

# **Important Open Areas Keynote**



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## 1. Important Open Areas (IOAs) Background

### Important Open Areas (IOAs), Background

**1.1** With some clear exceptions, the Forest of Dean Development Plan expects most development to be directed to the villages and towns that have settlement boundaries, and accordingly makes provision to accommodate an appropriate level of change mainly within these settlements. It allocates land and also provides guiding policies that suggest that certain types of development in being considered positively will also be expected to take place mainly or exclusively within the settlement boundaries. The plan's allocations and the settlement boundaries themselves are one side of the coin in the process of guiding development within settlements. The other is the identification, in settlements where there is a general expectation of change (ie those that have defined boundaries), of areas that will need to be protected. These include Listed buildings, Ancient Monuments and certain functional spaces, but also a number of so called important Open Areas. These are individually identified, justified and are recorded on the proposals map.

**1.2** The Core Strategy protects the landscape and encourages good design. It is the strategic but local (ie District based) part of the Local Plan. Two policies are especially important in this respect, CSP 1 and CSP 9. Both deal with protective designations which must be respected in both plan making and in development management. There is no differentiation between areas that are protected that are within settlements and those that are in the open countryside. Development is naturally expected to take place in appropriate locations in both (although most will clearly be directed to the settlements). Where there are protected sites or landscapes the degree of protection will be similar whether they lie in or outside defined settlements. In the open countryside, the dominant characteristics come from the landscape and inside settlements by the morphology (mainly built structures) of the settlement concerned. Settlement character is a complex issue but is made up of the buildings, open areas and other features, together with materials, sounds and the overall impression of a place.

**1.3** The plan uses defined settlement boundaries attached to about 54 of the largest built up areas in the district. These are identified in the settlement hierarchy as those villages and towns where additional development will be expected to take place, in accordance with their form and function. The list includes the four towns, the major villages and smaller villages which have some local services. Some are grouped together, so that the settlements of Milkwall, Berry Hill and Broadwell are included in the Coleford section of the Plan. In addition to these defined settlements, there are many smaller settlements which are not considered appropriate locations for additional development except in exceptional circumstances and these are considered to be part of the open countryside for planning policy purposes. The expectation in these is that they will experience a relatively low degree of change and will that their essential characteristics including open areas will remain intact being protected by the Plan. The smaller settlements because of their very nature and recent past are often open in form (not dense or nucleated), and include a variety of undeveloped areas which are important parts of their make up.

**1.4** Within all settlements, but especially those more complex ones, the areas between buildings are vitally important to their character. These comprise paths roads, and other gaps but also open areas that serve a particular function or are open (undeveloped) for a particular reason. Many will

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be privately owned spaces, and may only be particularly important to single buildings. Private gardens are an example of these types of space. It may be desirable to provide a degree of protection for such spaces through the planning system and the judgement of general impact on amenity of development proposals affecting these areas will need to be made.

**1.5** Other open areas within settlements merit more explicit protection. These include a variety of spaces and will invariably be visible from public areas and in many cases will be functional as well. They may be hard surfaced public spaces which form part of the circulation space in a town or village. These spaces are usually protected and often have some civic role and cannot be developed because of their role providing access, or space for a market for example. Spaces which need to be protected do not include those that may not contribute positively to the character of the settlement concerned and could be candidates for alternative use including buildings (subject to any functional need, eg for vehicle access for the spaces concerned).

**1.6** The final type of open areas are green spaces which may have a role in providing routes through or into a particular area, may be used for a purpose (eg games), may be unenclosed spaces which make an important contribution to the character and / or visual amenity of an area. Some may in fact be enclosed but have an important group role. Some spaces contain or contained features of importance.

**1.7** In order to offer the degree of protection that is necessary and provide certainty in terms of a plan it is necessary to specifically identify areas for protection. The outgoing 2005 Local Plan and its predecessor did just this and thereby enjoyed considerable success in preserving the character of the settlements in the district. Although the protection of forest waste is one very important aspect of this overall protection, it is not the only one and settlements away from the statutory Forest and Highmeadow Wood have many important areas worthy of protection. Any areas identified need to be justified by clear reasoning as to why they are protected and this reasoning needs to be consistent across the various settlements of the district.

**1.8** The Allocations Plan (Publication Draft) contains individual detailed proposals including maps for each of the settlements that have defined boundaries. These identify land for development, areas for protection and define areas where other policies apply to such areas as the town centres. Within and occasionally around the defined settlements important open areas are identified that are generally to be protected from development. The areas concerned are identified and the policies that protect them from development are both in the CS, namely CSP1 and CSP9. Their protection is supported both by these two policies but also by the AP particularly through AP4 (design of development) and AP5 (Style and materials) which seek to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the area in which it is proposed.

**1.9** The areas identified have a role which goes beyond simply being important to an individual building or property. They are usually identified as of importance to a group of properties within a settlement but may also be valuable features in their own right. The areas are considered to contribute to the character of an area in terms of their form, function, amenity value, historic/ cultural importance and are often but not exclusively publicly accessible. All these are characteristics that contribute individually or collectively to the character of the settlements concerned. Their contribution is central to the aims of national policy, set out in the NPPF whereby in requiring

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“good” design, the principle is to add to the overall quality of the area, to respond to local character and history and to provide good architectural solutions accompanied by appropriate landscaping (see para 58).

**1.10** The open areas within settlements are especially important in those parts of the district which are within the statutory forest but they have a part to play in all types of settlement in making contributions to their essential character. Some open areas that contribute to the settlements concerned are on the edge and are really part of the open countryside, and one example of this is where farmland provides gaps in an otherwise built frontage. Here the open areas concerned are generally protected by being outside the settlements as they are part of a larger and wider landscape. In the event of development proposals, their contribution will be evaluated against such considerations as the landscape SPD and other policies of the Core Strategy. Where they have a dual role, both as part of the wider landscape and in contributing to the setting of the settlement concerned such areas will be protected from development over and above the protection that being in the open countryside already confers.

**1.11** Forest Waste and planted forest is protected from almost all development by the Core Strategy, except where it is allocated for the purpose by a plan document (for example the Cinderford Northern Quarter Area Action Plan). Forest Waste does however extend into many settlements as an essential and distinctive part of the landscape and is protected by Core Strategy Policy CSP9 wherever it is found. In reality the open areas themselves form a bridge between the settlements and their surroundings as well as comprising important amenity space within the settlements themselves. Most of the areas of forest waste within settlements have been individually identified as important for the reasons listed below. This does not confer any additional protection to the high level already offered to such areas but does explain the individual importance of each area which in turn helps to explain why it is protected. The irregular planned form and the (often) closely cropped grassed area that form forest waste around settlements is a very sensitive landscape and is vulnerable to change. As well as protecting it from loss, it is essential to respect the key aspects. Formal straight edges and kerbs can look alien as can inappropriate means of enclosure of adjoining land. These will be considerations under CSP 1 where they are subject of planning applications.

**1.12** Away from the forest boundary and within it, a variety of open areas that are not forest waste and lie within settlements are protected by the IOA designation. They include open areas with public access, enclosed but visually important areas (for example orchards) and areas with a formal recreation use. The latter are identified as being of dual purpose namely for games and for the contribution the area makes to the amenity of the settlement.

**1.13** Listed individually there are about 482 individual IOAs including 40 that are also used for some form of formal recreation. They vary in size from areas of roadside verge (typically forest waste) to large playing fields and associated open spaces. All are considered to make an important visual contribution to the settlements in which they are located. About 225 are or have the appearance of forest waste (and almost all of these are part of the statutory forest and are owned by the Forestry Commission) and another 35 or so are wholly or partially enclosed. Whilst most of these are privately owned areas, there are a number of school fields and churchyards. Only a relatively small number of the important open areas are not accessible to the public. These include

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remnants of orchards and other small fields which are very important visually within their respective settlements. Of all the areas identified, some contain features such as tracks or paths, most notably in the forest but not exclusively so. Some provide the setting for historical or archaeological features and a few others include sites protected for their wildlife importance. Generally however and leaving aside the protection offered by the Plan itself under for example Core Strategy Policy CSP9, or the protection of areas used for recreation given by CSP8, these sites are not protected by any other designation. Although many are undoubtedly of interest for their wildlife value and may contain historic remains it is their intrinsic value to the setting or character of the settlements concerned that is the first reason for their IOA designation. This is further justified below.

**1.14** The features concerned and the particular characteristics of individual open areas are of great significance to individual settlements. Some within the Forest, for example Harrow Hill contain small privately owned paddocks which serve as an important visual element and which are accordingly identified for protection. It is the open weave of the forest settlements that leads to the identification of considerable areas within them that are not considered suitable for development. To develop such areas would result in their loss of identity, character and would devalue the unique character of the district. Some of the enclosed areas are school playing fields and churchyards which often form a key focus for a particular part of a settlement.

**1.15** If the important open areas were not to be individually identified, the principle that there are areas within settlement that it is important to protect would still apply. It would be necessary to evaluate the pros and cons of each development proposal against its impact on the site itself and on its surroundings. There is no automatic assumption that development will be permitted because it is located within a settlement boundary. Greater certainty is given by the individual identification of land which is protected within the settlement and the important open areas are one key type of protection. The protection must always be qualified by the knowledge that there will be exceptions where areas have to be developed. Normally this will be possible only where there are no alternatives to development, or where compensatory provision can be made. In considering whether the loss of part or all of a designated area is justified its significance will need to be assessed as will the impact of its loss.

## 2. Types of Important Open Area

### Types of Important Open Area

**2.1** Important open areas fall into the following general classifications though one area may sit under more than one. They are not necessarily public open space nor are they incidental open space (eg highway verges and grassed areas within housing developments):

- Forest Waste (175 areas identified)
- Planned amenity land (266 areas identified)
- Functional recreational space (119 areas identified)
- Enclosed space without public access (42 areas identified)
- Informal areas not forest waste (229 areas identified)
- Historical and or cultural importance (33 areas identified)

Note: the areas above referred to in this paper are counted and measured using the mapping from which the Local Plan Map and the current proposals map are derived. Some larger areas may be disaggregated while others may be combined.

### Forest Waste

**2.2** Approximately half of the areas plotted lie within the statutory forest and are of the nature of forest waste (land owned by the Forestry Commission but not enclosed). Not all areas having this appearance are actually owned by the Commission although the great majority are. They are not generally planted though some do contain trees of great amenity value. These areas are mainly those around the margins of the forest plantations which are settled. Other equally important areas of forest waste away from settlements are protected by other mechanisms. They are mainly irregular in shape and were in many instances closely cropped by sheep grazing. They often directly abut buildings though their limits are often defined by garden enclosures or fields and paddocks. Many have the appearance of highway verges although they tend to be somewhat more irregular in shape. Protection of these areas is essential if the character of the forest settlements is to be maintained. Important open areas that are forest waste are especially vulnerable to change and degradation. The former can occur through inappropriate enclosure or development. The latter can be the result of more subtle actions not necessarily in the control of the local authority. Degradation may happen through damage caused by vehicles, by formalising edges (for example kerbing), or simply through the lack of grazing or mowing. The Plan aims to protect identified open areas of forest waste for the contribution that they make to a locality but in doing so recognises their overall importance to the area as historic features in their own right.

## 2. Types of Important Open Area

**2.3** Forest waste is probably the most vulnerable of the various categories of open area and is also the most likely to have several functions. Almost all of the identified areas are visually important, all contribute to the setting of the locality and they are all by definition of historical significance. Areas of forest waste are publicly accessible, whether they have discernable paths or tracks on them or not.

**2.4** Forest Waste is protected where it is specifically identified on the proposals maps within defined settlements and in a very few cases outside them but also elsewhere under CSP9. This CS policy gives protection to all such land whether it is specifically marked on a plan or not and whether or not it is within a settlement boundary, unless the plan itself identifies it for development.

### Planned amenity land

**2.5** Land set out for amenity purposes should by definition be important to the setting of its locality and may have a dual function for example as both a play area and an informal space which is of visual importance. It is also likely to enjoy some form of public access. IOAs made up of land intended as incidental open space as part of housing development are quite common within former local authority housing although there are examples within the district which predate these developments. There are examples of this kind of open area in most of the defined settlements that contain housing originally built for or by the local authority. Some are relatively modest verges and others are more significant. Because the spaces concerned tend to be more formal than for example forest waste, they need greater maintenance.

**2.6** In addition to planned amenity land within areas of housing there are some areas associated with other forms of development. The areas concerned are protected and the same degree of protection will be applied to new amenity areas as they are established within sites being developed to meet the needs of the present plan.

**2.7** New developments should be provided with sufficient amenity space and this should be well related to the buildings involved as well as the surroundings. Where redevelopment removes the need for particular existing IOAs, they may be replaced or remodelled appropriately so that they function as part of the new development and its surroundings. Opportunities for enhancement may be taken for example where poorly maintained open areas not well related to dwellings can be replaced with better more accessible and attractive ones, possibly including appropriate areas for play.

### Functional recreational or other space

**2.8** Some overlap exists between planned amenity land and functional recreation space that is identified as an important open area. Where the land concerned has a role in providing or contributing to the setting of a development, then this it is identified for this reason, possibly as well as being identified as a recreational area. Not all recreational areas within settlements are treated in this way as some may be important for their function in providing recreational space but not for their visual amenity. The 2005 Local Plan does contain a number of areas that are identified for their recreation use but lie outside settlements. These are generally identified because they

## 2. Types of Important Open Area

were within the area covered by the Plan's inset maps and no lesser or greater protection applies to them as to recreation areas not marked on the Local Plan 2005 map. This is because the protection of policy CSP9 would apply whether or not such areas are specifically identified.

**2.9** Examples of this type of land are playing fields, public parks, school grounds, and churchyards.

### Enclosed space without public access

**2.10** Some open (ie undeveloped) areas within settlements are privately owned and may not enjoy any form of public access. Some may be crossed by rights of way, but this is not essential for an undeveloped area to have an important function other than being visible in order to make it worthy of protection. Orchards and small fields associated with villages both inside and outside the statutory forest meet this definition and in some settlements are particularly important in contributing to the overall make up of the village concerned. These are especially apparent in some parts of the statutory forest (eg Harrow Hill) and also in locations such as Longhope and Hartpury.

### Informal areas not forest waste

**2.11** Areas outside the statutory forest contain open areas which are not forest waste but have either a similar role or appearance. The areas concerned may simply be highway verges which have been identified as having importance beyond just being part of the highway.

### Historical and or cultural importance

**2.12** This category almost always overlaps with another and it could be argued that most IOAs are of cultural or historic significance, especially when related to the forest. Included are areas of forest waste, but also Churchyards, areas of land associated with historic features and also public parks, or areas around memorials. Some areas, at St Briavels and English Bicknor include ancient monuments. Other areas that are of historic importance include those around features such as spoil heaps and remains of past industry.

**2.13** One reason for the designation and therefore protection of many IOAs is their historic and cultural importance. Historic features (now often of archaeological interest) are often contained within forest waste and may have been covered by vegetation leaving attractive informal green spaces where there may have been features such as spoil heaps and large buildings, or railway sidings. Not all historically important IOAs are currently attractive however and not all are protected by other designations. In terms of cultural importance, it is possible to consider all forest waste to be significant in this respect as much of it comprises the unplanted margins within which settlements have developed and these are a fundamentally important characteristic of the area.

## 2 . Types of Important Open Area

**2.14** As with other IOAs it is important to be aware that the areas are identified in the AP only where there are settlement boundaries. They are identified to ensure that the development expected takes place in a manner that protects the areas concerned. There are many other areas of cultural and historical importance outside the settlement boundaries which are protected by the plan.

**2.15** Whether identified in the Plan or not areas of open land of historic importance are good examples of non- designated heritage assets information about which will be added to the Councils evidence base over time. One way in which this is encouraged is set out in the AP.

## 3. Important Open Areas in the Allocations Plan

### Important Open Areas in the Allocations Plan

**3.1** The first District wide Local plan adopted in 1996 replaced a system in which there were no comprehensive plans and in doing so considered on an individual and detailed basis policies for over 50 settlements. The preliminary work to establish this Plan considered existing land uses in all the settlements concerned and then derived policies which would deliver the required outcomes. Amongst the principles on which the plan was based was the protection of key features in the landscape and retention of undeveloped areas within settlements where they contributed to the character of those settlements. The plan contained other conservation oriented policies too and also policies to achieve the required scale and nature of new development over the district. As part of the land use surveys, open land had been identified as were areas that were considered especially important. The plan sought to identify settlement boundaries for the first time in the case of all villages and Newent. These along with the boundaries in the forest towns were intended to identify practical extents of the settlements concerned not areas for development. It followed that alongside the policies showing the practical extents of settlements, there would need to be particular areas identified both for development and for conservation. One example of the latter was the recording of IOAs. Open areas within settlements were assessed individually and were then recorded on the proposals map where they were considered to make a contribution. Their assessment covered both visual and functional importance and the enclosed or non-enclosed nature, and whether they had public access. All were expected to have an amenity value to a group of properties or be visible from publicly accessible land, but did not need to be accessible to the public in order to be designated.

**3.2** The basic structure of the first district plan was retained in the second, 2005 plan. The IOAs were reviewed and the concept retained. It was considered that the first district wide plan had been successful in promoting the IOAs and this was especially apparent when comparing the pre 1996 policy of relatively unconstrained development areas with the more extensive and detailed settlement boundaries. The balance between conservation and development therefore continued to be sought through policies that identified particular areas for development as well as for conservation within the settlement boundaries.

**3.3** The revised planning system introduced the LDF (Local Development Framework) in about 2005. In 2012, the council adopted the strategic part of an LDF in the form of a Core Strategy. It sits side by side with the non strategic parts of the saved 2005 Local Plan and contains policies which protect amenity land including all forest waste whether or not it is explicitly identified on the proposals map. The IOA policy using identified areas from the 2005 plan and non identified areas as specified in the CS policy CSP9 replaced the old plan's policy (R)FBE8.

**3.4** The CS was intended to be complemented by a detailed Allocations Plan and this is now at an advanced stage. The AP incorporates IOAs and settlement boundaries which have been reviewed along with other aspects in order to prepare a document that takes plan policies forward to 2026. All settlements were reviewed and individual areas within them were re assessed. The IOAs themselves were also re assessed and as a summary of the process the attached table provides a guide to each of them. The general characteristics of these areas is described above.

### 3. Important Open Areas in the Allocations Plan

**3.5** Each area has been considered for its contribution as an important open area against a number of criteria. These area similar to but more comprehensive than the initial consideration when IOAs were first defined for the 1996 Plan. The areas above referred to in this paper are counted and measured using the mapping from which the Local Plan Map and the current proposals map are derived. Some larger areas may be disaggregated while others may be combined.

**3.6** The information in the spreadsheet which accompanies this note is set out with the following headings and entries for each IOA. Areas evaluated but not eventually identified as IOAs in the Allocations Plan are not listed. The spreadsheet is a separate document.

Name	Content
OBJECTID	Reference number
DESCRIPTION	What the area appears to be (eg verge,play area ,field ect)
LOCATION	Location
SETTLEMENT	Name of settlement
SIZE (sqm)	Size of area concerned as plotted on proposals map (may be part of a larger group)
FOREST WASTE	Whether or not the area is or appears to be Forest Waste
RECREATIONAL SPACE	Whether the land has an active recreational use eg play area, football pitch
ENCLOSED SPACE WITHOUT PUBLIC ACCESS	Whether the area is enclosed and apparently without public access
INFORMAL AREA	If informal with no laid out facilities etc
VISIBILITY	If visible
AMENITY VALUE	If considered to have (visual) amenity value
PUBLIC ACCESS	If there is public access
TRADITIONAL FEATURES	Whether the land is considered a traditional feature (eg orchard, paddock, forest verge etc)
LOCAL CHARACTER	Whether considered to make a a contribution
PLANNED AMENITY AREA	Whether a planned amenity area

### 3 . Important Open Areas in the Allocations Plan

PROMINENT LOCAL FEATURE	Does the area contain anything considered a prominent feature eg earth mound, war memorial etc
ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT	Is it considered environmentally significant (including is it protected as for example a Key Wildlife site)
COMMENTS	Additional description, notes on the area and whether it is part of a group etc.



