/agreements for the threatened land to see if there could be a way to raise a legal challenge.

For a small fee, you can get information about covenants from the Government's Land Registry. If there are existing deeds or covenants, it is useful to have a lawyer review them. You should also research your local authorities Local Plan policies which will help you formulate a reasoned response.

2. Build your campaign

Get together with other people concerned about the issue, talk through the goals you want to achieve and who you need to influence (your strategy), agree a name for the campaign and come up with some ideas for things to do (your tactics). Consider creating a 'core group' and several 'working groups' to take on different areas of work. You should also choose a Treasurer and Secretary.

You could also draft a simple set of rules known as a 'constitution' about how you are going to work so that you are ready to apply for a bank account and grants if required. See [here](#) for more information. Involve as many people as possible and include those with specialist skills in your campaign group, such as lawyers, planning officers, the media savvy, those with graphics skills and those with media contacts who will strengthen your efforts. The next section provides more details about running a concerted campaign.



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3. Submit your objection letter

Make sure you submit an objection to the planning application by the deadline and encourage others to do likewise. The more objections the better. You can find guidance and sample letters or emails in [this guide](#). If you can, quote Council policies related to green space, climate mitigation and biodiversity and demonstrate how they are being ignored. These policies are often found in documents such as the Local Plan or Green Space Strategy and can be accessed on the Council's website. You may also find it helpful to [contact Planning Aid for London](#) for free planning advice.

After submitting your objection letter, prepare to speak at the relevant planning meeting and get other people to turn up to support you – this counts in front of local councillors. Lobby your councillors and other local politicians, they may also speak on your behalf.

4. Go to Court

If you're concerned about a development proposal on a green space that has gained, or may gain, planning permission, there may be scope for a legal challenge through judicial review or statutory challenge. These can be undertaken if either the process by which the decision has been reached did not follow the correct steps; or you discover historic protections that should have been applied.

However, legal challenges can cost a significant amount of money and success is not guaranteed. There are a number of crowdsourcing platforms which can be an efficient and effective vehicle for fundraising and updating contacts on legal action. They work well with solicitors and charities. More information about legal challenges can be found [here](#).



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Campaigning

For a campaign to gain momentum and have influence you will need to plan some activities and events to help achieve your goals. These can include making your case directly to decision-makers and generating public support for your cause.

You will probably also want to fundraise, create press coverage and work with other groups and experts. These steps are not only valid for planning objections but also other types of campaign to protect your green space – whether you are seeking the repair of infrastructure in your park (eg. replacement of neglected play equipment) or some other concern (eg. preventing antisocial behaviour).



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1. Create a clear identity for the green space

One of the most important ways to protect a green space is to prove that it is being used, valued and has a clear identity. You can do this by collecting information and data on the benefits it brings to the area. It might also be a good idea to check if there are any natural, archaeological or historic assets on the site – see the [GoParks London map](#). Local history societies and wildlife groups may be able to help with this research and you can search for these online.

2. Create a Campaign Plan

This should include your long-term and short-term aims. Create a timeline with key dates and plan tactics to influence decisions at the right time. List the major reasons to object. Ask yourself, who will be making the decision? What is their current opinion and how might their views be changed? Who else will influence their decision? How aware is the local community of what is being planned? Are there any allies or community leaders who might help generate support? Are there any consultations, exhibitions, council meetings, elections, or other events coming up where you could raise the issue? What information could you uncover to increase the prominence of the issue with the press and public?



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3. Set up online campaign and fundraising tools

Set up a dedicated email address (which is regularly monitored by your group) for campaign business such as sending newsletters and press releases to supporters and journalists. A campaign website, online petition and social media accounts can also be useful. Make sure you include information about how people can help the campaign such as responding to the planning application, signing a petition or donating to the campaign. It may also be a good idea to set up a crowdfunder to help with this. Multiple platforms exist to help you do this, including Kickstarter, Crowdfunder and GoFundMe, though it is worth checking what fees they will charge. If you become a registered charity you can also claim gift aid.

4. Develop a set of concise key messages

It is essential to explain your campaign's aims and objectives clearly. Use photos, maps and videos that highlight the beauty and value of the green space and, if possible, compare these with images showing how it will be damaged or lost to the community. Try to keep your campaign messaging positive and constructive. Be the voice of reason and make sure you present the issue from a storytelling perspective. Rather than just objecting, show that you are solution-focused too. If possible, highlight alternative locations for the development that doesn't involve building on green space. For example, are there any brownfield or previously developed areas of land that could be used instead?



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5. Launch your campaign with a public meeting

Invite local residents, media and other concerned groups. Advertise the meeting in local libraries, community centres and on local websites. Use the meeting to present your concerns and encourage local people to ask questions and discuss potential next steps.

6. Inform the press and increase interest through social media

Your local newspaper and radio station may be able to provide coverage of your campaign through articles and features. Phone or email them or send a press release highlighting news of the campaign launch and other upcoming events. You could also create a campaign poster and pay for it to be included in your local newspaper as an advertisement. It is also worth using social media to provide regular information about your progress and engender support.



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7. Influence local politicians

If you can, check if the councillors who will be voting on the application are for or against, and write to them explaining your concerns. If they are reluctant to engage, at a minimum, it is important to get your local ward councillors onside. Councillor contact details can be found on the Council's website. Try getting your local MP to support your campaign as well. You could invite local politicians to meet with you and other concerned residents at a public meeting or arrange a site visit for them. Opposition councillors can be approached to ask questions of a local council, and members of the public may also be able to submit questions to council meetings. In the run up to local elections try to get pledges from candidates to protect your green space if elected.

8. Letters, petitions and joint statements

Encourage local residents to write individually to a decision-maker to oppose the development. This can be done at any time, not just in response to standard deadlines and consultation periods. Similarly, a joint statement or letter is a good way to demonstrate that a wide range of people, including celebrities and organisations, support the campaign.



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9. Seeking support from other groups

As well as CPRE London there are other charities across London dedicated to protecting London's natural landscapes and you can run joint activities with them eg. a litter-pick event; a community birdwatch; or a bulb planting day in your green space (subject to securing the necessary permissions from the landowner). This will broaden your reach, raise awareness and make direct contact with new supporters.

10. Posters, leafleting and door knocking

Visiting residents in areas that will be affected by the development can be very useful. Take along leaflets and collect names and emails for your petition and to maintain contact or follow-up with enquiries. Posters displayed in and around the affected space is also an effective way of raising awareness.

11. Street stalls

These can also be an effective way of increasing support. There's likely to be a designated area for this kind of activity somewhere on your high street. You could also book a stall at local events and fairs.

12. Protests and direct action

A peaceful protest inside or outside an event or a march can help raise awareness of your campaign and generate media coverage.



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Safekeeping your green spaces against future threats

It is important to act the moment you hear the very first hint of a threat to a green space. Once any proposal has become public there will already have been meetings between developers, officers, councillors and other interested parties.

The proposals will have gained momentum long before any public consultation takes place and once under way it is very difficult to stop it. You can keep an eye on any emerging planning threats and other risks to green spaces near you by:



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1. Getting involved in your local park friends group

In London, there are around 900 park friends groups made up of volunteers who get together to protect, improve and bring communities together in their local parks. You can check if your green space has a friends group on the [GoParksLondon website](https://www.goparkslondon.org/). If your green space doesn't have a friends group, why not consider [setting one up yourself](#)?

2. Checking the status of your council's Local Plan

If there are any consultations which propose to build on or de-designate protection for your green space, respond. See this [guide](#) on the overall process. You may also read in your local newspaper or news website about local parks, playing fields and other green spaces which may be under threat in which case you can join their campaigns.

3. Getting involved in your neighbourhood planning forum

This is where local people set out the vision and planning policies for how they want their local area to develop by producing a neighbourhood plan. See this [guide](#) on [Neighbourhood Planning](#) and [how to shape where you live](#).



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4. Considering other methods of designation and purchase

This includes Town and Village Green status, designating as both a Local Green Space and an Asset of Community Value. You can also ask your Local Authority to consider compulsory purchase.

5. Joining CPRE London

We are always looking for planning volunteers. Or you could sign up to be a member [here](#) and support our work to protect London's environment.

If you're concerned that a green space in London may be under threat or have questions about anything included in this guide, please contact CPRE London at: office@cprelondon.org.uk

We work to make London a greener city, which develops sustainably, is richer in nature and climate resilient, for the wellbeing of all.



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Glossary

The best time to get a green space designated is when your council is reviewing their Local Plan or producing a Neighbourhood Plan, whichever is already underway. If neither document is currently being reviewed, you can still contact your council about gaining a designation and ask for a written commitment in advance.

Designations can include:

Green Belt: This designation exists to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It is for local authorities to define Green Belt land in their local areas and keep the boundaries up to date. The National Planning Framework (NPPF) restricts inappropriate development on Green Belt land unless there are 'exceptional circumstances'.

Metropolitan Open Land (MOL): This designation is only used within London and offers the same level of protection as Green Belt. MOL is intended to protect important areas of landscape, recreation, nature conservation and scientific interest.



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Conservation Area: The character of a Conservation Area is made up of a combination of many things, including the buildings, their interrelationship, and the spaces they create, their variety of styles and details, street patterns, open spaces, walls and trees, vistas and monuments. As well as smaller details such as paving, walls, signs and railings, which all go towards making a place unique and distinctive. If you are unsure whether your site is in a Conservation Area you can check with the Local Planning Authority on their website.

Historic Listing: Historic England designates certain historic green spaces as of importance to the environment – Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II. These are protected in planning legislation based on a Statement of Significance which reviews the heritage merit of a site. London Parks & Gardens may be able to assist.

Local Green Space (LGS): This designation is for community green spaces and means the land cannot be built on other than in special circumstances, much like the Green Belt and MOL. [Here](#) is a guide to designating Local Green Space through neighbourhood planning.

Fields in Trust Deed of Dedication: This is perhaps the strongest protection a green space can receive because it is a legal agreement between the UK charity Fields in Trust and a site's landowner that they will permanently retain it for use as a green space. This is usually used for public parks, playing fields or recreation grounds.



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Town or Village Greens: These are protected from encroachment and development by the Enclosure Act 1857 s12 and the Commons Act 1876 s29. If you can prove that local people have used the land without secrecy, force or permission for at least 20 years for lawful sports and pastimes, you can apply to register the land as new green. This will protect it from development for ever and preserve it for use by local people. More information can be found on the [Open Spaces Society website](#).

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC): A site may qualify as a SINC due to the presence of a notable species or an important habitat. Designating a SINC raises awareness of its importance for wildlife particularly regarding planning and land management decision making. They are usually administered by local authorities in partnership with conservation organisations.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs): Sites are designated as SSSIs by Natural England for their biological or geological interest. Designation as an SSSI gives legal protection to the most important wildlife and geological sites.

Asset of Community Value (ACV): Land that is used for furthering the social wellbeing of the local community can be listed as an ACV with the local authority. Sites can be nominated by parish councils, neighbourhood forums (as defined in Neighbourhood Planning regulations), community groups of at least 21 members, and not-for-private profit organisations (eg. charities). If land registered as an ACV goes up for sale, the local community should be informed, and they would be given a period of six months where they would be prioritised to purchase the site if they are able to raise the necessary funds. You can find out more information about ACV [here](#).

This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other protections you can seek – for instance if you discover a rare species of plant or animal on your site.



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