

Belford Parish Neighbourhood Plan: Protecting Open Space Background Report (March 2021)

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Open spaces provide significant benefits for our community. They provide a visual and recreational amenity and support better health and well-being. Many of the open spaces in our Parish also make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the built and natural environment.
- 1.2 This background paper sets out a methodology for the approach taken by the Parish Council to the designation of Local Green Space and the protection of other open spaces through policies in the draft Belford Parish Neighbourhood Plan.

2 Local Green Space

Planning Policy Context

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) sets out the government's planning policies for England. Paragraphs 101 to 103 of NPPF set out national policy allowing the designation of 'Local Green Space' (LGS) through local plans and neighbourhood plans. The intention of this policy approach is to allow local communities to identify and protect green spaces that are of particular importance to them for a variety of reasons.
- 2.2 Once designated, any development proposed in LGS must be managed in a way that is consistent with national policy applying to the Green Belt. In effect, this creates a presumption that development should not normally take place on designated LGS.
- 2.3 Designation of land as LGS is not appropriate for all green areas. Paragraph 102 of the NPPF describes the circumstance in which it may be appropriate to use this designation. This requires that the green space must be:
 - in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
 - demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
 - local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.
- 2.4 Land can be designated as LGS even if there is no public access. Designation does not in itself confer any rights of public access beyond any rights that existed prior to designation.

- 2.5 A LGS does not need to be in public ownership. However, before any land is proposed for designation as LGS it is essential that landowners are made aware of that intention at an early stage of plan preparation. Management of land designated as LGS will remain the responsibility of its owner.
- 2.6 Landowners will have opportunities to make representations in respect of proposals in a draft plan. It is therefore critical to the success of any proposal to designate LGS that the proposal is based on sound evidence. This must be presented for scrutiny to demonstrate, in accordance with the NPPF, why the land is so special to the local community that it warrants designation.

Methodology for Designating Local Green Space

- 2.7 The designation of LGS is a matter for local communities to determine in the first instance, since the evidence required to demonstrate why a green space is special must be expressed by reference to the value the space holds to the community that uses or benefits from the space. Accordingly, the initial list of sites to be proposed for designation in the Belford Parish Neighbourhood Plan was created from feedback provided by the local community following early consultation and engagement on the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.8 The list of candidate Local Green Spaces created through the early engagement exercises was further assessed by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to review their suitability for designation having regard to relevant criteria established in the NPPF and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). The assessments for each site are provided in Appendix 1.
- 2.9 A review of existing planning policies shows that there are no open spaces designated for protection through the current Berwick-Upon-Tweed Borough Local Plan (1999). The emerging Northumberland Local Plan (NLP) proposes to create 'Protected Open Space' through Policy INF5. This designation would apply to four of the candidate LGS sites. However, the Parish Council consider it appropriate to recognise the value the local community attach to these spaces for the reasons set out in the detailed assessments. It is noted the County Council confirm in the NLP that they consider the designation of LGS to be a matter for local communities to address through neighbourhood plans.
- 2.10 In order to be designated as LGS all the criteria identified in Figure 1 below, which represent the relevant requirements set out in national policy and guidance, must be met. The explanations given in Figure 1 regarding each criteria reflect the relevant sections of NPPG which are specifically referenced.

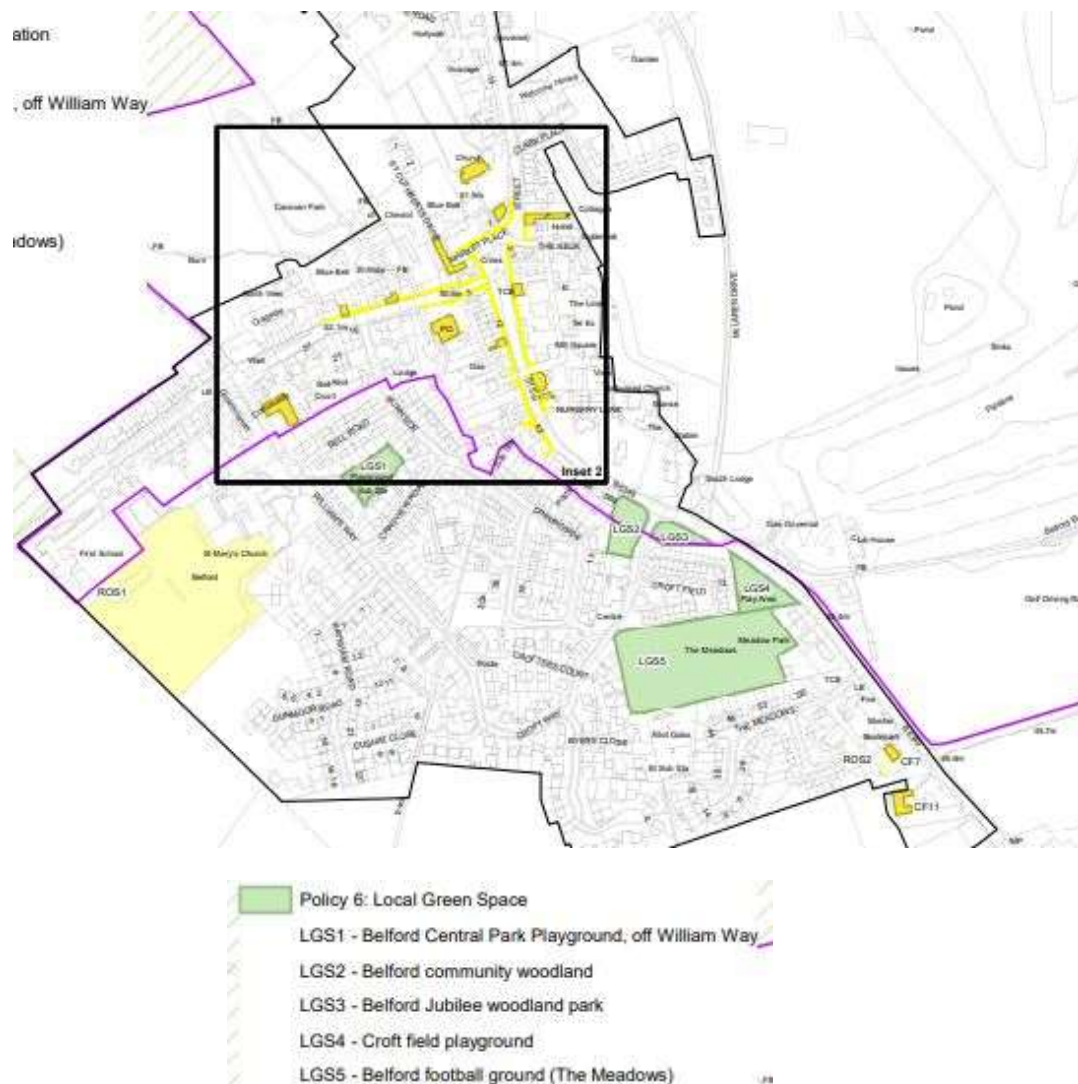
Figure 1: Criteria for LGS Designation

Criteria	Explanation
1. Is the land subject to a Planning Permission?	LGS designation will rarely be appropriate where the land has planning permission for development. Exceptions could be where the designation would be compatible with the planning permission or where planning permission is no longer capable of being implemented. (NPPG Para: 008 Ref ID: 37-008-20140306)
2. Is the space allocated or proposed for development in the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan?	Designating any LGS will need to be consistent with local planning for sustainable development in the area. In particular, plans must identify sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs and the LGS designation should not be used in a way that undermines this aim of plan making. (NPPG Para: 007 Ref ID: 37-007-20140306)
3. Is the space local in character and not an extensive tract of land?	LGS designation should only be used where the green area is not an extensive tract of land. Blanket designation of open countryside adjacent to settlements will not be appropriate. (NPPG Paragraph: 015 Reference ID: 37-015-20140306)
4. Is the space in close proximity to the Community it serves?	The proximity of a LGS to the community it serves will depend on local circumstances, including why the green area is seen as special, but it must be reasonably close. For example, if public access is a key factor, then the site would normally be within easy walking distance of the community served. (NPPG Para: 014 Ref ID: 37-014-20140306)
5. Is the space demonstrably special or does it hold particular significance for the local community?	<p>LGS may only be designated where those spaces are demonstrably special to the local community. (NPPG Para: 009 Ref ID: 37-009-20140306)</p> <p><i>LGS may be special for one or more reasons. The following questions will help to identify if the space accords with criterion 5. Is the space special or of particular local significance because of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>its beauty?</i> • <i>its historic significance?</i> • <i>its recreational value?</i> • <i>its tranquillity?</i> • <i>its richness of wildlife?</i> • <i>another relevant reason not covered by the above?</i>

Proposed Local Green Space in Belford Parish

2.11 Having regard to the outcome of the detailed site assessments provided in Appendix 1 the following sites are proposed for designation as LGS in the Belford Neighbourhood Plan:

- LGS 1 – Belford Central Park Playground, off William Way
- LGS 2 – Belford Community Woodland, Croftfield
- LGS 3 – Belford Jubilee Woodland Park
- LGS 4 – Croftfield Playground
- LGS 5 – Belford Football Ground (The Meadows), Croftfield



3 Protection of other open space

- 3.1 Local Green Space is a specific designation that carries with it certain obligations for the Local Planning Authority when considering how development is to be managed in the area. LGS is generally protected from development, including changes of use. This is because, unlike many other open spaces, the characteristics of each LGS arise specifically from their location. In effect, these may be considered an irreplaceable resource having particular benefits to the local community in that specific location. However, many other open spaces are valued by local communities although they may not meet the strict criteria for designation as LGS.
- 3.2 National planning policy recognises the benefits to the health and well-being of communities arising from people having access to a network of high quality open spaces and people having opportunities for sport and recreation. To support this recognition, paragraph 99 of NPPF offers clear protection to all open space by requiring that:
- ‘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.’*
- 3.3 While the NPPF offers this general protection from built development unless the prescribed criteria are met, there are opportunities for more locally distinctive planning policies to be created that provide a greater degree of local clarity on those spaces and buildings to which this national policy approach would be expected to be applied. This has been done in a number of neighbourhood plans across Northumberland, and is an approach being proposed by Northumberland County Council through the emerging NLP which seeks to designate a wide range of ‘Protected Open Space’ through Policy INF5.
- 3.4 NPPG advises that open space, which includes all open space of public value whether or not there is public access to the space, can take many forms. This can include areas such as formal sports pitches, open areas within settlements that provide a visual amenity or informal recreational space; linear corridors; and larger areas such as woodlands and country parks. These spaces are special in that they can:

- provide health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby;
- have an ecological value;
- contribute to networks of multi-functional green infrastructure;
- provide important elements of the landscape;
- provide attractive settings for built development, including buildings and areas of heritage value; and
- provide an important component in the achievement of sustainable development.

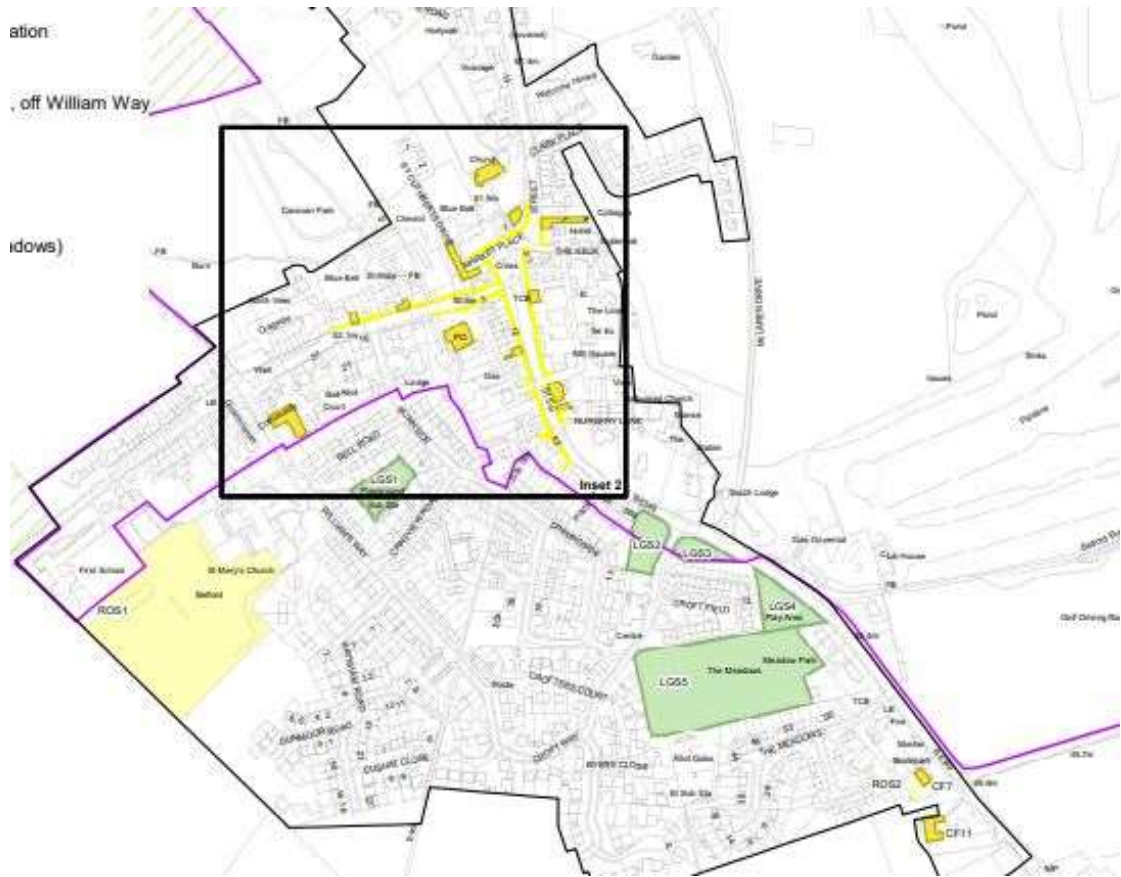
3.5 Having considered the matter carefully, and noting that two recreational open spaces identified as being important to the local community are not designated as 'Protected Open Space' in the emerging NLP, the Parish Council consider that the Neighbourhood Plan should independently recognise the importance of those two open spaces.

3.6 It is proposed that these are protected from built development by a policy in the Neighbourhood Plan. This approach will result in the creation of a locally distinctive planning policy that demonstrates the Parish Council's commitment to ensure, as far as practicable, that protection is afforded to those recreational facilities the community have identified as being important. A detailed assessment of the two sites proposed for protection as 'Recreational Open Space' is provided in Appendix 2.

Proposed Recreational Open Space in Belford

3.7 Having regard to the outcome of the detailed site assessments the following sites are proposed to be protected as Recreational Open Space through the Belford Neighbourhood Plan:

- ROS 1 – School Fields east of Raynham Close
- ROS 2 – Skate Park rear of Belford Fire Station




- Policy 5: Recreational Space
- ROS1 - School fields east of Raynham Close
- ROS2 - Skate park rear of Belford fire station

4 Conclusion and Next Steps

- 4.1 This paper explains the process behind the proposed designation of areas of Local Green Space and Recreational Open Space in Belford through the Neighbourhood Plan. It has summarised the planning policy context and explained the methodology used in the assessments. This provides the evidence necessary to justify the proposed designations.
- 4.2 Consultation will now take place on the draft Neighbourhood Plan which will allow anyone with an interest in the sites proposed for designation to make their views known. Any written representations received in response to that consultation will be carefully considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the Parish Council.

Appendix 1: Assessment of Proposed Local Green Spaces in Belford Parish

<p>Site Ref: LGS 1</p>		
<p>Site Name: Belford Central Park Playground, off William Way</p> <p>Description: A locally equipped, grassed area for play including, children's play equipment, outdoor gym equipment, small football goal and 4 picnic benches. The site has approx. 8 mature trees, is overlooked on all 4 sides by residential housing and can be accessed from 4 points at the junctions of Williams Way and Bell Rd, Williams Way and Cragview Rd, Cragview Rd and Burnside and Burnside and Bell Rd.</p>		
<p>Criteria</p>	<p>Met?</p>	<p>Comment</p>
<p>1. Site is not subject to a planning permission</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p><i>There are no known planning permissions on this site at the time of survey.</i></p>
<p>2. Site is not allocated in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan</p>	<p>No</p>	<p><i>The site is proposed as Protected Open Space in Policy INF 5 of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan, Ref 2,126.00, Provision for Children and Young People</i></p>
<p>3. Site is not an extensive tract of land and is local in character</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p><i>The site is a small locally equipped play area within a housing estate.</i></p>

4. Site is within close proximity of the community it serves	Yes	The site is overlooked on all four sides from the rear of residential properties and is within a housing estate
5. Site is demonstrably special to the local community and holds particular local significance for the following reasons:		
5a. Site is particularly beautiful	No	The site does not have any beautiful aspects to it. It is a functional green space
5b. Site has particular historic significance	No	There is no known historic significance to the site
5c. Site has recreational value	Yes	The site has recreational value. The play equipment for children and younger people, seating areas and protection from traffic provide this recreational value.
5d. Site has tranquillity	No	The site was empty at the time of visit. There was no sound of near-by traffic or noise from industry. There were many common garden birds could be heard but it would be difficult to say the site had tranquillity in terms of a LGS designation.
5e. Site has rich wildlife	No	The site had mature trees and hedgerows which will no doubt provide an environment for wildlife like birds, hedgehogs, mice etc. but the site was not rich in wildlife.
5f. Site has significance because of another reason	No	There are no known other reasons why the site is significant.
The space should be designated as Local Green Space: Yes		

Site Ref: LGS 2

**Site Name: Belford
Community Woodland,
Croftfield**

Description: A community woodland garden with trail. Belford Burn runs through the site and there is a grassed area to the east of the site. The site includes young, mature and a large veteran tree. There is squirrel, feeders, bird feeders and bird nesting boxes on many of the trees. There are benches to sit on. The site is accessed via a gate from High St or informally from the Doctors surgery car park at the rear and also along the footpath at Croftfield. The site is enclosed on two sides by a stone wall running along High St and the boundaries of the rear gardens of residential properties on High St and Dinningside.



Criteria	Met?	Comment
<i>1. Site is not subject to a planning permission</i>	Yes	<i>There are no known planning permissions on this site at the time of survey.</i>
<i>2. Site is not allocated in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan</i>	No	<i>The site is proposed as Protected Open Space in Policy INF 5 of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan, Ref 2,184.00, Amenity Green Space</i>
<i>3. Site is not an extensive tract of land and is local in character</i>	Yes	<i>The site is a small woodland, community garden and community greenspace situated on the approach to Belford High Street and surrounded by residential development.</i>
<i>4. Site is within close proximity of the community it serves</i>	Yes	<i>The site is surrounded by residential development and situated on the approach to Belford High Street and the core of the Village.</i>
<i>5. Site is demonstrably special to the local community and holds particular local significance for the following reasons:</i>		
<i>5a. Site is particularly beautiful</i>	No	<i>The site is a pleasant place to walk through or sit in but is not beautiful for the purposes of Local Green Space designation.</i>
<i>5b. Site has particular historic significance</i>	No	<i>There is no known historic significance to the site</i>
<i>5c. Site has recreational value</i>	Yes	<i>The site has benches to sit on and a larger grassed area to the rear of the site for informal play or recreation.</i>
<i>5d. Site has tranquillity</i>	No	<i>The site is bordered by public highway and roads on two sides. While pleasant to walk through or sit in, it is not completely tranquil for the purposes of Local Green Space designation.</i>
<i>5e. Site has rich wildlife</i>	Yes	<i>The site has young trees, mature trees and a large veteran tree supporting 5 crows nests. A wide variety of common garden birds were spotted in the space. Hedgerows and bramble alongside Belford Burn will no doubt provide an environment for more wildlife like hedgehogs, mice, insects, smaller nesting birds etc.</i>
<i>5f. Site has significance because of another reason</i>	No	<i>There are no known other reasons why the site is significant.</i>
The space should be designated as Local Green Space: Yes		

Site Ref: LGS 3

Site Name: Belford Jubilee Woodland Park

Description: A small, triangular shaped, community and memorial garden with seating areas and trail. There are planted flowers, wild- flowers, younger trees, and mature trees, many of which have name tags on noting their species. Belford Burn continues through the site and has mature trees, wild growth, brambles, and bushes growing alongside. The site is bordered by a stone wall and public highway on two sides. The third side includes the rear of residential properties at Croftfield and more wild growth alongside the Burn.



Criteria	Met?	Comment
1. Site is not subject to a planning permission	Yes	<i>There are no known planning permissions on this site at the time of survey.</i>
2. Site is not allocated in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan	Yes	<i>There are no known Local or Neighbourhood Plan allocations on this site at the time of survey.</i>
3. Site is not an extensive tract of land and is local in character	Yes	<i>The site is a community garden surrounded by residential development and located on the approach to Belford High Street and the core of the Village.</i>

<i>4. Site is within close proximity of the community it serves</i>	Yes	<i>The site is within a one-minute walk from the core of the Village and residential development.</i>
<i>5. Site is demonstrably special to the local community and holds particular local significance for the following reasons:</i>		
<i>5a. Site is particularly beautiful</i>	No	<i>The site is a pleasant place to walk through or sit in but is not beautiful for the purposes of Local Green Space designation.</i>
<i>5b. Site has particular historic significance</i>	No	<i>There is no known historic significance to the site</i>
<i>5c. Site has recreational value</i>	No	<i>There are benches located in the garden to sit on. There are no areas for informal or formal recreation.</i>
<i>5d. Site has tranquillity</i>	No	<i>The site is bordered by public highway and roads on two sides. While pleasant to walk through or sit in, it is not completely tranquil for the purposes of Local Green Space designation.</i>
<i>5e. Site has rich wildlife</i>	Yes	<i>The site did have many recognisable sounds and sites associated with rich wildlife. A wide variety of common garden birds could be heard and the burn and associated brambles and bushes will no doubt provide for further wildlife species like foxes mice, voles, and insects.</i>
<i>5f. Site has significance because of another reason</i>	No	<i>The site is significant for its educational value too. Many of the trees and flowers have name plates with their species on.</i>
The space should be designated as Local Green Space: Yes		


Site Ref: LGS 4

Site Name: Crofffield
Playground

Description: An equipped play park surrounded by fencing and beyond, an informal green space bordered by mature trees on the southern edge, overlooked by houses on the western edge and a stone wall and public highway on its eastern edge. The site also had a picnic table. The site is accessed via a gate from South Road.




Criteria	Met?	Comment
<i>1. Site is not subject to a planning permission</i>	Yes	<i>There are no known planning permissions on this site at the time of survey.</i>
<i>2. Site is not allocated in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan</i>	No	<i>The site is proposed as Protected Open Space in Policy INF 5 of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan, Ref 2,122.00, Provision for Children and Young People</i>
<i>3. Site is not an extensive tract of land and is local in character</i>	Yes	<i>The site is a small locally equipped play area overlooked by housing on its western side.</i>
<i>4. Site is within close proximity of the community it serves</i>	Yes	<i>The site is overlooked on its western side by a row of terraced houses. It is a one to two- minute walk to the centre of Belford from the park.</i>
<i>5. Site is demonstrably special to the local community and holds particular local significance for the following reasons:</i>		
<i>5a. Site is particularly beautiful</i>	No	<i>The site does not have any beautiful aspects to it for the purposes of Local Green Space Designation. It is a functional green space with a play park</i>
<i>5b. Site has particular historic significance</i>	No	<i>There is no known historic significance to the site</i>
<i>5c. Site has recreational value</i>	Yes	<i>The site has recreational value. The play equipment for children and younger people, seating areas and protection from traffic provide this recreational value.</i>
<i>5d. Site has tranquillity</i>	No	<i>The site was empty at the time of visit. The site is very close to South Road, the road into Belford Village. There was traffic noise. Many common garden birds could be heard but it would be difficult to say the site had tranquillity in terms of a Local Green Space designation.</i>
<i>5e. Site has rich wildlife</i>	No	<i>The site had mature trees and hedgerows which will no doubt provide an environment for wildlife like birds, hedgehogs, mice etc. but the site was not rich in wildlife.</i>
<i>5f. Site has significance because of another reason</i>	No	<i>There are no known other reasons why the site is significant.</i>
The space should be designated as Local Green Space: Yes		

Site Ref: LGS 5		
Site Name: Belford Football Ground (The Meadows), Croftfield		
Description: Community football pitch with two fixed goal posts and small changing cabins at the southeast corner. There is a small area for spectators parking.		
Criteria	Met?	Comment
<i>1. Site is not subject to a planning permission</i>	Yes	<i>There are no known planning permissions on this site at the time of survey.</i>
<i>2. Site is not allocated in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan</i>	No	<i>The site is proposed as Protected Open Space in Policy INF 5 of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan, Ref 2, 123.00 Outdoor Sports Facilities</i>
<i>3. Site is not an extensive tract of land and is local in character</i>	Yes	<i>The site is a local football field which is also used for informal play and dog walking</i>
<i>4. Site is within close proximity of the community it serves</i>	Yes	<i>The site is bordered and overlooked on all 4 sides by the rear of houses at Croftway, Croftfield, The Meadows and Meadow Park</i>
<i>5. Site is demonstrably special to the local community and holds particular local significance for the following reasons:</i>		
<i>5a. Site is particularly beautiful</i>	No	<i>The site does not have any beautiful aspects to it. It is an outdoor sports facility</i>
<i>5b. Site has particular historic significance</i>	No	<i>There is no known historic significance to the site</i>

5c. Site has recreational value	Yes	<i>The site has recreational value. The field is used for informal play and organised football matches.</i>
5d. Site has tranquillity	No	<i>The site was empty at the time and due to its enclosed nature was quiet but it would be difficult to say the site had tranquillity in terms of a LGS designation.</i>
5e. Site has rich wildlife	No	<i>The site will no doubt have wildlife that uses its borders but could not be classed as rich in wildlife for the purposes of LGS designation</i>
5f. Site has significance because of another reason	No	<i>There are no known other reasons why the site is significant.</i>
The space should be designated as Local Green Space: Yes		

Appendix 2: Assessment of Proposed Recreational Open Spaces in Belford Parish

- ROS 1 – School Fields east of Raynham Close
- ROS 2 – Skate Park rear of Belford Fire Station

<p>Site Ref: ROS1</p>	
<p>Site Name: School Fields east of Raynham Close</p>	
<p>Description: <i>Former school playing fields situated between the B6349 and Williams Way</i></p>	
<p>Justification: The open space is a former school playing field on western edge of the settlement. The space is very close to the community and is used by walkers, dog walkers and for informal games and recreation by families and children in Belford. The space is accessible on foot from housing along Williams Way and other areas. The site is not proposed for protection in the emerging Northumberland Local Plan and would benefit from specific designation through the Neighbourhood Plan as an important area of open space for a wide section of the local community.</p>	

<p>Site Ref: ROS2</p>	
<p>Site Name: Skate Park behind Belford Fire station</p>	

Description: Small, equipped skate park with tarmac surface and fabricated metal ramps and steps. Situated behind Belford Fire Station on the approach to Belford Main Street



Justification: The area is a small, purpose-built community skate park situated next to Belford Community Fire Station. It is used predominantly by younger generations for informal skateboard, scooter and bmx bicycle play. It is accessible on foot and is situated adjacent to the houses in the Meadows Estate. The site is not proposed for protection in the emerging Northumberland Local Plan and would benefit from specific designation through the Neighbourhood Plan as an important area of recreational space, primarily for young people in the local community.