

9 - Natural and Rural Environment

Respect and appreciate our countryside

Introduction

9.1 Our Neighbourhood Plan policies are intended to confirm our intention to safeguard the environmentally sensitive parts of the parish area by recognising those areas that need to be protected and where possible enhanced. Whilst much of the Neighbourhood Plan is about the urban area, the countryside is a precious resource that cannot be disregarded.

Aims and Objectives

9.2 The following aims and objectives relating to the local countryside, its ecology and habitats, have emerged following a programme of community consultation. They have been used to help formulate the neighbourhood plan policies and inform a programme of other community actions.

Natural and Rural Environment	
Planning Aims	Planning Objectives
Protect and enhance the natural environment and its bio-diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect natural hedging and wildlife • Utilise public rights of way and local green spaces as biodiversity corridors
Respect, increase and protect public rights of way and access to the countryside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 'Local Green Space' designation to protect areas of value to the community • Improve and maintain footpaths and bridleways
Enable new development where it assists the viability of farming and rural economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow conversion of farm buildings to increase farm viability



Protecting and Enhancing Local Wildlife

9.3 We respect the local natural environment and its biodiversity. Whilst there are no sites within the parish area that have protection through a statutory designation, there are many

areas which are important to local biodiversity. 94% of respondents to the Community Survey 2014 agreed we need to protect the countryside around us. Most of the locally important sites have been identified and delineated by the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre on behalf of Cullompton Town Council (see map 3).

9.4 The town of Cullompton is growing. This makes the countryside and those remaining areas of natural environment even more special. We want to be assured that these sensitive sites will be protected and enhanced if possible. The areas identified on map 3 are those regarded as sensitive and special, based on 2014 survey records. We are determined to protect the local habitats they provide and the species they host. We hope to use the development process not only to maintain but also to help increase local biodiversity. We are also reminded by the Environment Agency of the "importance of natural networks in managing water such as water quality and flood risk". The flood plain for instance coincides with several unconfirmed wildlife sites (see map 3).

9.5 The NPPF (para 170) says "planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: protecting and enhancing valued landscapes,

sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.....minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures”.

9.6 Local Plan Policies S1 and S9 set out the district policy to minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity; and Local Plan Policy DM28 sets the method by which the local planning authority will assess the significance

of the impact of any development. Policy EN01 provides support to these Local Plan policies, as they seek to protect those sites within the parish area identified as being of ecological or geological importance. We expect major development proposals to be supported by sufficient information for the impact of the proposals on the local natural environment and its inhabitants to be fully assessed and have a significant effect on the decisions taken related to that development proposal.

Policy EN01 Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Where appropriate, development proposals will be expected to protect sites of ecological and/or geological importance and protect and enhance local biodiversity and wildlife to include:

- i. the safeguarding or protection of designated sites, protected species, priority species and habitats, ancient or species rich hedgerows, grasslands and woodlands;
- ii. the provision of appropriate buffer zones around designated sites or features and/or the implementation of appropriate mitigation and compensation measures where appropriate (in accordance with Local Plan Policy S9 clause (f));
- iii. the safeguarding and preservation of ecologically sensitive areas and ecological corridors;
- iv. the safeguarding of important geological sites;
- v. the protection of trees and tree groups of arboricultural or amenity value;
- vi. the appropriate planting of new native trees and hedges;
- vii. biodiversity enhancements incorporated into the development wherever possible; and
- viii. the provision of appropriate measures to avoid and reduce potential recreational impacts to ensure there is no adverse effect on the integrity of European Sites.



Improving the Public Rights of Way Network

9.7 Cullompton has some beautiful countryside, rolling hills, river and streams and an identified list of local walks. We want to ensure that the existing walking and horse riding routes in the parish area remain fit for purpose. We want to increase the appeal of walking to the local population. We feel that this can be done in part by improving access to the countryside and promoting circular walking trails around the area.

9.8 Many rights of way and bridleways are “valuable for biodiversity by providing green corridors and linear grassland and hedgerow habitats” .We support improvements and extensions to the footpath network in the countryside as long as any developments to achieve this include measures to protect local flora and fauna and serve to encourage responsible access and enjoyment of the countryside.

9.9 The NPPF (para. 98) states that “planning policies should protect and enhance public

rights of way and access". Local Plan Policy S1 recognises the value of public rights of way and Local Plan Policy DM26 seeks to incorporate existing public rights of way in major development areas.

9.10 Local Plan Policy CU3 protects existing public rights of way (for the North West Cullompton development). Policy EN02 supports extensions and improvements to the network of public rights of way and bridleways across the whole parish area and endeavours to ensure that their value as biodiversity corridors is fully recognised, protected and, if possible, enhanced by any development work. In the interests of improving accessibility we are supportive of the removal of barriers (such as stiles and gates), wherever it is appropriate to do so. Map 5 shows the present network (2015) of public rights of way and bridleways in the parish area.

Policy EN02 Improving the Public Rights of Way Network

Measures to improve and extend the existing network of public rights of way and bridleways are supported so long as their value as biodiversity corridors is recognised, protected and efforts are made to enhance biodiversity as part of the 'development' work wherever appropriate.

Local Green Space

9.11 A recent audit and assessment of local play areas and parks has been carried out on behalf of the Town Council. It looked at all local play areas and 'pocket parks' and took a view as to whether they were fit for purpose, capable of being maintained properly and worthy of protection. The conclusions from this assessment are reflected in the list of local green spaces in Policy EN03. The Local Plan through its policy DM24 recognises the value of local green space and acknowledges that "sites which are particularly important to local communities may be designated as Local Green Space, through the preparation of local or neighbourhood plans".

9.12 We are pleased to recognise that the town area has several small green areas that contribute significantly to the appearance and character of the local area and provide for a range of informal community leisure activities of the local population, not least providing

somewhere safe for young children to play, as many of them do. Cullompton Town Council will be exploring how to reinforce their value as part of a network of green infrastructure throughout the town. As Natural England has reminded us, "green infrastructure can perform a range of functions including improved flood risk management, provision of accessible green space, climate change adaptation and biodiversity enhancement"¹.

9.13 The areas identified in Policy EN03 meet the criteria of the NPPF (para. 100) which enables them to be designated as 'local green space' i.e.:

- where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

The NPPF further advises that local policy for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with policy for Green Belts.

9.14 A thorough assessment of potential sites was carried out by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to assess whether the 'candidate' sites met the NPPF criteria, including being demonstrably special to the local community. Consistent with the approach of Local Plan policy DM24, those 'green' sites that are valued primarily for their sport and recreational purposes, are identified on map 8 and subject to a separate Policy WL01. The sites that are subject to Policy EN03 are designated as Local Green Space because they are highly valued green areas that contribute significantly to the amenity of their neighbourhood, and the community wants to ensure they continue to do so for a very long time. A Site Assessment Report² presents our site by site analysis and conclusions.

¹ Reg. 14 Consultation response, Natural England, 8th Nov 2017

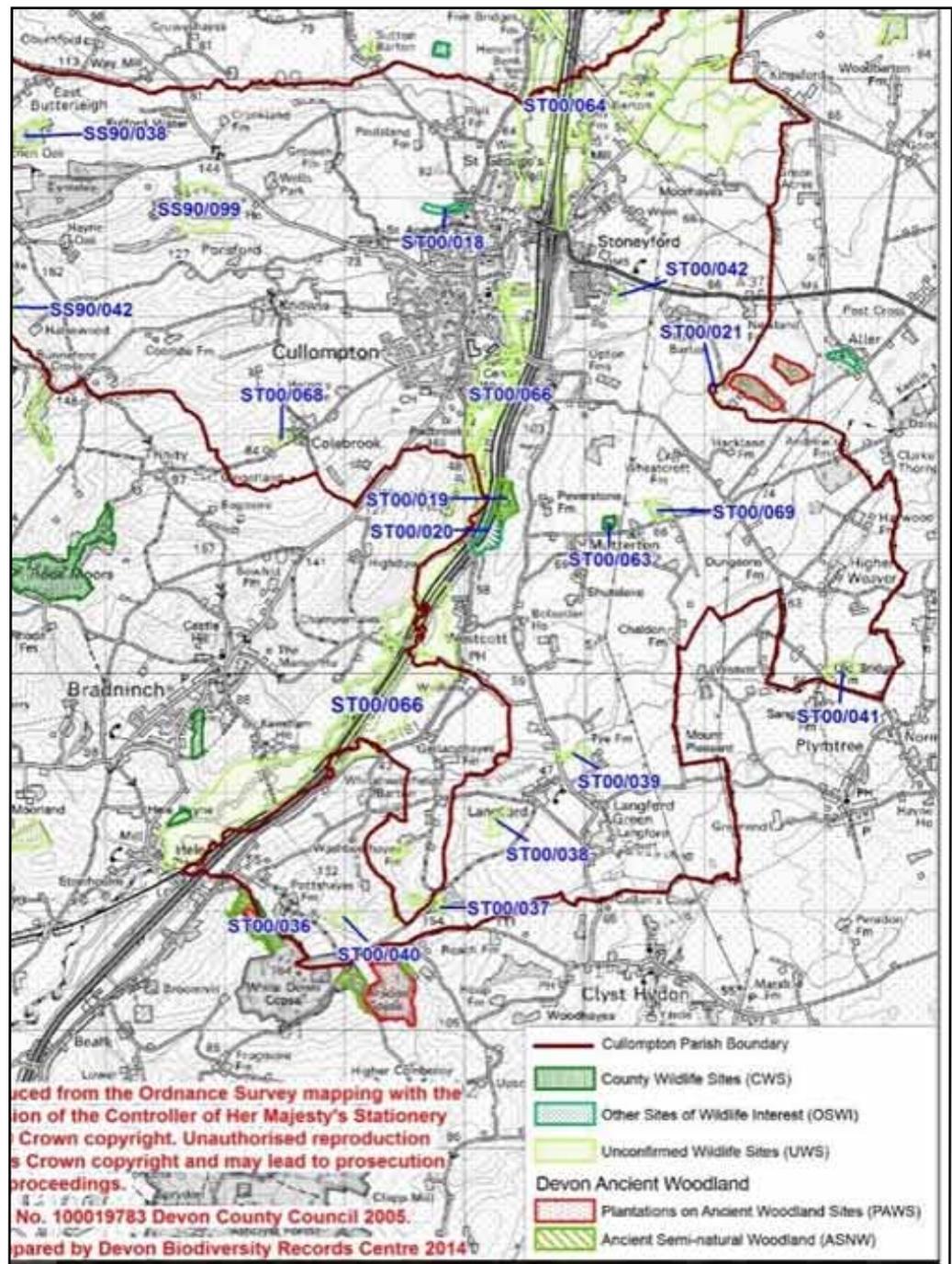
² <http://www.cullomptonneighbourhoodplan.co.uk/CullINP%20LGS%20Assessment%20Report%20Nov17.pdf>

Policy EN03 Local Green Space

The areas (listed on page 44 and identified on map 4) are designated as 'Local Green Spaces' and protected from development under Local Plan Policy DM24. Development proposals on designated Local Green Spaces will be supported only where such development demonstrably enhances the recreational use or amenity value of the green space.



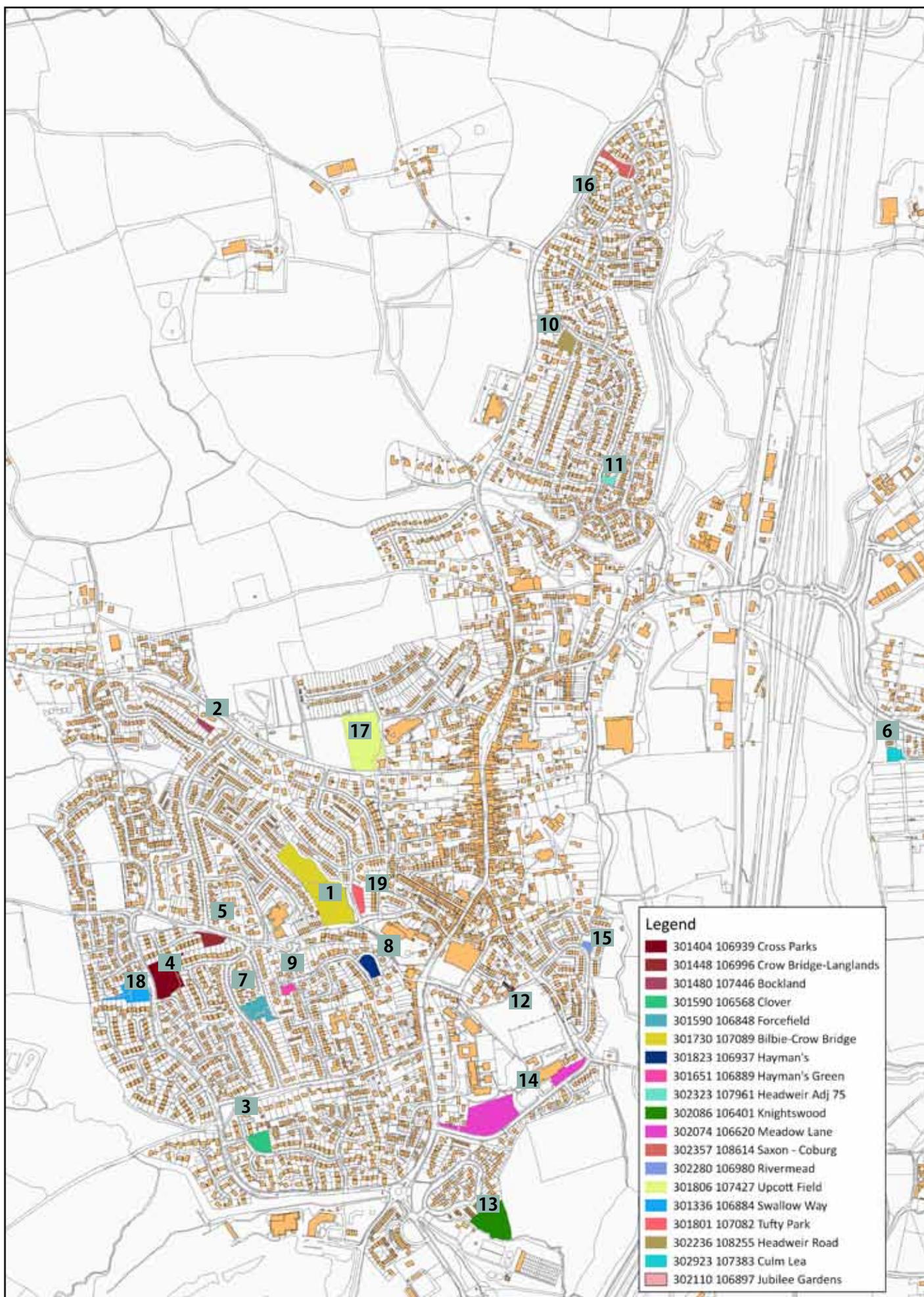
Map 3: Areas of Local Ecological Significance referred to in Policy EN01



9.15 The sites we consider 'qualify' as local green space and to which **Policy EN03** should apply are (see Map 4):

		Ownership	Use	Area (m²)	Remarks
1	Bilbie Close	MDDC	Public Open Space (POS)	10,200	A stretch of grass that provides for a range of informal leisure activities. It is bordered on two sides by a local brook.
2	Bockland Close	MDDC	Play Area	450	A play area at the rear of dwellings that provides a safe play space for local children. It has a range of play equipment with safety surfaces.
3	Clover Drive	MDDC	POS/Play Area	1,500	A triangular piece of grass, fringed with mature trees that contains a small children's play area, with a modern multi-play installation and a safety surface.
4	Cross Parks	MDDC	POS/Play Area	4,000	
5	Crow Bridge	MDDC	POS	1,100	A stretch of grass that provides for a range of informal leisure activities. It is bordered on two sides by a local brook.
6	Culm Lea	CTC (Leased)	Play Area	860	At the end of cul-de-sac, alongside a footpath that leads to an informal walkway along the River Culm, is a fenced local children's play area with some basic play equipment.
7	Forcefield Road	MDDC	POS	2,000	An amenity space with mature trees that provides a car-free pedestrian route through the estate.
8	Hayman's Close	MDDC	Play Area	1,200	A modern railing-enclosed play area in the middle of this modern housing estate. It offers a range of play opportunities for young children. As well as a multi-play installation for the younger children, with safety surface, there is a flat piece of grass that allows for a range of informal activities.
9	Hayman's Green	MDDC	POS	500	Also a modern railing-enclosed play area in the middle of this modern housing estate. It offers a range of play opportunities for young children. As well as a multi-play installation for the younger children, with safety surface, there is a kick-about area for the slightly older children of the locale.
10	Head Weir Road	CTC (Leased)	Play Area	1,250	A fenced grass area with a large specimen oak tree. It has a children's play area with modern but traditional play equipment i.e. swings, slide and see-saw, all on safety surfaces.
11	Headweir Road (adj 75)	MDDC	POS	450	A green play and amenity space that includes a pedestrian link to Fairfax Road
12	Jubilee Gardens	MDDC	POS	1,100	Small area of public open space.
13	Knightswood	MDDC	Play Area	4,600	A small park off Knightswood that provides a safe and sheltered play area away from the roads. It offers several pieces of play equipment and space to run around.
14	Meadow Lane	MDDC	POS/Sport	21,200	An expanse of amenity grass that plays host to the town's skate-park.
15	Rivermead	MDDC	Play Area	340	A small triangular grassed area with three pieces of junior play equipment, with safety surfaces, and a bench serving the families of the local area.
16	Saxon Way	MDDC	POS/Play Area	1,300	At the junction of these two roads is an amenity area containing a fenced, modern, play area for young children serving the families of the local area.
17	Upcott Field	CTC (sole Trustee)	POS/Play Area	8,000	The area of the Roman forts on St Andrews Hill, a scheduled ancient monument, is an important open green space in terms of its historic significance, that will impact positively on the north/north-west town expansion. Its designation was advocated by the Historic Environment Team at Devon County Council. As the planned development in North West Cullompton progresses it will surround the site. Because of its proximity to the new community it is designated as a local green space.
18	Swallow Way	MDDC	POS	2,600	A green corridor crosses Swallow Way providing a well wooded pedestrian routeway across the estate leading westward into the countryside. At the eastern end with a footpath entrance off Manning Avenue is a fenced children's play area with a range of play equipment.
19	Tufty Park	CTC (Leased)	Play Area	1,000	A small, gated, play area on Shortlands Road with grass and a range of play equipment for young children, with safety surfaces.

Map 4: Designated Green Space referred to in Policy EN03



Map 5: Public Rights of Way and Bridleways referred to in Policy EN02

