

Open Space Evidence Report

for Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan



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Introduction

Open Spaces are spaces of value for sport, recreation and visual amenity. They include sports pitches, open areas within development, linear corridors and country parks and are not just restricted to publicly accessible land. They can include areas of woodland and scrubland as well as formal parks and gardens and allotments. They do not include agricultural land, land used for horse grazing or private gardens.

Open spaces are an important part of the landscape, local character and the setting of built development. They can provide health, well-being and social benefits acting as locations for community and social events. Open spaces can contribute to the reduction in atmospheric carbon dioxide and improved air quality particularly in areas including trees, woodland and hedges.

There are standard national typologies for open space in rural areas:

- Cemeteries and Churchyards
- Amenity Greenspace
- Natural and Semi-Natural
- Land Associated with Outdoor Sports Facilities
- Young People and Children
- Allotments and Community Gardens
- Parks and Gardens

Overview

Fawkham Parish has one churchyard at St.Mary's church.

There are several areas of amenity green space: the village green, Baldwin's Green, land at Small Grains, Rogers Wood triangle, and the wide grass verge/bank with a footway from Michaels Lane to the village school.

The parish contains many areas of natural and semi-natural open space: over 22% of the area is covered by woodland, nearly 10% is covered by Local Wildlife Sites designations and there are 13 areas with UK BAP priority habitat status.

There is land associated with outdoor sports facilities: football pitches at Corinthians Sports Club; Corinthian (Fawkham Valley) Golf Course and Redlibbets Golf Course (part of which is in the Parish); sports fields at Fawkham Primary School and Steephill Independent School.

Fawkham Parish contains no open spaces for young people and children, or allotments and community gardens, or parks and gardens.

Improvements could be made to some areas, mostly by providing interpretation boards. One amenity green space, Small Grains, has high potential for improvements including parking area improvement, improved grass cutting regime, litter bin and other facilities for community use.

Open Spaces Audit

The Sevenoaks District Council Open Space Study, June 2018 is a District-wide study of open spaces and does not provide a comprehensive audit of all the open spaces within Fawkham Parish. For this reason, a comprehensive audit of the open spaces within the Parish was

undertaken by a Neighbourhood Plan working group during spring - summer 2022. It should be noted that SDC's study included one site (1036 Downs Valley) which is partly within Fawkhams Parish, although it is an agricultural field and has therefore been excluded from this report.

Methodology

The Open Spaces Audit Matrix used by SDC in their Open Spaces Study was adopted for this audit. This assesses both site quality and site access, using a number of measures for each. Within each measure, a number of criteria is taken into consideration in awarding a total score out of 5. The score for each measure is then weighted to produce a final total score.

An additional local criterion was included within the Neighbourhood Plan audit: valued by the community. This takes into account the community's usage of the open space; whether it was identified as within or providing a "valued view" and/or a place people feel "away from it all" in the "peace and quiet" in the Parish Countryside Survey, 2021; and/or whether it is included within an Important Public View identified by the Neighbourhood Plan. This criterion is particularly important when considering Open Spaces for a Neighbourhood Plan, as it reflects the quality for those living within the Plan area. In contrast, some of the criteria relating to access and transport are less relevant at the Neighbourhood Plan level, as those living in the Plan area are likely to walk to an open space using the network of Public Right of Ways.

The potential for improvement includes specific ideas for projects which could improve a site.

As with the SDC Open Space Study, some of the natural and semi-natural open spaces within the Parish are privately owned, with no PROWs or informal paths or public access. It is however important to note that: *inaccessible open spaces can nonetheless contribute to the appearance, environmental quality and amenity of an area and contribute to biodiversity.¹ And even without public access, people enjoy having open space near to them to provide an outlook... or as a positive element in the landscape².*

All areas were assessed to establish whether access is possible and/or whether the open space can be seen directly from publicly accessible land, for example a PROW or highway running beside it. Full audits with site visits were undertaken for open spaces with public access and those areas directly visible from publicly accessible land. Those areas that are only visible within the landscape were audited using aerial photography.³

The same team of two people conducted each site visit and scored the measures to ensure consistency of approach. The majority of site visits were undertaken in spring, in accordance with best practice, and the remainder in summer.

PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, and its companion guide, were considered before the audit was undertaken, including the guiding principles for local assessments and the primary purposes of the various typologies of open space (para 2.6). The definitions of Green Flag assessment criteria in common with SDC's criteria were also considered.

The consideration of the criteria within each measure took into account the appropriateness for the type and size of each open space, i.e. what could reasonably be expected.

"Sense of Place" was considered with the Welcome measure.

¹ Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17, para 2.4

² PPG 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, annex to part 3

³ Audits of provision should encompass: All existing open spaces and sport and recreation facilities within the local authority's area, irrespective of ownership and the extent of public access. The logic for this is that all forms of provision can contribute to meeting local needs, although to avoid excessive use of resources some councils have ignored open spaces or facilities below an agreed minimum size. Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17 para 5.1

Each of the typologies found in Fawkham Parish is summarised below; Appendix 1 tabulates summarised details, Appendix 2 contains site maps, and each audit assessment can be found in Appendix 3.

Cemeteries and Churchyards

The primary purposes of this typology of open space are quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity⁴.

St. Mary's is a Grade 1 listed Norman church within the Baldwins Green Conservation Area and its churchyard is an open space greatly valued by the local community and an important part of the local landscape.

The churchyard is well maintained, including by a community payback team. Some areas are left to grow "wild" for biodiversity purposes. The adjoining meadow and car park mean the space is well-visited. It was identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where the local community have a feeling of "being away from it all" in "peace and quiet".

Photograph shows part of the churchyard, March 2022



⁴ Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17, para 2.6

Amenity Greenspace

The primary purposes of this typology of open space are to provide opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or to enhance the appearance of a residential area.⁵

The Parish has five areas of amenity greenspace, each of which is briefly described below.

- **Village Green** - is situated at Fawkham Green, besides the village inn, and is around 0.08 hectares in size. It includes the Parish war memorial, and an annual service of remembrance is held on the green each November. There are three oak trees and a large conifer tree, which is lit at Christmas. The green includes a sign post with the Parish logo, which was designed to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee. There are three benches, a picnic table and a litter bin is also provided. The village green is owned and maintained by the Parish Council.

Photographs below show the village green (left) during the Christmas tree lights switch on event and (right) the War Memorial decorated with poppies for the Parish Remembrance Service, both November 2021.



- **Baldwins Green** - registered Common land, now a small grass triangle at the junction of Valley Road and Castle Hill, approximately 40m² in size. It is within a Conservation Area, after which it is named. It includes one of the two Parish sign posts. The community and Parish Council worked together to remove much of the grass and sow a native wildflower mix in the autumn of 2021 to reflect the rural nature of the Parish and increase biodiversity; spring bulbs have also been planted in recent years.

Photograph below shows Baldwins Green with wildflowers in bloom, summer 2022.



⁵Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17, para 2.6

- **Small Grains** - is situated at Fawkham Green and is an area of grassed amenity green space 0.2 hectares in size owned by Sevenoaks District Council, adjacent to the 1950s housing development. It is bisected by the road Small Grains and adjoins Fawkham Green Road. The space is primarily used by the houses in Small Grains, Fairview Cottages and other houses in the Fawkham Green area for general recreation, children's bicycle riding and play. It is also used for Parish-wide community events such as the Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1977 and those of the Platinum Jubilee in 2022. However, if the grass were cut more frequently and the cuttings removed, local residents say it would be used more.⁶

The road called Small Grains does not extend to the front of all 10 houses, only to the front of numbers 4 to 7. An informal parking area has been created for numbers 8-10, whereas numbers 1-3 are required to drive across part of the grass amenity area and park upon it. This has created deep ruts to the surface and an unsightly appearance to that part of the space. Provision of a suitably surfaced, dedicated car parking area for numbers 1-3 Small Grains would protect the rest of the amenity green space from being driven over and parked on. This has been requested by residents⁷, and use of Parish CIL money to help provide it will be explored, subject to consent from SDC as the landowner. Discussions have been ongoing with SDC since 2021 in this regard. The current informal parking area and further area considered to be required for car parking are excluded from the Open Space.

Photograph below shows Small Grains in use during the Platinum Jubilee, June 2022



- **Grass verge/bank in Valley Road** with a "tarmac" footway - this runs from Michaels Lane to the village school for c0.5miles. It is the only footway in the Parish and is owned and managed by KCC. It varies in width, with some grassed areas having regular cuts to maintain sight lines and other areas receiving less regular conservation cuts.

Photographs below show the verge, September 2022



⁶ Feedback from local residents at the Neighbourhood Plan event "Small Grains Picnic", August 2021.

⁷ ibid

Each of the above Open Spaces has a high value to the local community.

- **Rogers Wood triangle** - this is a small area of 30m² at the junction Rogers Wood Lane and Gallows Wood. It is owned by KCC and managed by FPC, with wildflower seeds planted.

Photograph below shows Rogers Wood triangle with wildflowers in bloom, June 2021



Natural and Semi-Natural

The primary purposes of this typology of open space are wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.⁸

Fawkham Parish contains many areas of natural and semi-natural open space: over 22% of the area is covered by woodland, nearly 10% is covered by Local Wildlife Sites designations and there are 13 areas with UK BAP priority habitat status. These type of open spaces form valued characteristics of the local landscape, as described in the the Fawkham Parish Landscape Character Assessment, 2022.

Residents highly value these open spaces, as demonstrated in the Village Survey, 2019, in which the countryside and natural surroundings were the most frequently named benefits of living in Fawkham Parish.

Many of these open spaces have biodiversity value and hence also appear in the Biodiversity evidence.

Summarised below are those areas of open space which have open access or PROWs through them:

- **Church Meadow (part 1)** - this land is part of Baldwin's Green Conservation Area and is owned by the Diocese of Rochester. It is a grass area edged by mature native hedgerows, freely available for public use, with a car park and is the site of the the annual church fete. It was identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where the local community has a feeling of "being away from it all" in "peace and quiet".

Photograph shows Churchyard Meadow (part 1) in use during a Family Fun Day, August 2022



- **Church Meadow (part 2)** - this is contiguous with the Meadow above although outside the Conservation Area. The majority is privately owned with a small area of unregistered land. It is a grass area with some wildflowers, edged by hedgerows and freely available for public use. It was identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where the local community has a feeling of "being away from it all" in "peace and quiet".

⁸ Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17, para 2.6

Photograph shows Churchyard Meadow (part 2), March 2022



- **Churchdown Wood** - a Local Wildlife Site, with three PROWs and some informal paths, extending to around 12 hectares. Access possible via PROW from church car park. This wood was identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where Parishioners have a feeling of “being away from it all” in “peace and quiet” and its edges are the location of several valued viewpoints. See the Biodiversity Natural Assets Report and Views Assessments for further information.

Photograph shows Churchdown Wood, May 2021



- **Saxten and Cages Wood** - these woods cover nearly 23 hectares and are a Local Wildlife Site and managed by the Woodland Trust. In 1993, Parishioners raised substantial funds to help the Woodland Trust acquire the site when it was put up for sale, such was its value to the local community. It was identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where Parishioners have a feeling of “being away from it all” in “peace and quiet”. See the Biodiversity Natural Assets Report for further information.

Photograph below shows one entrance to Saxten and Cages Wood, March 2022



- **Wilmary Copse** - this ancient woodland is a Local Wildlife Site and managed by the Woodland Trust. It was identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where Parishioners have a feeling of “being away from it all” in “peace and quiet”. It forms part of the valued view FV12 and a valued viewpoint, FV14, is from its eastern edge. It contains a network of paths and is well used by local residents. See the Biodiversity Natural Assets Report for further information.

Photographs below show Wilmary Copse, May 2022, and an entrance, March 2022



- **Loaves Wood** - this ancient woodland is privately owned and has two PROWs through it. It was identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where Parishioners have a feeling of “being away from it all” in “peace and quiet”, and a valued viewpoint, FV12, is from its western edge.

Photograph below shows Loaves Wood, August 2022



- **Fawkham Valley Woods** - woodlands with BAP priority habitat status, identified in the Countryside Survey 2021 as a place where Parishioners have a feeling of “being away from it all” in “peace and quiet” and it features in valued view FV4.

Photograph below shows Fawkham Valley Woods, July 2022



All the above open spaces are valued by the local community.

- **Cross House woodland** - larch plantation forming part of the grounds of a listed building.

Fawkham Primary School has an area of natural woodland used as a forest school; Steephill Independent School has an area of orchard and woodland which is used for free-play and as a forest school.

Photographs below show Fawkham Primary Forest School: (left) bird hide and (right) ancient yew tree, July 2022



There are further areas of natural and semi-natural open space within the Parish. Those with visibility from the public highway or a PROW are listed below:

- Rogers Wood
- Scudders Shaw *
- Woodland East of Salts Farm *
- Pennis Wood *
- Choaks Wood *
- Horton Wood (part of) *
- Billet Wood (part of)
- Gallows Wood
- Woodland besides Three Gates Road
- Hatchfield Wood *
- Parkfield Wood *
- Woodland at Hill Barn Farm *
- Church Downs grassland *
- Brands Hatch grassland

Those listed below are only visible as part of the landscape, and have no public access are:

- Parefield Wood *
- Grove Wood *
- Hopkins Spring Wood *
- Shortledge Wood *

* Valued by the local community

Land Associated with Outdoor Sports Facilities

The primary purposes of this typology of open space are participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports⁹. Golf courses are also included in this typology. SDC commissioned an assessment of golf courses as part of their Open Space Study 2018¹⁰. This included:

- **Corinthian Golf Club aka Fawkham Valley Golf Club**, located at Corinthian Sport Club, DA3 8LY. Although described in SDC's report as two separate clubs, it is one club with 9 holes (18 tees). Access is via membership predominately, with some pay and play. It is crossed by a PROW and has ornamental tree planting. The Fawkham Parish Landscape Character Assessment says "The combination of trees and open areas within the golf courses create a distinctive small-scale pattern to the landscape, with strong variety of colour and texture" and that "the rural recreational character retains traces of its earlier agricultural land uses eg mature trees along former hedge lines, mature hedges and bluebells in former wooded areas". SDC's quality audit score is "excellent".



Photograph above shows part of Corinthian golf course

- **Redlibbets Golf Club**, TN15 7HT, which is partly within Fawkham Parish. A commercially-managed 18 hole course, built in the 1990s¹¹. Access is via membership predominately, with some pay and play. The course has a parkland form with many mature trees, and is crossed by a number of PROWs. The Fawkham Parish Landscape Character Assessment says "The combination of trees and open areas within the golf courses create a distinctive small-scale pattern to the landscape, with strong variety of colour and texture" and that "the rural recreational character retains traces of its earlier agricultural land uses eg mature trees along former hedge lines, mature hedges and bluebells in former wooded areas". SDC's quality audit score is "good", and it is noted that the club has undertaken work to the course since the score was assessed. *Photograph below shows part of Redlibbets golf course*



⁹ Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17, para 2.6

¹⁰ https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1531/os002_sevenoaks_open_space_study_june_2018, table 8.1

¹¹ <https://www.redlibbets.co.uk/golf/the-course/>

Sevenoaks District Playing Pitch Study, 2018¹², assesses other types of land associated with outdoor sports facilities. It contains the following open spaces with Fawkham Parish:

- **Corinthian Sports Club:** *“A very impressive large site, hosting good football provision throughout. The pitches are mainly used by the local team - who receive a discounted rate when hiring the facilities - with their own team utilising the multiple pitches for free. Used sometimes by the Kent FA and Gillingham Ladies team also. The club would like to add drainage across the site, as sometimes have issues, and think overall it would improve the pitches quality in the long run. They would also like to improve the floodlights on the 1st team pitch. During consultation, the problem of being charged business rates was causing huge financial strain on the club. The AGP provision includes 1 outdoor and 1 indoor 3G AGP, which both are of good quality. The changing room facilities for the pitches are in need of improvement”*¹³. The scores for the pitches are assessed at 100%/94.29% and both are rated “good”.

Photographs below show the football pitches at Corinthian Sports Club



- **Fawkham Primary School:** 7 v 7 mini-football pitch abutting the Primary School, which is privately owned. Score of 65.71%, rating standard.
- **Steephill Independent School:** 7 v 7 mini-football pitch, privately owned and not available for community use. Score of 61.43%, rating standard.

SDC's assessments are relied upon for the purposes of this report.

**Fawkham Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
January 2023**

¹² https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1533/os004_playing_pitch_strategy_-_main_report_april_2018

¹³ https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1533/os004_playing_pitch_strategy_-_main_report_april_2018

Appendix 1 - Summary of Open Spaces by type

Provided as a separate document

Appendix 2 - Maps of each Open Space

Provided as a separate document

Appendix 3 - Open Space Audits

Provided as a separate document