

# Watermead & Thurmaston Area Background Paper

November 2010

# I Introduction

The Watermead Country Park is recognised as one of the most significant green infrastructure assets in Leicestershire with over 250,000 visitors each year. It enjoys excellent access by road, rail and waterway from across the sub region yet it is often regarded as being a hidden asset, as it lacks signage and the visitor facilities to make it a sub regional player. Its connectivity with the surrounding built up areas of Birstall, Wanlip, Thurmaston and Syston in Charnwood Borough and Abbey, Rushey Mead in Leicester City is reasonable but more could be done to attract local people to use the park.

The Watermead Country Park sits in the open countryside between the built up areas of Birstall and Thurmaston and it lies within an area of green wedge in the current Local Plan that radiates out from the City into Charnwood Borough. Thurmaston and Birstall have close relationships with the city being contiguous with its outer suburbs and the wards of Abbey and Rushey Mead. Recognising this, recent planning policies<sup>1</sup> have sought to plan for the growing needs of the City within and adjoining communities in South Charnwood to meet housing needs and support its economic growth within the East Midlands.

Parts of Thurmaston lie within a Priority Neighbourhood where there is evidence of pockets of higher than average deprivation in terms of older persons' income; education skills and training; and living environment. The community is bisected by the A607 bypass and Midland Main Line railway, isolating the older parts of the village from newer developments further to the east. In contrast, Birstall, Wanlip and Syston are relatively prosperous but depend on the City in the broadest sense for jobs and higher order services and facilities.

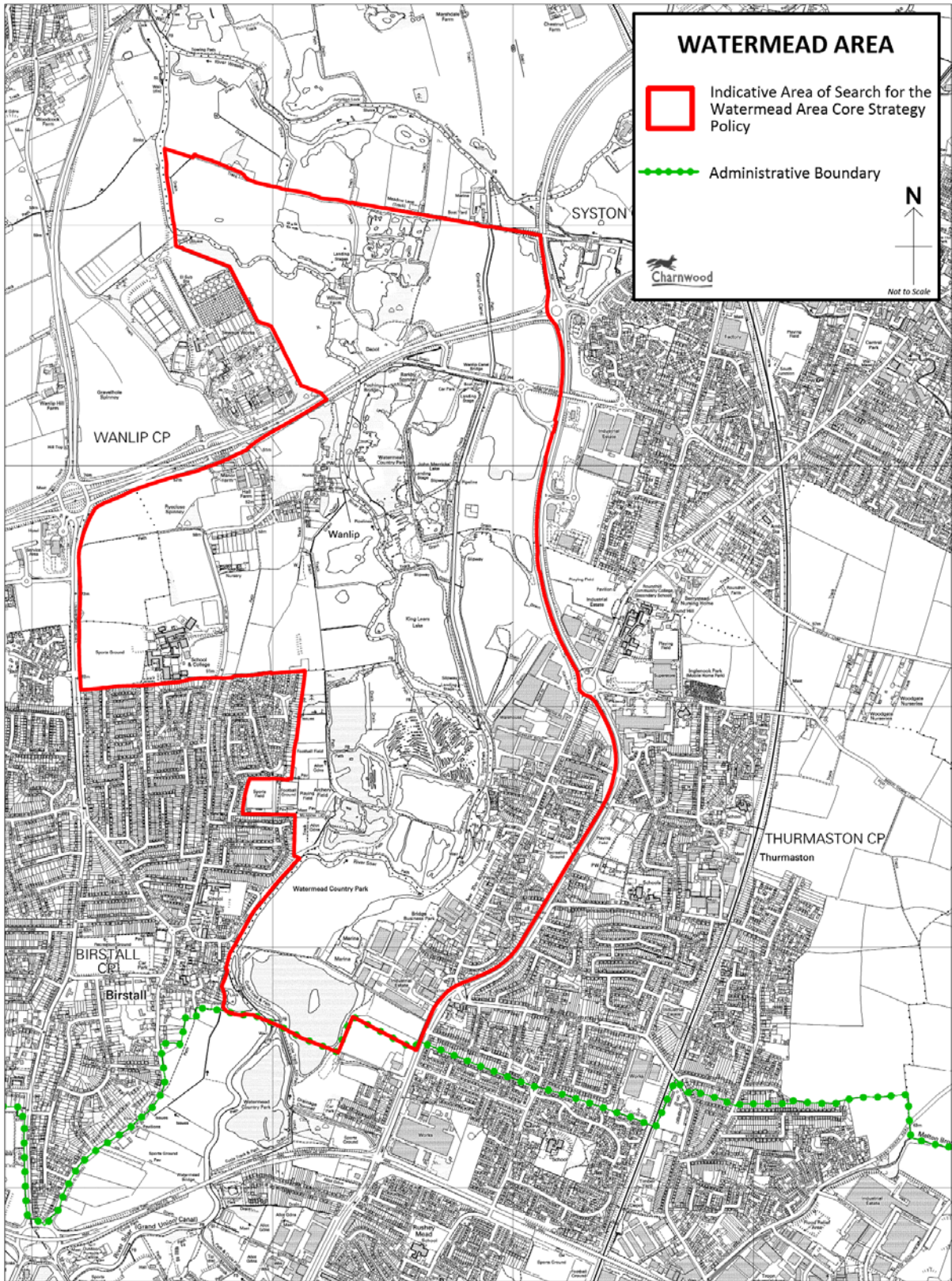
Within this context, The Borough Council is developing a new suite of planning policies in a document called the Core Strategy which will become the principal document within the Local Development Framework (LDF) when it is adopted in 2012. Earlier drafts of the Core Strategy have sought to accommodate the development pressures arising from the City and recognised the green infrastructure asset of Watermead Country Park whilst also recognising their importance to the wider regeneration opportunities in Thurmaston<sup>2</sup>.

This background paper provides more information on the area and its wider context, the issues that it faces and the opportunities that exist. The Council would like to work with organisations and partners to develop a specific planning policy which will be used to guide future planning decisions in the Watermead and Thurmaston area in the South of Charnwood Borough (a plan showing the indicative area is overleaf).

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail see the [East Midlands Regional Plan](#) and the [Leicester City Core Strategy](#).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed review see [Charnwood 2026 – Planning for Our Next Generation](#) (October 2008).



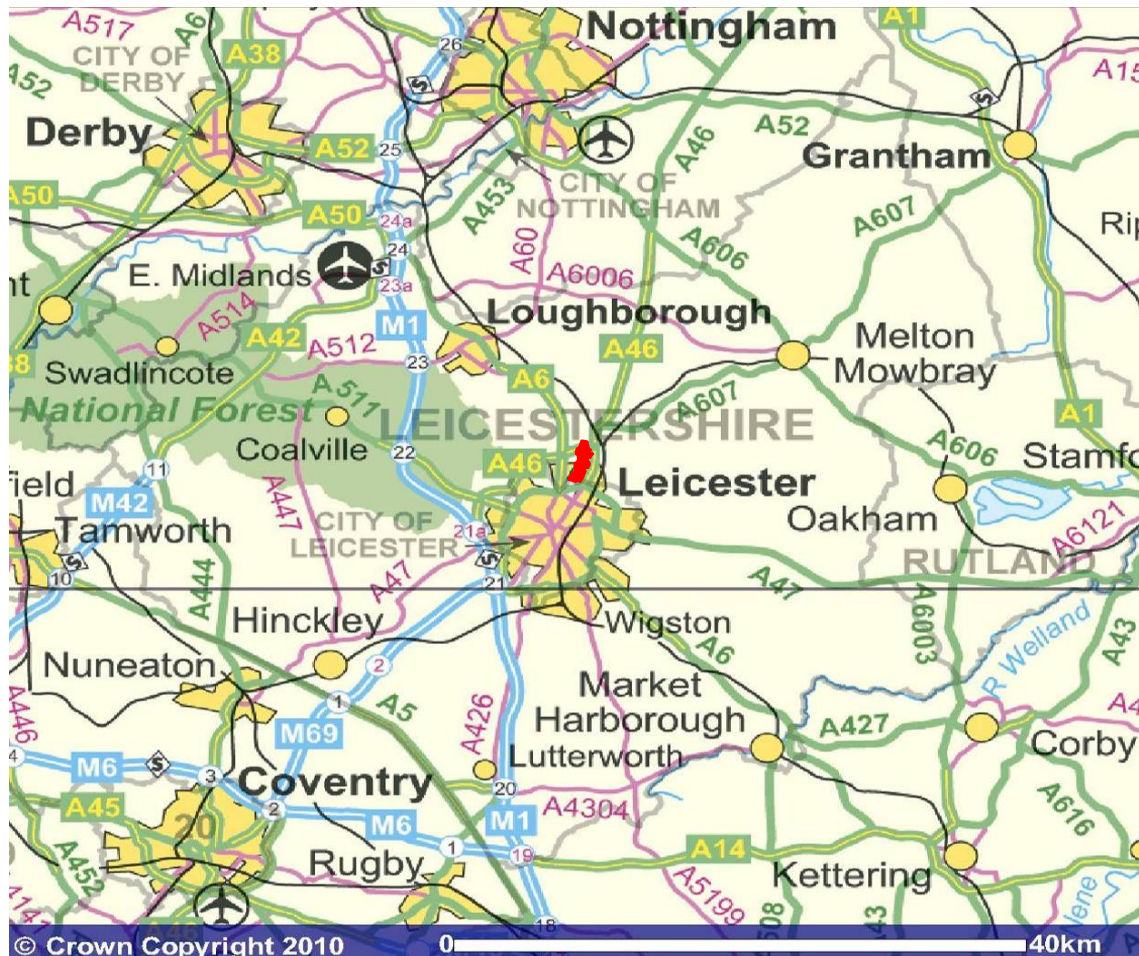
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## 2 The Study Area

The area is located to the north of Leicester between two of its suburbs, Birstall and Thurmaston, with Syston to the north-east. Nottingham is 35km north on the A46(T) and A606, Derby is 50km north-west on the A50, M1 and A52(T) and Coventry 50km south on the A46(T), M1 and M69 Motorways, so the area is less than half an hour from four major cities.

The north of the area is crossed by the final section of the A46(T) Leicester Western Bypass, with the junction of the former route being at the north-eastern edge of the area (known locally as the Hobby Horse roundabout). The old route of the A46 runs along the eastern edge of the area, by-passes Thurmaston and on a further 5km into Leicester city centre, now forming a southern section of the A607.

Syston railway station is about 1.5km east of the area and is on the section of the Midland Main Line railway linking Leicester to Nottingham and Derby, with regular services to each. Regular bus services link Birstall, Syston and Thurmaston with Leicester city centre, with one route looping close to the area along Wanlip Road and many passing through Thurmaston itself.



# 3 Policy background and Evidence

## **National Planning Policy**

Core national planning policy is currently expressed through Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) but is supported by a range of white papers, circulars and ministerial statements. Many of the existing planning policies were prepared by the previous government and it is important to bear in mind that the new government intends to radically reform the planning system over the next few years. Principal to these reforms are the Decentralisation and Localism Bill, which is due to come into effect before the end of 2011 and will provide the legal framework for many of the reforms, and the new National Planning Framework. The National Planning Framework is expected in 2012 and will streamline the existing Planning Policy Statements. It will clearly set out national economic, social and environmental priorities and how they relate to each other and maintain sustainable development as the key consideration in planning decisions.

The following review of relevant national planning policies is therefore provided in the knowledge of the changing context of the new government's reform agenda and in the understanding that policy may be clarified or changed during the process of preparing the Core Strategy.

### Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

Paragraph 13 of PPS 1 establishes the following principles for planning so that sustainable development is secured by:

- i. integrating environmental, economic and social objectives;
- ii. addressing the causes and potential impacts of climate change through policies which reduce energy use, reduce emissions (for example, by encouraging patterns of development which reduce the need to travel by private car, or reduce the impact of moving freight), promote the development of renewable energy resources, and take climate change impacts into account in the location and design of development;
- iii. the use of spatial planning policies;
- iv. high quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- v. clear, comprehensive and inclusive access policies that take account people's diverse needs and break down unnecessary barriers and exclusions in a manner that will benefit the whole community; and
- vi. community involvement in the development of plans and policies.

These principles are relevant to the Watermead and Thurmaston areas since opportunities exist to realise social and environmental benefits through economic development and regeneration. These benefits include the creation of sustainable travel and leisure opportunities that should reduce car dependency and so mitigate a cause of climate change. The increased flood risk resulting from climate change could be managed by new development within the area. A spatial policy for the area developed in partnership with landowners, stakeholders and voluntary groups that is able to unify strategies and ambitions for the area will be prepared in consultation with the community to ensure a policy is created that is in the public interest and is deliverable.

#### Planning Policy Statement 1: Planning and Climate Change (Supplement to PPS 1)

This PPS on climate change supplements PPS1 by setting out how planning should contribute to reducing emissions and stabilising climate change and to take into account the unavoidable consequences. Recognises that changes in climate are likely to have far-reaching, and potentially adverse, effects on our environment, economy and society for which we need to prepare and adjust. The PPS sets out the following considerations for plan making:

- the proposed provision for new development, its spatial distribution, location and design should be planned to limit carbon dioxide emissions;
- optimising opportunities for decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy;
- minimising future vulnerability in a changing climate;
- integrating climate change considerations into all spatial planning concerns; considering mitigation and adaptation together when planning new development;
- applying sustainability appraisal (incorporating strategic environmental assessment) to shape planning strategies and policies that support the Key Planning Objectives; and
- appropriate indicators should be selected for monitoring and reporting on in regional planning bodies' and planning authorities' annual monitoring reports. Such monitoring should be the basis on which regional planning bodies and planning authorities periodically review and roll forward their planning strategies.

#### Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (December 2009)

National policies on economic development, particularly policies EC2, EC6, EC7 and EC8 encourage local planning authorities to plan for sustainable economic growth, whilst protecting the countryside; supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities; limiting car use to encourage walking and the use and provision of public transport; and responding to climate change. Local Planning Authorities are also expected to promote the vitality and viability of town and other centres as important places for communities.

#### Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport (April 2001)

National policies on transport, particularly paragraphs 19, 20, 31, 49-56 and 72-80 seek the creation of places that are accessible for all by public transport, walking, and cycling and the reduction of travel demand overall by linking planning and transport, limiting parking, identifying the potential for improved interchange between different transport modes, creating more direct, safe and secure walking routes, and improving cycle routes and facilities.

#### Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (July 2002)

National policies on open space, sport and recreation, particularly paragraphs 1-5, 18, 25 and 31-33, require the need and opportunities for these uses to be assessed (see paragraph 3.6) and opportunities to improve the value of existing facilities to be sought, including through the use of planning obligations. Local authorities are encouraged to realise the recreational potential of:

- i. urban fringe locations for country parks, subject to ensuring their non-car accessibility
- ii. water features, subject to environmental safeguards
- iii. recreational rights of way, for example by adding links to existing networks

#### Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk (March 2010)

National policies on flooding set out a risk-based approach, summarised in PPS25 paragraph 9, of minimising vulnerable new development in flood risk areas, by ensuring its design and location maximises the use of sustainable drainage and mitigates impacts by being prepared for flood events.

#### Local Growth: Realising every place's potential (October 2010)

The government has signalled its intention to shift power away from central government departments to local government, citizens and independent providers. The Local Growth White Paper (2010) foresees changes to the planning system, banking and skills to achieve this ambition in an effort to enable economic growth to occur unfettered by bureaucracy and perceived bottlenecks. The White Paper confirms the role of local authorities in supporting growth and that the Planning System is to be an important tool that will help promote efficient and dynamic markets by bringing together key stakeholders to create the right conditions for growth and prosperity and allowing the markets to work by:

- Preparing planning policy documents that set out a clear framework for local development and provide certainty for developers and investors through the provision of a responsive supply of land that supports business growth and increases housing delivery
- Using local authority land assets to lever private funding to support growth
- Directly and indirectly influencing investment decisions via the use of statutory powers
- Support for local people and businesses including regeneration
- Support local infrastructure particularly transport investment as a key enabler of growth
- Provide high quality services that directly support businesses' investment confidence and individuals life chances
- Provide wider services and investment that increase the attractiveness of the area

- Support improvements to the health and well-being of the population by promoting independence and rehabilitation to ensure all individuals have the opportunity to benefit from work and contribute to the local economy.

### **Regional Planning Policy**

Whilst the Government has signalled its intention to abolish Regional Strategies, this is not likely to take effect until November 2011 at the earliest and may take longer depending on the passage of the Decentralisation and Localism Bill through Parliament during 2011. In the meantime the East Midlands Regional Plan remains part of the Development Plan and its policies are relevant in the context of preparing Core Strategies. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires LDFs to be in general conformity with Regional Strategies.

Policy 3 seeks to advance an ‘urban concentration strategy’ with development focused first to Leicester then other settlements and finally to rural areas subject to four criteria. This fundamental strategy is reflected in other policies of the plan including the approach to planning for development in the three cities area (policy 12); the distribution of housing in Charnwood Borough (policy 13a); and the provision of employment land supply (policy 20). The concentration strategy is further explained in a sub regional context in policies for the Three Cities sub area including the definition of the Leicester Principal Urban Area (policy three cities SRS 1), Housing provision (policy three cities SRS 2) and employment land provision including the need to provide for the regeneration of deprived communities; address green infrastructure deficits and reduce out commuting (policy three cities SRS 4).

Of particular relevance to the formulation of the policy approach for the Watermead and Thurmaston area are the Regional Plan policies that provide a regional expression of national policy including:

- Priorities for better design (Policy 2) and the requirement to minimise energy use and secure energy from renewable and low carbon technologies and to pursue design led approaches to development that take account of local natural and historic character; locating and designing access from new development to local facilities on foot, by cycle or by public transport; designing out crime, promoting vitality and quality of life; and takes account of green infrastructure networks and the need to enhance biodiversity and landscape quality.
- The setting of principles by which sustainable development can ensure the region’s natural and cultural heritage is protected and enhanced (policy 26).
- Understanding the historic environment so it can be conserved and enhanced for its own intrinsic value (policy 27). In areas of change or where growth is proposed, development should promote the sensitive change of the historic environment.
- Policy 28 requires local planning authorities to work with stakeholders, partners, other organisations and the local community to ensure the delivery, protection and enhancement of environmental infrastructure across the region.

- Policy 29 seeks to enhance the region's biodiversity particularly through the creation, protection and enhancement of networks of semi-natural green spaces in urban areas and landscape features which act as corridors and 'stepping stones', essential for the migration and dispersal of wildlife, and to ensure that development does not lead to a net loss of BAP habitat and species, particularly those with special environmental requirements, and net gain is achieved.
- Policy 31 seeks to ensure that development proposals respect intrinsic landscape character in rural and urban fringe areas through the establishment of policies in LDFs.
- Policy 33 seeks to protect the natural and cultural environment of the River Soar corridor and encourages partners to work together to protect and enhance the multi-functional importance of strategic river corridors as part of the approach towards green infrastructure, including for wildlife, landscape and townscape, regeneration and economic diversification, education, recreation, the historic environment including archaeology and managing flood risk.
- Policy 35 requires local planning authorities to take account of the potential impact of climate change on flooding and land drainage.
- Green wedges are seen as a strategic priority in terms of providing enhanced and new green infrastructure in Policy Three Cities SRS 5.

#### Core Strategy Further Consultation Report (October 2008)

The Core Strategy (CS) will be the key Development Plan Document within the Charnwood Local Development Framework. Due to various legislative, national and regional policy changes, it has been through several consultation stages in various forms. The Core Strategy process has so far not included reference to a specific policy for the Watermead and Thurmaston area. Rather, the 2008 Core Strategy Further Consultation Report<sup>3</sup> makes a number of other references including: to Watermead Country Park and the River Soar and Grand Union Canal corridor within the Green infrastructure and Regeneration themes; and the area based approach to South Charnwood. Particularly relevant are the general regeneration priorities for the borough which seek to:

- Support the role and function of the Borough's district and local centres and to re-instil confidence in the larger towns and villages of Charnwood that serve as service centres by a variety of public realm improvements.
- Retain and create small employment centres within Service Centres to improve their sustainability and to replace local industrial employment that has been lost;
- To restructure existing employment space to allow the movement from traditional employment sectors to new high tech and knowledge based sectors and industrial floorspace to the provision of office space;
- To provide premises for, and support to, business start-ups and micro-businesses (including those in the creative sector) across the Borough; to ensure that

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/further\\_consultation\\_october\\_2008](http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/further_consultation_october_2008)

Charnwood can provide a spectrum of business property sizes of good quality and connectivity to accommodate growing businesses;

- To support existing businesses, and to ensure that Charnwood is seen as a business-friendly environment that encourages inward investment;
- To work with partners to improve the image of Charnwood and to positively market its economic potential;
- To develop Charnwood as an exemplar centre for low carbon living, working and travelling;
- To exploit the potential of Loughborough for the 2012 Olympics and use this as a catalyst to drive local regeneration and environmental improvement;
- To address the skills gap at both the lower and higher ends of the skills spectrum to meet changing requirements created by both business needs and climate change / sustainability drivers;
- To promote and link the Borough's tourism assets to provide a tourism destination / offer;
- To connect with and exploit regional links such as the National Forest, Great Central Railway, Grand Union Canal;
- To exploit Charnwood's waterfront (rivers, canal, Watermead Country Park) and open spaces (Charnwood Forest and possible linear park) better as an amenity for both residents and visitors and to provide better access for local residents; and
- Target New Growth Point funding to help to integrate new growth within existing communities and to help address issues of social exclusion and improve community cohesion;

The 2008 Core Strategy Further Consultation Report also sought views on the preparation of an Area Action Plan for the wider Thurmaston area with a view to regenerating the historic village centre and waterfront, improving community facilities and the public realm and addressing accessibility issues across the village. Although the response was small there was a consensus that this was a good idea.

Responses to the 2008 Core Strategy Further Consultation Report by land owners and developers have expressed a desire to bring development forward within the Watermead area. Further representations have been made in response to a call for potential development sites as part of the [Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment](#) (SHLAA)<sup>4</sup>. It is important that these ambitions are considered and balanced against other objectives in the Core Strategy.

The Further Consultation Report was the most recent consultation. Since then the new Government has moved to abolish regional planning and, despite some short-term legal issues, this may be reflected in the final draft of the CS for submission to a public examination before an independent inspector in late 2011 or early 2012.

#### [Charnwood Strategic Flood Risk Assessment \(2008\)](#)

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/shlaa>

A large area either side of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal, as far as Fosse Way in some parts on the eastern bank lie within Flood Zone 3a (High Probability of Flooding), representing a significant constraint to development. A plan showing the extent of flood risk will be available at the workshop.

#### [South Charnwood Transport Assessment \(April 2009\)](#)

A broad assessment of the transport implications of potential growth options in south Charnwood was undertaken by MVA Consultancy in April 2009 with further technical work undertaken in June. The work considered various growth options in three locations, between Anstey and Glenfield, Birstall and East of Thurmaston/North of Hamilton and permutations including growth options split between Anstey and Thurmaston and combinations of development mixes at Thurmaston.

The work showed that growth options focused at Anstey/Glenfield, in Birstall or split between Anstey and Thurmaston were not viable in transport terms at the scale of development tested as they give rise to impacts that are not considered acceptable in transport terms. The options involving development of around 5,000 dwellings and either 20ha or 50ha of employment east of Thurmaston were shown able to achieve an acceptable level of mitigation in congestion terms. This is because these options contain the greatest number of access points and therefore are able to disperse traffic more effectively than other options tested.

No decision has yet been taken on which options to pursue, but one of the report's key recommendations is that mitigation measures, such as greater investment in bus, cycling and walking routes will be essential to reduce the impact of increased travel demand. The study area contains opportunities to reduce existing and future traffic.

#### [6C's Green Infrastructure Strategy \(2010\)](#)

The '6Cs' are the City Councils of Derby, Leicester, Nottingham and the County Councils of their respective shires. Their Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy was launched in July 2010 and is based on a wide ranging study of existing GI assets in the sub-region. It contains a sub-regional framework, an action plan and baseline review, along with three more detailed analyses for each of the cities. The spatial framework is set at three levels: sub-regional, city-scale and urban fringe.

The River Soar corridor is identified as both a strategic sub-regional GI corridor and of city-scale importance to Leicester. The corridor in the vicinity of the study area is also identified as requiring urban fringe enhancement.

Whilst much of the work was intended to be funded through the last government's Growth Point initiative, of which the 6Cs was one, the survey work and conclusions are useful regardless of the funding streams that might be used.

#### [Charnwood Open Space Sport and Recreation Study \(2010\)](#)

This study provides an examination of existing areas of open space and sport and recreation facilities in Charnwood Borough and assesses them against standards developed in

consultation with local communities. The assessment considers their relative accessibility, quality and distribution and identifies the key issues for the future. The study also comprises a Playing Pitch Strategy, which was prepared in consultation with local teams and societies.

#### Birstall – significant issues:

- There is a large quantitative shortfall in the provision of amenity green space in Birstall, and there particular issues of accessibility in the east and the south
- There is no natural and semi-natural green space in Birstall although some residents in the east are within the catchment of natural and semi-natural green space in adjoining areas. The lack of informal recreational space in Birstall means that new provision should be considered, as well improvements in the quality of sites
- There is pressure on playing pitches for junior football and adult rugby. New pitches will however be provided as part of the development at Hallam Fields
- The Hallam Fields development will also provide new play areas in the North West, an area of deficiency of provision for children and young people.

#### Thurmaston - Significant Issues:

- There is a shortfall in the quantity of parks, and even though there is an even distribution, accessibility is affected by major transport routes
- There is a lack of provision for young people in the south of the village. Consideration should also be given to a destination play area in Thurmaston to serve the south of the borough. Residents in the south west are outside of the catchment for facilities for children and the quality of existing provision is poor
- There is a lack of provision of junior and mini pitches.
- Whilst some residents may benefit from being close to allotment provision in neighbouring areas, Thurmaston does not have any provision itself. Residents in the northwest of Thurmaston are outside the recommended distance of allotment provision.

#### Thurmaston - Other Issues:

- There is need for new burial space towards the end of the Core Strategy period to 2026.
- Watermead Country Park provides natural and semi-natural green space, but residents to the East of Thurmaston are outside the recommended distance to this type of open space and which is further affected by the barriers created by transport routes. There are also issues in terms of quantity and quality of amenity green space across Thurmaston, and issues of a lack of access to this provision in the west

#### Syston - Significant Issues:

- There is no natural or semi natural open space meaning a short fall in quantity and accessibility. There are also shortfalls of amenity green space, and residents in the east are outside the recommended distance to this type of open space meaning new provision may be required. Outside the east of the town, the park provision means that increased amenity green space provision is less important, and opportunities to

improve quality of provision will be priority. New provision will however be provided as part of new development at Barkby Road.

- Residents in the East of Syston are outside the recommended distance for facilities for children, a situation made worse by the barrier created by the railway line. New provision will be provided as part of developments on Barkby Road and Barkby Lane.
- In terms of facilities for young people, residents in East and West Syston are outside the recommended distance for these facilities.
- There are shortfalls in junior and mini football, and for cricket.
- Allotment provision is below the recommended standards and residents in the south and south west are outside the recommended catchment for this type of provision. There are also waiting lists.
- There is a need for further cemetery provision.

#### Wanlip - Significant Issues:

- Apart from the churchyard/cemetery and school, Wanlip lacks any other type of open space provision. The lack of open space provision means that opportunities for new provision (where demand exists) should be sought. Access routes to nearby spaces and the countryside will also be of particular significance.

#### Charnwood Borough Green Wedge Review

This study is currently being finalised and should be available in time for the second workshop in January.

#### [River Soar and Grand Union Canal Strategy \(2009\)](#)

This strategy was prepared by a partnership including British Waterways, the Waterways Trust and local authorities. It set a vision to “Maximise the Impact of the Waterway for the economic benefit of Leicestershire” through five key policy themes it identified as:

- Landscape and the natural environment
- Improving the urban offer and quality of place
- Development and heritage
- Green infrastructure; and
- The health agenda

The strategy identified three key themes of the: Green, Visible, and Accessible Waterway supported by nine objectives:

- Respecting the Natural Environment
- Development and Public Realm and Valuing Heritage
- Promote Green Transport
- Secure Funding

- Raising the Profile of the Waterway
- Inspiring Interest and Involvement
- Improving Access
- Optimising Waterway Activity
- Enhancing the Visitor Experience

These lead to the following interventions:

- Partnership
- Develop the Hubs (seven areas including Watermead Country Park)
- Improve the linkages to and along the Waterway
- Promotion of the Waterway

The strategy recognises the Watermead Country Park and its environs as Hub 5. The priority actions for the Hub are:

- Develop the proposed visitor centre to serve the Country Park and wider Soar Valley
- Provide enhanced marketing, interpretation and facilities at this key site
- Expansion of the existing public art
- Exciting new marina development on the Raynsway site with hotel and conference facilities as well as other mixed uses
- Introduction of a new Waterway festival/event

#### [Leicester and Leicestershire Employment Land Study \(2008\)](#)

This study found that the decline of industrial floorspace is forecast to continue, albeit at a lower rate. Office employment is forecast to increase but at a lower rate than in the past. Warehousing employment is forecast to remain relatively steady, following growth in the past. It recommended the allocation of 50ha of light industrial and small warehousing in the South Charnwood Strategic Urban Extensions (i.e. on land east of Thurmaston) primarily to meet the needs arising from a reorganisation of employment land sites in the City.

#### [Charnwood Employment Land Study \(2006\)](#)

This study found strengths in the representation of high-technology industries and weaknesses in the high levels of manufacturing jobs and the low share of financial and business services. It recognised that jobs within the Borough have been declining in recent years (but those that exist are relatively well-paid) reflecting the decline of manufacturing and the proximity of service sector jobs in Leicester and elsewhere. It recommended that immediate priority should be given to the land and property needs of high-technology employers and attracting the finance and service sector where this is possible.

Changed economic circumstances and government policy since this study might turn this finding on its head in that manufacturing industries are seen as important not just to broaden the economic base but to provide a route out of recession by virtue of exports.

Much of the remaining manufacturing is concentrated near to the study area. In terms of quantity, the study reported land requirements (including a margin for friction, or churn) for some 11 hectares of additional land for offices and a fall of 16 hectares in land for industry and warehousing, but considered that the forecasts underestimated the Borough's potential to attract office-based jobs.

#### Further work on Employment Supply

Further work has been done by Council Officers since the employment land studies were published. This takes into account all of the employment evidence as well as the changing economic conditions and suggests:

- South Charnwood needs over 7,000 more jobs to sustain its current population (this is for its own population, not to provide for any overspill for Leicester). For an average mix of jobs, this requires about 23 hectares (57 acres) of new employment land.
- To allow for expected population growth to 2026, South Charnwood would need about another 10 hectares (25 acres). This is what is required to match an average economic performance of similar areas
- This compares with a suggestion in the Leicester and Leicestershire Employment land Study (2008) that South Charnwood should have an extra 50 hectares of employment land associated with a new sustainable urban extension (SUE). However, this did include an allowance for overspill from Leicester City

There is a growing recognition that rather than concentrating all of the City's employment needs in one place (as part of an SUE for example) it may be preferable to spread some of it across other parts of the Leicester Principal Urban Area. The balance of employment needs will then need to be matched to the particular needs of various settlements, including places like Thurmaston, Syston, Anstey and Mountsorrel. This would help to maintain the vitality and commercial viability of existing settlements and to prevent them from becoming merely commuter settlements where the retail sector struggles to survive and service provision decays.

#### Charnwood Renewal Framework (2005)

The Renewal Framework was prepared in 2005 to inform the Leicestershire and Charnwood Community Strategies. It focused on education, employment, skills, health, housing and crime issues. The framework identified priority areas for economic regeneration, and included the south Charnwood and Soar Valley villages as a secondary priority. It identified four inter-related Renewal Themes as (1) Youth Aspirations and Positive Destinations, (2) Liveability – Living Places, (3) Learning, Skills and Employment, and (4) Community Engagement and Capacity Building. The findings fed into the Leicestershire Sustainable Communities Plan (SCP), to which the LDF must have regard.

## Priority Neighbourhood profiles (2010)

These Profiles are prepared by the County Council and provide statistical information on two of the settlements surrounding and included within the study area identified as Priority Neighbourhoods.

For Thurmaston, a population of 3,106 is reported in 2001, of which a higher than average proportion are aged 0-15 (22%) in comparison to the Borough and County (19%) and a lower than average proportion are of retirement age (17%) in comparison to the County (19%). There are 1,278 households with an average size of 2.4 persons. The BME population is 9.4%, the same as the Borough but higher than the County at 7.3%.

It reports a moderate level of deprivation, most commonly income deprivation affecting older people, education skills and training deprivation, and living environment deprivation. 17% of the population aged over 60 and 15% of the population under 16 are estimated to live in income deprived households. Average annual household income is well below District, County and National averages, 29% of people of employment age are economically inactive.

The area is limited in terms of Higher Education facilities. Under half of pupils (43%) achieve 5 or more GCSEs graded A\* to C compared to over half for the District and County (55% and 58% respectively), 6% of the LEA school population were excluded for an amount of time during 2005/2006, twice as many than for the District or the County.

Violence against the person and theft from stores account for 40% of crime and between 2005/06 and 2006/07 the number of offences increased by 10%. Rates of reported Domestic Violence are nearly twice as high than in the County of the District, and estimates show Thurmaston to have the second highest percentage of obesity of all the wards in Charnwood. Thurmaston has the largest outflow of persons travelling out of the ward to work in the whole of the District.

For Syston, it identifies a population of 4,185 in 2001 of which a smaller proportion are aged 16-29 (14%) than in the Borough (17%) or the County (16%), and a greater proportion (27%) are older than in the Borough (20%), the largest proportion of which are in the 65 to 74 age range. 2,974 people (71%) are of working age, of which 69% are economically active. Income is below the District, County and National average, 62% of persons claiming income support are female and the largest proportion of income support claimants are aged 25-49. The town has high levels of out-commuting.

Syston does not have high levels of deprivation and has good access to a range of education and health facilities, services and amenities; and that a below-average 37% voted in the May 2007 Borough Elections. It reports that offences overall are decreasing by 13% between 2005/06 and 2006/07. Rates of Domestic Violence are slightly higher than the District or County average and about a quarter of the population are estimated to be obese or smokers. Levels of obesity in Syston East are estimated to be amongst the highest in the district and the proportion of children eating the recommended daily allowance of fruit and is estimated to be amongst the smallest in Charnwood. Attainment at KS2 is below District and County levels and below the floor targets set for the County for 2006, fewer children achieve grades A\* to C at GCSE compared to the District and County and 3% were

excluded from school in 2005/06, a similar rate to the Borough and the County. Rates of teenage pregnancies are relatively low.

#### Thurmaston Village Masterplan (2005)

In 2005 the Borough Council in partnership with **Thurmaston Parish Council** commissioned Bellinger Design to prepare a masterplan to identify the areas within the village where enhancements might bring an improvement to its overall environmental quality and cohesion.

The masterplan identified village entrances, areas where quick environmental 'wins' can be achieved and pedestrian linkages with nodal points where effort will be concentrated to create an improvement in environmental quality of the public realm. The masterplan envisaged an enhancement of the village centre where a range of improvements including signage and surfaced footpaths are expected to create a positive connection between the village centre and the surrounding area.

A number of neighbourhood enhancement zones are identified across the village where there is potential to either improve or create a focus for the local community. These projects could be organised by the surrounding neighbourhood and would help to foster a sense of identity and a strong community spirit.

The village masterplan will be an important consideration in the preparation of a policy for the Watermead and Thurmaston waterfront areas. A copy of the masterplan map will be available at the workshop.

#### Sustrans Connect 2 Project

Sustrans is a national charity that aims to make journeys possible, desirable and inevitable by foot, bike or public transport for more every day journeys. Connect 2 is a programme of projects funded by the Big Lottery fund that seeks to fill in missing links in walking and cycling routes to create or complete networks.

As part of wider works to create consistent pedestrian and cycle access along the River Soar, improvements have been made to towpaths and bridges over the River Wreake at its confluence with the Soar and over the Grand Union Canal at the southern end of Watermead Park to improve access to it from Syston and Thurmaston and to the Leicester city cycling network. Opportunities remain to further improve the walking and cycling network in the study area through or in conjunction with Connect 2.

#### Places in Charnwood (2009)

This document is part of a series compiled by the community planning team at the County Council. Its purpose is to identify and highlight the priorities for individual places in Charnwood Borough, based on relevant and available data sources and information. The original series formed background evidence to the 2008 Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), which all DPD policies must take into account. Of the five area forums that contributed to the document in the Borough, the most relevant to the study area is the Syston, Thurmaston and Wreake Villages forum.

The key places are divided into Main Towns, Priority Neighbourhoods and Rural Service Centres. Birstall, Syston and Thurmaston are all listed as Main Towns and South Charnwood generally is listed as a Priority Neighbourhood.

The document reports that unemployment in Birstall is in line with the Borough average, average household income high at £31,000 with significant year on year increases in levels of income can be observed. Parts of Birstall rank low in Charnwood in terms of living environment, though otherwise deprivation is not widespread. The population is ageing, with 18.9% aged 65+, compared to 14.9% for the Borough. There is also above average representation in the 0-14 age group. Significant residential (500 dwellings) and employment development (4 hectares) is currently taking place at Hallam fields.

In respect of Syston, it reports that 84.7% of the working age population are economically active, the highest of the main towns in Charnwood. Unemployment is low at 2.6%, with a quarter of all jobs are manufacturing based, the proportion in high-end services lower than average. Household income varies is £32,000 in Syston West and £28,300 for Syston East, with significant and similar year-on-year increases. Amongst the lowest proportions in the county of 16 year-olds remain in education, at around 70%. Parts of Syston East are ranked in the top ten most deprived in Charnwood in terms of Education and Skills.

It reports that Thurmaston relies on the manufacturing industry for over one in three jobs and less than the average number of service sector jobs. It has the fifth lowest mean household income in Charnwood, at £26,350, the lowest outside Loughborough. It has the highest Asian or Asian-British population of the main towns in Charnwood at 17% in 2001. Just under two-thirds of residents consider themselves in “good health” – the lowest of the seven main settlements.

In respect of Wanlip, it reports that a Parish Plan completed in 2005/06 identified concern about increased traffic and safety; concerns about heavy vehicles in the village; desire for a 20 mph speed limit and improvements to the public realm as key issues.

### Leicester City Ward Profiles

The study area adjoins the City boundary and the two wards of Abbey and Rushey Mead.

According to the 2001 Census Abbey ward has a population of 12,713 of which 6,629 are female. The largest proportion of residents are within the 30-45 and 45-59 age groups (21% and 16% respectively). 78% of residents are white British and 13% are Indian. 56.5% class themselves as Christian, 9% as Hindu and 21% as having no religion.

In contrast Rushey Mead Ward has a population of 15,134 people of which 7,814 are female. The largest proportion of residents is also to be found in the 30-45 and 45-59 age groups (22% and 19%). 37% of residents are white British and 53.6% are Indian. 30% class themselves as Christian, 41% as Hindus and 8% as having no religion.

### Land ownership and Developer interests

The largest land ownerships in the area include those of Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, Murphy's and Raynsway Properties Limited. However a number of sites have also been put forward by people as submissions to the Council's

[Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment](#) (SHLAA). Many of the more obvious development opportunities are within these ownerships, though land assembly may be a constraint with respect to projects in or around Thurmaston Town Centre. Plans detailing land ownerships and developer interests will be available at the workshop.



Murphy's ownership

# Summary

National policy encourages the type of area-specific approach that is envisaged where it leads to the integration of environmental, economic and social objectives, addresses climate change, results in a spatial plan and high quality design and access policies, and is reached through community involvement.

It also encourages sustainable economic development that protects the countryside, supports tourist and visitor facilities, facilitates cycling, walking and public transport use and limits car parking and use. It also recognises the recreational potential of urban fringe locations, water features and rights of way.

National policies on flooding are based on reducing overall risk through locating vulnerable uses away from high risk area and designing to mitigate flood risk and impact. Large parts of the study area are at risk of flooding, though several important sites are at lower risk and opportunities exist to improve flood performance overall.

Earlier consultation versions of the Core Strategy have suggested considerable growth in the wider vicinity of the study area. Whether or not this occurs, there is a need and the opportunity to improve green infrastructure and to provide new walking and cycling links for existing or future residents that will mitigate traffic growth.

The River Soar and Grand Union Canal Strategy (2009) has already identified a number of opportunities that exist within the study area and beyond, and set out possible actions to help realise the benefits of the waterway to residents along its course and nearby. This policy seeks to build on that work and facilitate delivery mechanisms.

Key to delivering the many opportunities that exist will be the potential for sustainable economic development to enable many of the changes needed. There is evidence of a pressing need for the economic development of the study area to improve outcomes for local people and to serve a sub-regional employment role. The opportunity exists now to combine these development needs to create a more attractive place within both the waterway corridor and Thurmaston waterfront itself.