



PLANNING FOR OUR NEXT GENERATION ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

September 2007



1. Introduction

- 1.1 In February 2006 we consulted local residents, interest groups and other organisations on options to meet the future need for homes and jobs over the next 15 years or so – this was called “Charnwood 2021 – Planning for our Next Generation”. We received many helpful comments including a number of suggestions for alternative locations to accommodate our development needs. A summary of these comments can be viewed on our web site at www.charnwood.gov.uk.
- 1.2 We had intended to formally submit our proposals to the Secretary of State later in 2006. However, because of new proposals in the Regional Plan for the East Midlands proposing higher levels of housing for Charnwood, we decided to look again at all alternative options to meet these new housing requirements. Comments on the options paper also highlighted a number of issues and alternatives which needed further investigation. We now intend to undertake a further Preferred Options consultation early in 2008 before finalising our proposals for submission to the Secretary of State in November 2008.
- 1.3 To help us as we put together options and alternatives for a further round of public consultation in the New Year, we are looking to engage with key groups and organisations to make sure we have identified and considered all reasonable alternative approaches to meeting our future development needs.
- 1.4 In looking again at alternatives we need to take account of some important changes to national and regional planning policy, not least the higher level of housing requirements being proposed in the Regional Plan. We also have the opportunity to reflect emerging best practice on the development of options and alternatives in the preparation of Core Strategies. This should ensure that the

choices available locally, potential alternative strategies and the implications of these for the location of future development are clearly outlined and understood by all parties.

2. Strategies, Choices and Locations

- 2.1 Through the initial work on Charnwood 2021 we focussed on the alternative broad locations for future development around Loughborough and in south Charnwood adjoining Leicester. The Preferred Options paper suggested that, on the evidence available at the time, a combination of development west and south of Loughborough, north of Birstall and east of Thurmaston/ Hamilton represented the most sustainable solutions to meeting our future need for homes and jobs. The paper outlined the reasons why alternative locations to the north and east of Loughborough, at Shepshed and Anstey were potentially less sustainable and invited comment on this approach and possible alternatives.
- 2.2 In taking forward the Core Strategy we need to be clear about the key choices we have and the alternative strategies that could be pursued to address local issues. There are a number of reasonable alternative strategies for Charnwood that could mean different decisions being made about the future location of development.
- 2.3 Work on the Core Strategy, including the baseline assessment of the Borough's environmental, social and economic features undertaken for the sustainability appraisal, has highlighted some key local issues that need to be addressed through the Core Strategy. There are some key choices we need to make about how we address some of these issues. How we make these decisions depends on the overall strategy we wish to pursue for the Borough. The overall strategy will influence the choices we make about these key issues and in turn this will influence

decisions about the appropriate location for future development.

- 2.4 This paper and the workshop sessions aim to investigate with key stakeholders broad alternative strategies that could mean different choices being made about appropriate locations for future development. Four examples of alternative strategies are outlined which intentionally present quite distinct solutions so that the different locational implications can be highlighted. It is likely that the final preferred strategy will involve a combination of different elements of these and other strategies.
- 2.5 Whilst we have some important local choices to make we also have to reflect national and regional planning policy and ensure that the choices we make will help to deliver development that is sustainable. National and regional planning policies set a number of “ground rules” about how we plan locally. Once the Regional Plan is finalised it will identify the number of new homes to be provided in Charnwood over the period to 2026 and we will have to identify locations to meet this requirement. Until the Regional Plan is finalised later next year, we will have to consider the possible implications of different requirements for new homes and jobs. These different scales of growth are outlined in the next section.
- 2.6 The Local Development Framework will also be an important tool in helping to deliver objectives of the Community Strategies developed by Leicestershire Together and Charnwood Together. The Core Strategy will need to reflect these strategies and this will influence the decisions we make about strategies and key local choices.
- 2.7 The Core Strategy will also help to deliver the Borough Council's “Top Twenty” goals set out in the recently refreshed Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan seeks to address key local social, economic

and environmental issues across three themes:

Theme 1- Leisure and Environment- Creating safe and liveable areas- cleaner, safer, greener living environments with a focus on deprived areas;

Theme 2- Housing and Health- To nurture healthy and strong accessible communities- healthy, cohesive and engaged communities leading to active citizens and civil renewal;

Theme 3- Development and Regeneration- Maximising opportunities for a dynamic Charnwood economy- thinking and planning ahead to retain and enhance the strong Charnwood economy.

3. Alternative Strategies For Charnwood

3.1 We would like to ask you to think about four alternative strategies for the future development of Charnwood.

3.2 Each strategy has social, environmental and economic advantages and disadvantages. Each prioritises one of the key issues or opportunities identified in the baseline assessment of the Borough or raised by people who live, work and are interested in Charnwood during consultation. Whilst each strategy prioritises a particular issue, this does not mean that other issues would be ignored. However there may need to be some trade-off between social, environmental and economic objectives. The alternatives outlined present the extremes so that the different locational implications can be clearly understood. It is likely that preferred strategies would involve a mix of these aspects to address key local social, environmental and economic issues.

3.3 The four alternative strategies are based on the following broad themes:

- Strategy 1 - A Priority for Regeneration;
- Strategy 2 - A Priority for Safeguarding Environmental Features;
- Strategy 3 - A Priority for Economic Growth;
- Strategy 4 – A Priority for Local Needs.

3.4 The aim of this paper is to consider what the implications are of each strategy for the decisions that need to be made about the future development of the Borough. We would also like to find out if there are other strategies which would help address key issues for Charnwood.

3.5 This consultation will help inform the Council's preparation of the Core Strategy

which will eventually set out the scale and distribution of development over the next twenty years and policies to ensure development is sustainable.

4. Key Choices

4.1 Within each strategy there are a number of key local choices that we have about the future development of our Borough.

4.2 Depending on which strategy we choose, the answers to these questions will be different and will produce a different distribution of development. These key choices are:

- What role should different settlements play in providing for the future growth of the Borough?
- What transport measures are needed to manage travel demand, widen travel choices and serve new development?
- How should social and cultural services and facilities support change?
- What types of jobs should be provided to support economic development?
- What approach should be taken to tackling housing affordability?
- How should the provision of green infrastructure be managed in the Borough?
- What role should Charnwood Forest play as part of the development strategy?
- What should be done to minimise the environmental impact of development to help address the implications of climate change?

4.3 To see the range of possible answers to these key questions see the matrix in Appendix A. By prioritising an issue when making these choices and decisions, we

can start make a real difference in tackling that issue.

5. Decisions That Have Already Been Made

5.1 There are some choices that have already been made at a national or regional level that influence the choices we can make about Charnwood's development.

5.2 Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) sets out the Government's key objectives to improve the affordability and supply of housing in all communities. The key policy objective is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live. These objectives have been emphasised in the recent Housing Green Paper.

5.3 PPS3 provides greater flexibility for local planning authorities to identify suitable locations for future development including,

- the re-use of vacant and derelict sites or industrial and commercial sites for providing housing as part of mixed-use town centre development;
- additional housing in established residential areas;
- large scale redevelopment and re-design of existing areas;
- expansion of existing settlements through urban extensions;
- the creation of new freestanding settlements.

The East Midlands Regional Plan- A Strategy of Urban Concentration and Regeneration:

5.4 The Draft Regional Plan outlines the overall planning strategy for the East Midlands. It seeks to focus most new development in existing urban areas as

they offer the greatest opportunity to ensure that homes, jobs and services are well related to one another and accessible. Concentrating development in urban areas:

- reduces the need to travel longer distances from home to work, shops and services;
- secures a more efficient use of existing and new infrastructure and services;
- conserves the countryside and high grade agricultural land;
- makes use of previously developed land and buildings to limit the need for undeveloped land to be brought forward for development; and
- maximises opportunities for the socially excluded to benefit from development activity.

5.5 Where new development needs to be found outside the existing urban areas the plan directs this development to large sustainable urban extensions to the main cities – the Principal Urban Areas and larger towns- the Sub-Regional Centres. For Charnwood the Draft Regional Plan proposes sustainable urban extensions to Leicester as the Principal Urban Area and Loughborough and Shepshed as the Sub-Regional Centre.

5.6 In the summer an independent panel held an examination in public to consider objections to the Draft Regional Plan. Their report is due to be published in October. The Secretary of State will then publish any proposed changes to the plan for comment before it is adopted in September next year.

How Many Homes and Jobs?

5.7 One of the decisions which will be made by the Secretary of State on the Regional Plan is the number of new homes to be accommodated in Charnwood, including

any requirements to provide for the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

5.8 Issues about the appropriate scale of growth for the region, sub-regions and districts is a matter that is being considered by Independent Inspectors following the examination in public this summer and will not be finalised until September 2008 when the Regional Plan is published. The Panel of Inspectors have been presented with a range of growth proposals including the published Draft Regional Plan proposals, revised proposals from Leicestershire County Council and proposals to take account of the most recent household projections.

5.9 Until the Regional Plan is adopted, and the scale of housing growth required in Charnwood is confirmed, it is important to consider the implications of a range of alternative scales of growth when appraising alternative strategies for the future development of the Borough. These alternative growth scenarios are set out in the table below.

The Borough Council’s Position:

5.10 The Borough Council commented on the Draft Regional Plan and attended the examination in public. We have requested more flexibility to be able to determine the appropriate scale and location of future housing development in the Borough. We have also argued that the Borough should accommodate no more than the 19,000 homes between 2001 and 2026 proposed in the Draft Regional Plan.

Employment

5.11 The draft Regional Plan does not specify the level of employment development that will be required within the Borough. It is possible, however, that the final Regional Plan will include some specific guidance on strategic employment sites or number of jobs that must be created, including

proposals currently outlined in the Leicestershire Structure Plan for a Science Park of up to 50 hectares at Loughborough.

5.12 Pending decisions to be made in the Regional Plan the following scales of housing and employment growth and their implications need to be considered:

Growth Scenarios		
Scenario	Scale of Development	Examples of Delivery¹
A	13,750 – 17,500 new homes 550 - 700 homes per year 30 hectares of employment Science Park of up to 50 hectares	This could potentially be delivered with small scale urban extensions to the main urban areas and some provision for rural needs.
B	17,500 – 20,000 new homes 700- 800 homes per year 50 hectares of employment Science Park of up to 50 hectares	This could accommodate the Draft Regional Plan proposals (760 homes per year), which includes delivering two sustainable urban extensions to Loughborough and north of Leicester in Charnwood of 4,875 homes with limited provision for rural needs.
C	20,000 – 23,750 new homes 800-950 homes per year 50 hectares of employment Science Park of up to 50 hectares	This could accommodate the County Council's revised advice (860 homes per year), which includes delivering 8,000 homes as sustainable urban extensions to Loughborough along with a 4,300 home urban extension north of Leicester in Charnwood with limited provision for rural needs..

¹ It is important to note that these are examples of what these housing figures would mean for Charnwood Borough. A key element of this consultation exercise is to consider a range of options for delivering the required housing and associated development.

6. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY 1: A PRIORITY FOR REGENERATION

The Issue

- 6.1 Whilst Charnwood Borough is a relatively affluent area, there are a number of areas where residents suffer poor access to housing, jobs and social and community facilities.

The Evidence

- 6.2 Recent work undertaken as part of the government sponsored Community Cohesion Pathfinder initiative has confirmed that there are areas of relatively higher need within the Borough. A key output from the Pathfinder Initiative in Charnwood was a Renewal Framework.

- 6.3 The Renewal Framework has confirmed that communities in Loughborough and Shepshed continue to suffer high and concentrated levels of deprivation. Loughborough (particularly eastern Loughborough) and Shepshed and to a lesser extent pockets in Soar Valley and South Charnwood villages are affected by a number of issues:

- low economic activity;
- high unemployment;
- poor health;
- low educational achievements;
- poor environment and open space;
- poor housing and poor access.

- 6.4 To address these issues a key priority for the Core Strategy could be to address social exclusion and reduce deprivation in those parts of the Borough identified as areas of relatively higher need including Loughborough, Shepshed, the Soar Valley villages and south Charnwood.

Links to Other Strategies

- 6.5 Charnwood's Community Strategy theme of 'People Matter' highlights that some communities have 'distinctly higher levels of poor health and are less socially cohesive. Some people within these communities face multiple 'life' problems including drug/alcohol dependency, depression, teenage pregnancies, long term illness, mental and physical health problems, low economic activity, debt and isolation'.

- 6.6 There are four Priority Neighbourhoods in Charnwood, which have been identified through the Local Area Agreement process by Charnwood Together. These are parts of east Loughborough, west Loughborough, Mountsorrel, and South Charnwood (Syston and Thurmaston).

- 6.7 The Leicestershire Community Strategy highlights the following as key areas of concern for the people of Leicestershire: a strong and diverse economy, the provision of lifelong learning opportunities, strong communities. The Leicestershire Community Strategy identifies priorities, sets out specific actions and ways it works to support other partnerships.

Implications for Charnwood's Future Development

- 6.8 There is an opportunity to tackle these issues through a strategy which prioritises the regeneration of key areas of the Borough. The main aim of this regeneration focussed strategy is to revitalise the urban areas, in particular those areas in Loughborough and Shepshed suffering high and concentrated levels of deprivation, Thurmaston and the service centres of Anstey, Syston, and Mountsorrel.
- 6.9 This will include consideration of the economic, physical, environmental and social aspects of regeneration for the benefit of the residents and workforces of these areas.

Key Strategic Choices:

Settlement Roles and Location of Development: Future development would be directed to Thurmaston as part of the Leicester Principal Urban Area, the sub-regional centre of Loughborough and Shepshed and to a lesser extent the service centres of Anstey, Mountsorrel and Syston. This would ensure those communities in the most need get the benefits that new development can bring in terms of new facilities, infrastructure and jobs. Developers would be encouraged to bring derelict land and buildings back into use to help regenerate run down areas.

Transport: It is important to ensure people in the areas of highest deprivation have better access to jobs and services by non-car means. This strategy would support the existing good bus services that run from Loughborough south along the A6 and from Leicester to Thurmaston, Syston and Anstey. The strategy could involve some new road building to tackle congestion in Loughborough, possibly through the provision of an eastern distributor road, and could address rat running through south Charnwood villages.

Social and Cultural Facilities: Existing facilities and services in deprived areas would be maximised and financial contributions sought to improve local facilities. However the areas with the highest levels of deprivation often have a lack of facilities particularly for young people, so it would also be important to maximise opportunities from new development to provide new facilities accessible from these areas.

Jobs: As economic restructuring leads to manufacturing industries closing, it is important that new jobs and training provide opportunities for those people previously employed in manual roles. Whilst it is important that the focus on high technology continues, with an extension to the Science Park at Loughborough, it is also important that a variety of jobs continues to be available to match the skills of residents. This strategy would make provision for a range of employment sites close to the most deprived areas.

Affordable Housing: All opportunities to provide affordable housing would be maximised. By focussing development in the most deprived locations, affordable housing would be located close to those in greatest need. Allocating land solely for affordable housing would also be considered in rural areas.

Green Infrastructure: The areas of highest deprivation often lack access to parks, green spaces, recreational facilities and the countryside, and may in general have less opportunity to visit wildlife and heritage features. The potential of existing green infrastructure would therefore be maximised and integrated into the areas of development wherever possible.

Charnwood Forest: A visitor led approach to Charnwood Forest would maximise social and economic benefits. The approach would maximise the recreation potential of the forest to create more visitor related jobs.

Energy Efficiency: Large scale development would be required to meet strong environmental standards for buildings and meet requirements for on-site renewables which go beyond the national target. This would be restricted to large developments to ensure the financial viability of smaller regeneration sites is not undermined.

7. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY 2: A PRIORITY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Issue

- 7.1 Charnwood is not fulfilling its strong economic potential with Loughborough as the largest Sub-Regional Centre in the East Midlands at the centre of the triangle formed by the cities of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham.

The Evidence

- 7.2 Loughborough is the largest Sub-Regional Centre in the East Midlands and is integral to the continued economic success of the Borough and the sub-region. It is a thriving commercial centre with strong associations, not only with further and higher education, but also engineering and pharmaceuticals. It is the main retail and cultural centre in the Borough, boasting a varied shopping experience, Leisure Centre, Museum and the successful Town Hall Theatre. The presence of Loughborough University is significant for the local economy and stands it apart from other Sub-Regional Centres in the area.
- 7.3 Charnwood's Economic Development Strategy (September 2004) identifies a number of strengths and weaknesses of Charnwood's economy:

Strengths

- Excellent transport links;
- A strong labour market;
- Strong high technology manufacturing;
- Relatively low unemployment;
- Loughborough University;
- Opportunities arising from the reputation as a centre for science, technology, knowledge and sports.

Weaknesses

- Limited supply of available quality employment sites;
- Not enough inward investment;
- Poor graduate retention;
- Pockets of deprivation;
- Skills shortages; and
- Threats from declining industries and competition from the three cities.

- 7.4 The Charnwood Employment Land Study shows that there is a need for additional employment land in the Borough to meet strategic requirements, in particular high quality employment sites including a new Science Park at Loughborough. It shows that there has been a loss of existing employment areas to housing and other uses. The decline in the local textile industry has resulted in the loss of significant employment opportunities in some villages. There are also particular issues in relation to rural employment needs.
- 7.5 The findings of a recent study on '*Commuting Flows in the East Midlands*' by EMDA/ Experian (April 2007) indicate Charnwood has the fourth highest level of out commuting of all districts in the region. The Borough's population profile, the quality of local housing, the quantity, type and quality of jobs locally available plus the good access by road and rail notably to the Three Cities are all contributory factors.

Links with Other Strategies

- 7.6 The Charnwood Economic Development Strategy sets out an approach to economic development which is based on 'growth through quality'. It prioritises:
- Business innovation and advanced technology;
 - Business creation and survival;
 - Education, research and knowledge based industries;
 - Creative/cultural industry – for example sports and creative arts clusters linked to Loughborough University and Loughborough College;
 - Loughborough as a retail/commercial centre of sub-regional significance.
- 7.7 Charnwood's Community Strategy theme of 'Prosperity Matters' highlights that the creation of new jobs, investment in buildings and services and improvements to the social and environmental qualities of the borough are all things which occur as a result of a healthy local economy.
- 7.8 The Leicestershire Community Strategy highlights the following as key areas of concern for the people of Leicestershire: a strong and diverse economy, the provision of lifelong learning opportunities, strong communities. The Leicestershire Community Strategy identifies priorities, sets out specific actions and ways it works to support other partnerships.

Implications for Charnwood's Future Development

- 7.9 There is an opportunity to build on this strong economic potential of Loughborough through a strategy which prioritises economic growth for the benefit of Charnwood residents and the wider sub-region.
- 7.10 A strategy prioritising economic growth could focus on Loughborough and Shepshed as the key economic centre of the Borough and would recognise the contribution that south Charnwood can make to the economic success of Leicester. It could also consider the role of all the Borough's settlements in promoting economic growth for the area.

Key Strategic Choices:

Settlement Roles and Location of Development: Future development would be directed to Birstall, Thurmaston and Anstey/Glenfield close to the Leicester Principal Urban Area and Loughborough and Shepshed as the sub-regional centre. There would be a continued need for provision for major development at Leicester to contribute to the growth of the City and at Loughborough to enable the continued growth of the knowledge based economy. The Service Centres of Hathern, Quorn, Barrow Upon Soar, Mountsorrel, Rothley, Sileby, Syston and East Goscote would also accommodate some growth. Businesses need different sizes of premises in a variety of locations and also need an accessible workforce with the appropriate skills.

Transport: Accessibility is a key issue for businesses, which influences decisions about where they invest. It is important that the accessibility of the Borough, with good access to Midland Mainline, the trunk road system and East Midlands Airport, is not undermined by congestion. This strategy would be focused on infrastructure improvements and could involve new road building at Loughborough to improve access to the motorway from industrial areas to the north of the town. In South Charnwood, it could include new road infrastructure to serve a sustainable urban extension and link it to roads into Leicester.

Social and Cultural Facilities: The potential for new provision of social and cultural facilities and services would be maximised. This could include a range of services such as schools, health and leisure facilities that will help attract people deciding whether to move to the area to work or set up/expand a business.

Jobs: The focus would be to build on key economic strengths including high technology and the growth sectors such as the service sector and office based employment. The Borough has a strong economy which is based on high technology companies and knowledge based businesses linked to the University. This will mean making provision for a range of sites that will be attractive to the market, including a major new science park at Loughborough, other large scale strategic sites at Birstall and Shepshed and smaller sites in service centres.

Affordable Housing: It is important that new developments provide a good mix of housing types to help attract university graduates to remain in the area rather than move to major cities for jobs. A proportion of affordable housing would therefore be sought from large developments but only in line with current government requirements.

Green Infrastructure: Existing green infrastructure can make a significant contribution to the physical environment of new housing and employment development and should be integrated where possible to help attract new businesses and skilled people to the area and also benefit the existing communities.

Charnwood Forest: A visitor led approach is likely to create the most employment opportunities within Charnwood Forest through new visitor attractions and visitor related businesses. Maximising recreational value of the Forest would make the area more attractive to outside businesses and for residents from outside the area.

Energy Efficiency: Good design and sustainable building standards will be encouraged but not required. On-site renewables will only be required in line with national targets. This is an opportunity to consider innovative design and construction techniques, and by avoiding strict requirements, this should help ensure investors are not put off by onerous requirements.

8. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY 3: A PRIORITY FOR SAFEGUARDING ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

The Issue

- 8.1 Charnwood is an ecologically rich area compared with the rest of the East Midlands, and has a number of sites which are important for wildlife and for recreation, particularly within the Charnwood Forest and the valleys of the Soar and Wreake. The geography of the Borough, with a settlement pattern concentrated along the river valleys, also means that settlement identity has been a longstanding issue locally.

The Evidence

- 8.2 As a region the East Midlands has the lowest level of designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England at less than 4% of the total land area. However Charnwood is one of the most environmentally rich areas within the East Midlands with the two strategic river corridors of the Wreake and Soar, Charnwood Forest and parts of the National Forest, all of which attract visitors from outside the Borough. Safeguarding the Borough's environmental assets is therefore of local and regional significance.
- 8.3 The Borough takes in substantial parts of the regionally important National Forest and Charnwood Forest. In 2000 Beacon Hill and Bradgate Park attracted 325,000 and 1 million visitors respectively (Leicestershire Tourism Strategy). With the Forest and the river valleys the Borough is rich in flora and fauna. The Borough contains some 17 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 217 Local Wildlife Sites. The Borough's total area of SSSIs is above the regional average.
- 8.4 Due to the geography of the Borough, with a concentrated settlement pattern particularly along the Soar and Wreake valleys, towns and villages in Charnwood are close together with little open space between them. This has meant that settlement identity has been a longstanding issue locally. Strategic and local policies for green wedges and areas of local separation have sought to safeguard the separate identity of settlements. Green wedges have been identified on the edge of Leicester and around Loughborough to help to guide and direct urban development and provide "green lungs" penetrating the urban areas, preserving and enhancing links to the countryside. In this way they are an important tool in shaping urban growth so that as urban areas expand open land is incorporated.

Links to Other Strategies

- 8.5 Charnwood's Community Strategy theme of 'Places Matter' highlights the importance of creating safe and liveable areas which are greener, cleaner and safer living environments. The strategy particularly considers the importance of the quality of public spaces and the contribution that can be made locally to global environmental issues such as climate change.
- 8.6 The Leicestershire Community Strategy highlights the following as key areas of concern for the people of Leicestershire: a clean and green environment and countryside and green spaces. The Leicestershire Community Strategy identifies priorities, sets out specific actions and ways it works to support other partnerships.

Implications for Charnwood's Future Development

- 8.7 There is an opportunity to safeguard the Borough's environmental assets through a strategy which prioritises the minimisation environmental impacts and safeguards settlement identity. The main aim of this strategy is to direct development away from environmentally sensitive areas and ensure the landscape and biodiversity of the Borough is maintained and enhanced, and the separate identity of the Borough's settlements safeguarded.

Key Strategic Choices

Settlement Roles and Location of Development: In meeting future development needs full use would be made of brownfield potential within existing urban areas through high density development. Outside the urban areas opportunities for development on brownfield land, including Wymeswold Airfield would be the priority. Where development on greenfield land is needed this would seek to avoid environmentally sensitive areas and safeguard settlement identity.

Transport: Transport measures would be focussed on public transport improvements and measures to reduce the need to travel by car. New road infrastructure would be limited to that necessary to serve any new development in order to minimise environmental impact.

Social and Cultural Facilities: Existing social and cultural facilities should be maximised, and financial contributions would be sought to improve these facilities. This would minimise the land required for building new facilities.

Jobs: The focus of jobs provision would be in growth sectors such as the service sector and office based employment. These jobs tend to have to be able to locate in existing built up areas and tend to provide a greater number of jobs for a given area of land. Employment development would be focussed on available brownfield land within, and where necessary, outside existing settlements to limit the impact on settlement identity.

Affordable Housing: This strategy would provide the minimum affordable housing needed to meet address issues of affordability, which would minimise loss of land and length of journeys from new housing in the countryside. A proportion of affordable housing would be sought from large developments and rural affordable housing would be provided on a rural exception sites.

Green Infrastructure: Any greenfield development would be located at the edge of the urban area and would avoid important environmental assets such as the river corridors, wildlife and archaeological sites. Large scale development outside the existing urban areas would be directed to available brownfield land and would seek to limit the impact upon settlement identity.

Charnwood Forest: Charnwood Forest would be managed to protect and enhance its landscape and biodiversity. Recreation and visitor attractions would not be encouraged.

Energy Efficiency: The strategy would place the highest emphasis on energy efficiency with all development having to comply with highest standards. This would minimise the impact of new building upon the local and global environment.

9. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY 4: A PRIORITY FOR LOCAL NEEDS

The Issue

- 9.1 Rural communities in Charnwood, particularly in the Forest and the Wolds, suffer from limited access to services and facilities. Larger villages in the Soar and Wreake valleys have seen a decline in employment, despite increases in population, with consequent impacts on local services and facilities. There are affordable housing needs in all communities in Charnwood, but there are particular issues in the smaller rural settlements.

The Evidence

- 9.2 Outside the main urban centre of Loughborough and Shepshed the settlement pattern in Charnwood consists of a string of larger settlements extending northwards from Leicester along the valleys of the River Wreake and Soar. These settlements have a well-established service base that serves local residents and surrounding areas, including the more rural parts of Charnwood. The most rural areas are located in the higher rolling landscapes of the Charnwood Forest to the west and the Leicestershire Wolds to the east. Even these more rural areas are relatively close to facilities and services available in the larger settlements and at Loughborough and Leicester.
- 9.3 Nevertheless there are particular issues facing the larger Soar and Wreake Valley settlements and the more rural Charnwood communities. Many of the larger settlements have suffered due to the decline in the local textile industry. Loss of local employment means that many now function primarily as dormitory settlements serving Leicester and Loughborough. This has had an impact on the availability of local services and facilities.
- 9.4 Whilst not remote rural locations, the Forest and Wolds villages suffer from limited public transport access, decline in local services and facilities and affordable housing need. The Indices of Deprivation 2004 key findings for Charnwood published by Leicestershire County Council indicates that for rural areas in Charnwood the key issue is barriers to housing and services.

Links to Other Strategies

- 9.5 Charnwood's Community Strategy themes of 'People Matter', 'Places Matter' and 'Prosperity Matters' all feature important aspects of supporting rural areas. The Community Strategy highlights the areas of deprivation within the Borough's villages and identifies the importance of nurturing healthy and strong and accessible communities.
- 9.6 The Leicestershire Community Strategy highlights the following as key areas of concern for the people of Leicestershire: a strong and diverse economy, the provision of lifelong learning opportunities, strong communities, thriving markets town and villages centres, the countryside and green spaces and opportunities for all. The Leicestershire Community Strategy identifies priorities, sets out specific actions and ways it works to support other partnerships.

Implications for Charnwood's Future Development

- 9.7 There is an opportunity to support the needs of existing communities through a strategy which focuses development on existing urban areas across the settlement hierarchy from Loughborough and Shepshed as the Sub-Regional Centre to Service centres and smaller communities in the Forest and the Wolds.
- 9.8 The main aim of this strategy prioritises supporting rural areas to overcome the problems faced by people living and working in rural parts of the Borough, particularly those in relation to affordable housing, and gaining access to facilities and services.

Key Strategic Choices

Settlement Roles: Whilst future development would be directed to the settlements of Birstall and Thurmaston on the edge of Leicester and Loughborough and Shepshed as the sub-regional centre, development would also be accommodated in the Service Centres of Hathern, Quorn, Barrow Upon Soar, Mountsorrel, Rothley, Sileby, Syston, East Goscote and Anstey, along with the smaller rural communities of Woodhouse Eaves, Newtown Linford, Swithland, Wymeswold, Burton on the Wolds, Seagrave, Queniborough, Thrussington and Rearsby. Affordable and market housing would be available in rural areas to address barriers to housing in these communities. Spreading development more widely would allow for more mixed rural communities.

Transport: Accessibility to facilities is a key issue facing people in rural areas. Improvements to bus services would improve accessibility for those without a car. In this strategy the car is accepted as being a key means of transport and improvements in infrastructure would help mobility of people in rural areas. New road building to address local issues of congestion could form part of the strategy. Demand management would still part of the strategy.

Social and Cultural Facilities: Existing services and facilities would be maximised or safeguarded, as this the most likely to address accessibility problems of those in rural communities.

Jobs: A mix of jobs would be encouraged as this would be most likely to address a wider variety of economic and social concerns. There would be a focus on high technology where some of these types of businesses could locate to rural areas and may boost prosperity the local economy. In this strategy the main employment sites would be developed at Shepshed, Birstall, Syston and Thurmaston where there is greater local need.

Affordable Housing: The approach would be to maximise affordable housing in rural areas. This would be achieved by specifically allocating land for affordable housing, applying a rural exceptions site policy, and lowering the thresholds at which affordable housing is required.

Green Infrastructure: For environmental assets contrasting approaches could offer benefits to those in rural communities. A strategy with strong protection of wildlife and landscape would be of benefit to forestry and agriculture, and may support visitor related

employment. On the other hand, the possible integration of some key environmental features may increase the awareness and the attractiveness of these features and similarly may increase employment linked to visitors. Access to green space will also benefit residents in terms of their well-being and quality of life. These are dependent on how these strategies are implemented.

Charnwood Forest: An approach which actively promoted visitors to places such as Charnwood Forest may create more employment in these areas.

Energy Efficiency: Compared to others, this strategy includes a greater number of small developments. A threshold based approach to energy efficiency would be likely to have a negative environmental impact. An approach which requires highest standards of energy efficiency across all developments would minimise contributions to climate change.

APPENDIX A - KEY DECISION AREAS AND CHOICES

Key Decisions and Choices	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
What role should different settlements have in providing for future housing needs including Gypsies and Travellers, and employment, retail and service growth of the Borough? ²	Future development should be focused on Loughborough and Leicester , as the urban centres that provide the focus of service and retail provision, jobs and transport links for the north and south of the Borough respectively.	Future development should be focused on Loughborough and Leicester , development of appropriate scale should also be provided for in the Service Centres as these provide locally focused service and retail provision, jobs and transport links.	Whilst future development should be focused in the urban areas and to a lesser extent the Service Centres , some smaller rural settlements with key services should have a role in providing for future development.	Whilst future development should be focused in the urban areas and to a lesser extent the Service Centres , all settlements including smaller rural settlements should have a role in providing for future development.
What transport measures are needed to manage travel demand, widen travel choices and serve new development?	Measures to improve public transport provision and demand management should be the focus.	Infrastructure enhancement including new road building and demand management.	An integrated package of measures should be the focus, including public transport, new highway infrastructure and demand management.	
How should social and cultural services and facilities support change?	Existing facilities and services should be maximised and financial contributions sought to improve existing facilities.	The potential for new provision of social and cultural facilities and services should be maximised .		
What types of jobs should be provided to support the economic development?	The focus should be to build on key strengths including high technology .	A mix of jobs should be encouraged within the Borough to meet local needs, with a particular focus on high technology.	The focus should be on growth sectors such as the service sector and office based employment.	
What approach should be taken to tackling housing affordability?	A proportion of affordable housing should be sought from large developments and rural affordable housing should be	A proportion of should be sought from large developments and provision should be made to allocate land solely for	The percentage of affordable homes that developers are required to provide should be increased and/or threshold	

² The housing requirements for Charnwood will be greater than that which can be accommodated with urban infilling, it will therefore also be important to consider where greenfield land allocations should be focused. Maximising urban capacity is assumed in all options.

Key Decisions and Choices	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
	provided on rural exception sites ³ .	affordable housing to supplement the rural exception sites.	lowered for the size of development which is required to provide affordable homes in line with evidence of need.	
How should the provision of green infrastructure, heritage and biodiversity (including parks, paths, green wedges, wildlife corridors, water spaces, recreational facilities and countryside) be managed?	Existing green infrastructure should be adapted and integrated into development areas and used to influence the form of development.	Existing green infrastructure should be protected and development directed away from key assets.		
What role should Charnwood Forest as part of the development strategy?	Landscape lead. Development would be controlled and programmes established which focus upon the appearance of the area.	Visitor lead. Visitor orientated development would be allowed, which in turn would help to fund management of the Forest. The option would involve the less quiet recreation and enjoyment of the area.	Forest lead. The boundary of the National Forest would be extended and multi-purpose forestry promoted as a key aim. There may be conflict with landscape aims of the National Forest Strategy.	Biodiversity lead. Management of the forest would be focused on enhancing the ecological character of the area. This option may restrict flexibility of those managing land in the Forest area.
What should be done to minimise the environmental impact of development to help address the implications of climate change	Encourage good design and suggest a benchmark of the 'very good' BREEAM standard or equivalent Code for Sustainable Homes level 3 ⁴ . Require on-site renewables and/or connection to a decentralised renewable or low carbon supply in line with national targets.	Require a minimum of the 'very good' BREEAM standard or equivalent Code for Sustainable Homes level 3 on large sites of 10 or more dwellings or 1,000 sqm of employment. Increase the requirement for on-site renewables and/or connection to a decentralised renewable or low carbon supply beyond national targets.	Require a minimum of the 'very good' BREEAM standard or equivalent Code for Sustainable Homes level 3 on all sites. Increase the requirement for on-site renewables and/or connection to a decentralised renewable or low carbon supply beyond national targets.	

³ The Rural Exceptions policy for providing rural affordable housing is a policy which allows affordable housing on sites within rural areas which would not be given permission for market housing as an exception to meet needs within rural communities.

⁴ BREEAM is the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method. It grades the sustainability of buildings based on a scoring system and gives an overall measure of pass, good, very good, excellent. The Code for Sustainable Homes is a new national standard for sustainable design and construction of new homes, launched in December 2006. The Code uses a 1 to 6 star rating system to communicate the overall sustainability performance of a new home.