

**APPENDIX 2(vi):  
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR REGENERATION**

**PROJECT: THE WATERMEAD CORRIDOR**

<b>The Watermead Corridor</b>	
Vision	To encourage the regeneration of former mineral workings and property reaching the end of its design life overlooking the Grand Union Canal and Watermead Country Park to provide a range of new employment opportunities accessible from the south Charnwood Neighbourhood Priority Area, a vital and vibrant Thurmaston waterfront, landscape restoration and related benefits for the enhancement of the country park.
Description	<p>Watermead Country Park is the product of sand and gravel operations within the Soar Valley undertaken over the past 50 years or so. Early mineral consents were subject to inadequate restoration conditions leading to poor reclamation or abandonment of redundant pits leading to a chain of lakes and rough pasture stretching for over 2 miles from Watermead Way in the south to the A46 in the north. Most of the land has been brought into public ownership and is managed as a country park, but pockets of land remain in private ownership where the scars of former mineral operations continue to injure the quality and character of the landscape.</p> <p>At Thurmaston there has previously been no incentive to orientate development towards the river valley; shops, homes and businesses have largely turned their back on a landscape historically offering little value other than as extensive water meadows or "bad neighbour" extractive industries. The establishment of the Country Park offers an opportunity to forge a new relationship between Thurmaston and an increasingly popular recreation resource. As properties along the waterfront fall to be renewed they may be designed and reoriented to exploit that new relationship delivering economic, community and environmental advantages.</p>
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ At the Hobby Horse Roundabout (Hope Park) approximately 5.8 ha of new mixed use business development on a restored but degraded former sand and gravel extraction site.</li> <li>▪ At the site of the former Wanlip Country Club site approximately 9.5 ha of mixed use business with the potential for a prestigious hotel overlooking flooded gravel pits restored as landscape features with enhanced wildlife and recreational value as appropriate to their potential contribution to biodiversity and patterns of established usage.</li> <li>▪ Incremental renewal of the Thurmaston Waterfront revitalising the Melton Road village centre with enhanced connectivity between Watermead Country Park, the established community and potential new communities residing within the proposed Thurmaston Sustainable Urban Extension.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Renewal and diversification of employment land at Pinfold Industrial Park (9.2 ha) and Bridge Business Park (3.5 ha) where buildings are approaching the end of their design life and new opportunities for enhancing the visual and functional relationship with the adjacent park may be pursued through redevelopment.</li> <li>▪ Negotiated contributions towards the delivery of reasonably related improved access and visitor facilities within Watermead Country Park.</li> </ul>
Planning Policy	<p>The greater part of the Watermead Corridor between the City boundary in the south and the A46 in the north falls within the Birstall/Leicester/Thurmaston (Soar Valley North) Green Wedge:– Policy CT/3 subsists to protect the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the area to maintain strategically important separation between settlements, provide access for informal leisure pursuits and encourage landscape improvements.</p> <p>Most of the land within the corridor is subject to flooding and therefore unsuitable for built development (Policy EV/27 applies) – an exception is that area occupied by the former Wanlip Country Club accessed off Wanlip Road where land has been allocated for tourism/visitor related development; Policy RT/18 states:</p> <p><i>Planning permission will be granted for the development of land within and adjacent to the site of the former Wanlip Country Club for the following uses:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i) Public house, cafe, restaurant;</i></li> <li><i>ii) Hotel;</i></li> <li><i>iii) Club house;</i></li> <li><i>iv) Conference facilities;</i></li> <li><i>v) Self catering holiday accommodation;</i></li> <li><i>vi) Indoor and outdoor sports facilities; and/or</i></li> <li><i>vii) Marina.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Provided:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>a) the development through sensitive siting, design and construction makes a positive contribution to visual amenities without appearing as intrusive within the wider landscape;</i></li> <li><i>b) the site is comprehensively landscaped so as to screen partially the built components of development and to break up the mass of any large buildings;</i></li> <li><i>c) vehicular access is taken from Wanlip Road.</i></li> </ul>

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*In addition the Borough Council will seek to negotiate with the developer contributions towards:*

- *the Watermead County Park Visitor Centre;*
- *improvements to access to all areas of Watermead Country Park; and*
- *the enhancement of the canal corridor.*

Within Watermead Country Park itself Policy CT/17 provides for limited development to deliver:

- i) a caravan and camping site with ancillary buildings on approximately 5ha of land immediately accessible from and adjacent to the Wanlip Road entrances;*
- ii) a Country Park Information Centre with warden's accommodation centrally located and easily accessible from the principal car park;*
- iii) footpaths, cycleways and bridleways with bridges and accommodation works as necessary; and*
- iv) buildings and structures of a minor scale designed for the purposes of supporting leisure and recreation uses within the Country Park.*

The existing employment sites at Pinfold Industrial Estate and Bridge Business Park are subject to the employment protection policy E/8 while properties adjacent to the Water Front bordering the canal fall within the Thurmaston Local Centre where policy CA/9 encourages a range of retail, business, institutional and residential uses consistent with the intention to foster the development of a nuclear and prosperous village centre.

The Local Plan Core Strategy is closely reviewing the suite of policies applying to the Watermead Corridor, including up-dated data from the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, with the intention of developing a cohesive and integrated strategy for the conservation and enhancement of the natural heritage of the river valley allied to the regeneration of derelict, vacant and redundant former quarry workings and the urban renewal of central Thurmaston.

The Borough Council has actively engaged with a broad range of partners in the preparation of the [River Soar and Grand Union Canal Strategy](#), the primary aim of which is to, ".....maximise the impact of the waterway for the economic benefit of Leicestershire." Redevelopment is to be focused in seven areas along the canal corridor, including three hubs within Charnwood Borough at Barrow upon Soar, Watermead Park and Loughborough. Priorities for the Watermead Hub include:

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop the proposed visitor centre to serve the Country Park and wider Soar Valley</li> <li>▪ Provide enhanced marketing, interpretation and facilities at this key site</li> <li>▪ Expansion of the existing public art</li> <li>▪ Exciting new marina development on the Raynesway Site with hotel and conferencing facilities' as well as other mixed use</li> <li>▪ Introduction of new Waterway festival/event.</li> </ul>
Planning History	<p>In accordance with the development plan aspirations for development within the corridor allied to the delivery of improvements to the Country Park planning permission was granted for the erection of hotel complex (150 bedrooms) with fitness suite, sports hall, park pavilion, groundsman's workshop/store, boathouse and ferry terminal, landscape, parking and infrastructure. (Application <a href="#">P/05/2584/2</a> applies) being a variant upon a previous consent (<a href="#">P/04/3997/2</a>) with both approvals being subject to the provisions of a planning agreement negotiated in connection with the first application committing the developer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A contribution of 50% towards the design and construction costs of a visitor centre within the Country Park up to a maximum of £1 million.</li> <li>▪ The provision of a bridge over the Grand Union Canal</li> <li>▪ £66,000 contribution towards improved pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the site, and</li> <li>▪ £75,000 towards a public art feature.</li> </ul> <p>The permission remains live until 25<sup>th</sup> January 2016 by reason of an approval for extension of time (Application P/10/1963/2 applies).</p> <p>Efforts to deliver a visitor centre have been progressed in tandem and in partnership with Leicestershire County Council and funding partners. Planning permission was granted in July 2005 for the erection of an information and educational centre with ancillary shop, cafe and offices; two bedroom flat for respite accommodation; car and coach parking and associated landscaping in favour of Mosaic Shaping Disability Services (application P/05/0991/2 applies).</p> <p>The inability to progress the hotel development and reduced funding available to both the County Council and Mosaic has frustrated the project and delivery in the approved form is now highly unlikely.</p>
Issues	<p>Consultants acting on behalf of Raynesway properties are actively engaged in the progression of the Local Plan Core Strategy proposals for the site. A planning application for a business park on the Hope Park (Hobby Horse Roundabout) and Wanlip Country Club sites has been submitted (<a href="#">P/12/0003/2</a>), ahead of the submission of the Draft Core Strategy. The site is already being marketed as a major development opportunity by appointed agents, <a href="#">Lambert Smith Hampton</a>.</p>

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The agent's web site identifies the approved "Lakeside" (Wanlip Country Club) site for hotel and leisure purposes although discussions with the owner and retained agents has focused on a more flexible approach incorporating a wider range of business uses in the absence of any interest from commercial hotel operators. Previous ambitions linked to the delivery of a visitor centre in the adjacent Watermead Country Park may now be difficult to deliver through the planning system.

The introduction of the CIL Regulations with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010 means that it is now unlawful for planning obligations to be taken into account when determining a planning application that is capable of being charged CIL, whether there is a local CIL or not, if the obligation does not meet all of the prescribed tests that it is:

- a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
- b) directly related to the development; and
- c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development

Additionally the prospect of public sector match funding is seriously compromised in the current financial climate although, the County Council remains desirous of securing a visitor centre in the longer term located in close proximity to the principal hub of operations close to the car park at the northern edge of King Lear's Lake.

Bellinger Design has prepared a master plan acting for Thurmaston Parish Council illustrating local environmental improvements and the potential for enhanced connectivity to Watermead Country Park with pedestrian and cycle way links into the extended village to the east of the A607. The plan was progressed through a working partnership successfully delivering a play area, the village green improvements off Garden Street (Drummer Boy), a picnic area behind the village hall and localised schemes. However a lack of funding to deliver further provisions has resulted in a loss of momentum.

Interventions /Actions	1	Progress proposals for an integrated strategy for the Watermead Corridor through the Local Plan Core Strategy.
	2	Collaborate with the developers and County Council in the negotiation of legitimate contributions to Watermead Park and local connectivity
	3	Refresh the partnership with the River Soar and Grand Union Canal to deliver joint action.
	4	Re-energise the Thurmaston Working Group to secure community ownership of the Waterfront and wider community initiatives.
	5	Explore opportunities for seed funding to deliver initial impetus to enhancement schemes.