



How to defend a public green space

Introduction

For years, community groups have been campaigning to save valued parks and other types of public green spaces from development. This document aims to use the experience of the groups that have gone before to provide advice for those who find themselves faced with the possibility of losing a much loved green space and wish to try and protect it.

1. Gather information

To successfully defend a public green space you need to start by gathering good quality, factual, background information that supports your case and you also need to make sure you present it simply, clearly and objectively.

You'll need information about your green space and how it is used. You'll also need information on planning policy in Leeds and how it affects your green space.

Information about your site

You will always need objective evidence to make your case. Be clear within your own group why you want to save it.

Take a step back and be rational, aim to present your case and viewpoint with evidence demonstrating negative consequences should the green space be lost. Be careful not to come across as a NIMBY ('Not In My Back Yard') as this may harm your case.

Information you will need:

- Who owns the land? – you may need to delve into the records to determine ownership and its legal status (try the Land Registry website www.landregistry-titledeeds.co.uk). Going forward, you will need to work with the owner(s).

- The circumstances of selling/developing (useful background information)
- History of the site
- Who uses the site now and for what – speak to local people who use the space. Aim to get actual numbers, times of days etc and build a profile of use. We recommend an on-site survey to gather this information.
- Potential future use of the site (e.g. for healthy activities such as walking or for local community events) – good to present positive alternatives that benefit your community.
- Does the site have any wildlife value? If it has protected species on it, this can be used as a reason to protect the site. Check it at [www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Leeds BAP combined.pdf](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Leeds%20BAP%20combined.pdf)
- How does the site connect to other locations? - the site might be an essential green corridor for people or wildlife to get around the city
- For evidence of benefits of green space –the following documents may be useful:
 - Heritage Lottery Fund’s ‘State of Public Parks’ at www.hlf.org.uk/stateofUKParks
 - Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy at [www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/chapter4 PPG17 Parks and Gardens.pdf](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/chapter4%20PPG17%20Parks%20and%20Gardens.pdf)
 - Urban Pollinators’ document ‘Grey Places Need Green Spaces’, which makes the case for investment in green space. Go to www.UrbanPollinators.co.uk click on ‘our writing & research section’ then the above-named pdf document.
 - Leeds City Council’s, Open Space Sport and Recreation Assessment www.leeds.gov.uk/council/Pages/Leeds-Open-Space-Sport-and-Recreation-Assessment.aspx

A Freedom of Information Request can be a powerful tool in discovering decisions taken with regard to legal processes.

Planning and development information

Policies

For this, you need to identify any planning policy that is relevant to your site. If you know that a planning application has been submitted, you can check its progress at <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/council/pages/public-access.aspx> If you know the application code, enter it into the ‘Search Planning Applications’ box, omitting the letters. There will be a deadline for comments/objections to be made.

Plans for Leeds

The Government has given Local Authorities the responsibility for ensuring new development embodies the principles of sustainable development. Achieving this is about striking a balance between the social, economic and environmental goals of a *community* – this last point being important. Leeds’ Local Plan (also known as the Core Strategy) can be found at www.leeds.gov.uk/yourcity

National Planning Policy Framework

Familiarise yourselves with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf It's based around achieving 'sustainable development'. For explanations of the terms used, read the Ministerial Forward and pages 2-5. Referring to greenspace, helpful sections are Sections 8, 9, 10 and 11.

The Framework clearly states that (house) building should be on Brownfield land first, (ie land previously built upon for housing, factories, mills etc) and land designated as green belt should only be built on 'in exceptional circumstances' - sadly those are not defined but case law is gathering, as challenges where house building is seen as the norm and not an exceptional circumstance. (See example in York (March 2015) at www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1339035)

Reasons for Green Belt are:

1. To check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
2. To prevent neighbouring towns or settlements from merging into one another
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
5. To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

2. Options for action

Consultation

It is important you make yourselves aware of any planning consultations which may affect your site and respond to them as appropriate within the given timescales. You can find out about this via your local Councillors, your Neighbourhood Forum, Parish/Town Council, notices in your local library and/or local press, as well as from neighbours!

Contact local decision makers

- Write emails/letters to local Councillors plus those Councillors responsible for green space, health & wellbeing, Children's Services, the Leader of the Council and encourage others to do the same.
- Keep your MP up to date and ask for his/her help when appropriate.

Campaign

If you don't think that the above actions will work on their own, you may decide to set up a campaign with other interested people to draw attention to your local issue(s)

Profile is essential for a successful campaign:

- Use the internet and social media to get your message 'out there'
- Send out press releases
- Marches/protest meetings are popular with local newspapers, especially with photos. Ensure you let them know date, time, place, reason
- Print banners, T-shirts, posters, badges
- Enlist a celebrity supporter

Petitions are also a very useful tool – online (there are various online petition platforms, for example change.org) and on paper. Ensure your questions are not biased towards the answer YOU want but objectively put so they are taken seriously by the decision-takers.

A few words of caution!

- Ensure your facts are correct – have a care to the laws of libel and slander
- If marching or holding an outdoor public meeting, inform local police, don't trespass or harass anyone.
- Beware of your campaign, whether online, or a protest in person, getting 'out of hand' with people's enthusiasm and/or frustration taking over. This can be counter-productive, try to keep things rational at all times.
- Keep focussed on challenging the 'process' rather than any individual people involved. You may need their co-operation later!

3. Other options

If you are willing and able to manage the land yourselves:

Community right to bid

You could consider registering the land as an 'asset of community value', which needs the support of 21 people. It is a designation whereby, if the land were to come up for sale, the person/group representing the community will be advised early, at which time the group has the 'Right to Bid', and can state that they'd like to buy the land for a community use. The designation gives you 6 months in which to raise the money, although there is no guarantee that your group would be the preferred bidder. More information at: www.leeds.gov.uk/residents/Pages/Community-Right-to-Bid.aspx

Asset transfer

If the site is owned by Leeds City Council and your group is willing, for community benefit, to manage it on a long lease with a viable business plan, an 'asset transfer' may be possible. This needs careful consideration, as parks/green spaces rarely generate enough income to cover the expenditure needed for maintenance. Make an initial enquiry via www.leeds.gov.uk/council/Pages/Planning.aspx

Fields in Trust

If your site is a recognised field, you could consider registering it as a 'Field in Trust'. Fields in Trust (formerly the National Playing Fields Association) offers legal protection to a site via charitable status. www.fit-fields-toolkit.org

If development is inevitable

If development is inevitable, meet with the developers and/or their consultants early in the process, - work with them to help shape it according to the needs of your community. This should be in conjunction with your Parish Council, Town Council or Neighbourhood Forum

4. Lastly

Be prepared to do quite a lot of work to research and formulate your case

Be prepared for the process to take a while

Be persistent, don't give up too easily

5. Useful contacts

Use your local Councillors – they can find which officers are responsible for which area and can sometimes get answers easier than a *Friends of* or community group. Find your local councillor here:

<http://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1&lccnavid=100004|200033|358>

Your local MP – has access to senior Council officers/Councillors. Also, will network widely and may have useful contacts, find your local MP here: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Forum – there may be other groups who have been through a similar process and are willing to share their experiences, visit www.leedsparksforum.org or email LPGSF@leeds.gov.uk .

6. Further information

The Open Spaces Society have a guide to running a campaign to save open space. www.oss.org.uk

An organisation called **Green Space** (which no longer exists unfortunately) produced a document 'Saving Open Space' which is available at the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum website at www.leedsparksforum.org

North West Parks Friends Forum has a Toolkit with aspects of the whole issue, including a summary of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) www.NWtoolkit.docx

Campaign for the Protection Rural England has advice, information and local contacts.
www.cpre.org.uk