

Protecting local green spaces: Town and Village Greens in England and Wales

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Town and village Greens in England and Wales represent historical land and resource rights systems that developed under customary law as areas of land where local people indulge in lawful sports and pastimes. Greens date back to medieval times, but they also present a means for modern communities to protect land within the immediate locality which is of social, cultural and nature conservation value. In terms of biodiversity conservation, many contain priority species and habitats, including grasslands, heath, beaches and woodlands. Shaped by local peoples' activities over time they are reliant on the actions of communities rather than individuals, and thus represent a widespread but as yet largely hidden form of community conservation.



Due to their 'local' nature, Greens fit in well with the concept of ICCAs, as well as with principle 22 of the Rio Declaration, with Agenda 21 and with the current UK government's Big Society policy ("to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a big society that will take power away from politicians and give it to the people"). They are also significant in terms of community health and wellbeing, and it appears that local communities are using Green status increasingly to protect their green spaces from ever encroaching development.

The process of registration of Greens requires a group of people from a locality to come together as a 'community' in order to legally protect an area from development. Any group of local people can apply to have land registered as a Green, even if privately owned, as long as it has been used by local people for recreation 'as of right' (i.e. without permission, force or secrecy) for at least 20 years. There are Greens that date back to medieval times and others – an increasing number – that have been created in the last five years. Greens are neither un-owned nor public land and have been referred

to as the last reserve of uncommitted land in England and Wales, and therefore as a national resource.



This presentation will examine the importance of Greens for biodiversity conservation and for local communities, and explore the struggles and motivations of the community groups that take active care of them. We will introduce the concept and mechanism of Greens and then focus on two village greens in Kent.

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