

## CHAPTER 6: RURAL LAND AND ECONOMY

### Introduction

- 6.1 The Borough is an area facing strong pressures for change. At present it contains extensive tracts of countryside and open land, much of which is particularly attractive. The local differences in character and appearance between areas reflect factors such as local geology, landform, settlement pattern and the influence of man over time. The rural areas are a resource much valued by those who live and work within them, visit them for recreation, or merely travel through. Around settlements these open areas are fundamental to the identity and separation of individual communities.
- 6.2 The landscape reflects the cumulative effects of natural, social and economic change over time. It will continue to evolve in response to future needs and demands. Over the plan period the rural areas will face further change, to provide in part for the needs of urban and other development, and also for recreation and other needs of local people. In some areas there will be changes as the rural economy moves away from its traditional reliance on agricultural production, and land is 'set-aside' from productive use.
- 6.3 The Local Plan has a key role to play by guiding development in the areas outside the built-up areas. There is a need to safeguard the countryside, avoid danger of coalescence between settlements, and protect local landscapes. This is particularly important in those areas facing the most pressure to accommodate development.

### Government Guidance

- 6.4 PPG7 'The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development' February 1997 sets out the factors to be considered in land use planning for rural areas. These cover the need to encourage rural enterprise; to protect landscape, wildlife and historic features; safeguard best and most versatile agricultural land; have regard to the quality and versatility of land for use in forestry and other rural enterprises; strengthen rural communities; achieve good quality development which respects the character of the countryside and secure safe development. The guiding principle in the countryside is to ensure development benefits economic activity and maintains or enhances the environment. The PPG indicates that building in the open countryside away from existing settlements or from areas allocated for developments should be strictly controlled. It is recognised that whilst agriculture will remain the main rural land use farmers will continue to diversify to other activities to supplement incomes.
- 6.5 The 1995 White Paper 'Rural England' – A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside' provides a comprehensive review of rural policy. It restates the need to sustain the economy of rural areas whilst ensuring conservation of the rural environment. The emphasis is on sustainable development by strengthening villages and towns, protecting the countryside and reducing the need to travel for all activities.

### Leicestershire Structure Plan and Related Guidance

- 6.6 The Structure Plan recognises the importance of safeguarding the countryside for its own sake whilst providing for development to support the rural economy. It contains general guidance seeking to safeguard areas of particularly attractive countryside, areas of local landscape value, green wedges, areas of local separation, and the best and most versatile farmland.
- 6.7 With regard to Charnwood the Structure Plan acknowledges that there would be serious environmental consequences if the Borough were to provide development to meet all of its forecast natural increase in population. The level of provision in Charnwood has therefore been reduced to reflect the environmental limits to development capacity in the Borough and increased in Districts with fewer constraints.

## The Charnwood Perspective

6.8 It is possible to distinguish four broad landscape areas in the Borough:

i) **Charnwood Forest**

The western part of the Borough contains the highest land with Beacon Hill at 248 metres above sea level. The landscape has an undulating ridge and valley form. The character of the underlying geology is reflected in the rugged appearance with rocky outcrops and quarrying activities at Longcliffe and Buddon Wood. There are numerous areas of woodland both ancient and more recently planted. There is a high level of ecological and scientific interest and amenity value. The landscape is generally a patchwork of hedge and tree lined fields with occasional dry stone walling. There has been some loss of features as a result of mechanised farming. The area has few settlements and is dotted with farmsteads. Traditional buildings are constructed of local materials, usually granite walls and slate roofs. Bradgate Park, The Outwoods, Beacon Hill and Broombriggs Farm are major outdoor recreation attractions. To the east the landform shelves gradually to the valley of the river Soar.

ii) **River Valleys**

The River Soar follows a corridor running north west to south east through the heart of the Borough. The river's main tributaries are the Blackbrook, north of Loughborough, and the Rothley Brook. At Rothley the Soar merges with the river Wreake which follows a narrower valley to the north east towards Melton Mowbray. The valleys of the rivers and the main tributaries are low-lying, generally at and below the 60 metres contour. The river valleys are characterised by pastoral farming. The traditional small-scale landscape of hedge and tree lined fields has in parts given way to a more open fabric as arable practices have increased. Elsewhere the landscape has been greatly modified by the impact of sand and gravel extraction especially in the south of the Borough. Both valleys are important communication corridors with a dense settlement pattern alongside as towns and villages have developed at the edge of the flood plain.

iii) **The Wolds**

East of the Soar Valley and north of the Wreake valley the landform rises gently towards a flat area around Six Hills at 130 metres above sea level. A rolling landscape is created by streams running in deep valleys generally in a south-west to north-easterly axis. This is the most important agricultural area, especially for arable farming. There is a scattering of small, traditional villages and hamlets and many farmsteads. The landscape has an open fabric with some pockets of woodland. The British Gypsum mine at Barrow upon Soar and the disused Wymeswold Airfield are alien features in the Wolds countryside.

iv) **High Leicestershire**

To the south of the Wreake valley the land rises away to the south east with a ridge and valley landscape on a south-east to north west axis. Reaching to 125 metres above sea level this undulating landscape marks the edge of the "High Leicestershire" area. This is an agricultural area. Villages are small, based around groups of traditional farmsteads, and in the case of Barkby around an historic hall.

6.9 Outside the built-up areas there are likely to be continuing pressures for change over the plan period. These include:

- i) **New development:** This includes housing, roads, employment areas, and recreation facilities. These individually and together will need to be carefully planned in order to minimise threats to the character and appearance of the countryside and the identity of individual communities.

- ii) **Changes in the Rural Economy:** The current landscape has resulted from interaction of estate management and farming over the years. In coming years measures such as 'set-aside' may bring further change to the landscape. Profitable agricultural businesses are necessary for the maintenance of the countryside with its characteristic features. Changes in methods of agricultural support and farm policies are reducing farm incomes and putting an increasing number of businesses at risk. Diversification of farm businesses provides an avenue for farmers to respond to these economic trends.
- iii) **Opportunities for Recreation:** The continual visitor pressure on popular recreation areas such as Bradgate Park, Beacon Hill and the Outwoods could damage the very quality of the environment which attracts visitors in the first place. Alternative attractions are needed to relieve pressure on the overused areas and provide new experiences. Farming will continue to be the dominant land use in the rural area. Diversification of the rural economy could create opportunities to provide new recreation and amenity areas.
- iv) **Mineral Extraction:** The Borough is an area rich in natural resources. There is likely to be continuing pressure for mineral extraction for roadstone, gypsum and sand and gravel.
- v) **Flood Alleviation Measures:** The completion of flood defence works along the river Soar as far south as Quorn may affect in the longer term the landscape, ecology and management of the wider river valley. Such measures are also to be put into effect on the Barkby Brook to alleviate flooding in central Syston.
- vi) **National Forest:** The defined area of the National Forest includes parts of the Charnwood Forest area and offers considerable opportunities for new woodland planting and habitat creation as well as new recreation and access opportunities and rural economic development where this is consistent with policies to safeguard the countryside and landscape.

## Aims and Objectives

- 6.10 The Local Plan needs to provide a policy framework for the rural areas to balance potentially conflicting users and interests. In overall terms the aims are to:
- i) identify areas of Green Wedge and other open land necessary to preserve the separate identity of settlements;
  - ii) protect the character and appearance of the countryside for its own sake, especially within areas of particularly attractive countryside and other areas of local landscape value;
  - iii) facilitate the diversification of the rural economy including the promotion of the National Forest;
  - iv) give considerable weight to the conservation of the best and most versatile agricultural land as a national resource.
- 6.11 The policies and proposals seek to address the following broad objectives with regard to the countryside in the Borough:-
- i) to safeguard and enhance the character, appearance and amenity value of the countryside for its own sake by controls and restrictions on development;
  - ii) to safeguard the role of farming as the dominant land use in areas of countryside and open land in the Borough;
  - iii) to ensure that clear separation is retained between communities;
  - iv) to improve the appearance of, access to and public enjoyment of the rural areas;
  - v) to resolve conflicts between rural interests by the control of development, proper management of the countryside and the promotion of a greater understanding of countryside issues;

- vi) to encourage respect for the countryside in all development proposals;
- vii) to support and encourage the creation of the National Forest;
- viii) to encourage the planting of native trees and woodlands.

## **General Principles for Areas of Countryside, Green Wedge and Local Separation**

### **6.12 POLICY CT/1**

**Land lying outside the defined Limits to Development is variously identified on the Proposals Map as Countryside, Green Wedge and Areas of Local Separation.**

**Development within these areas of generally open land will be strictly controlled. Planning permission will be granted for the re-use and adaptation of rural buildings for uses suitable in scale and nature, and small-scale new built development, where there would not be a significant adverse environmental impact and the proposal would:**

- i) be essential for the efficient long-term operation of agriculture, horticulture or forestry; or**
- ii) facilitate the diversification of the rural economy; or**
- iii) improve facilities for recreation, or leisure uses; or**
- iv) implement strategically important schemes for mineral related uses, transport infrastructure, and for public services or utilities.**

**In all cases it should be demonstrated that the proposed development could not reasonably be located within or adjacent to an existing settlement.**

*(See also in particular Policies CT/2, CT/3, CT/4, CT/6, CT/15)*

- 6.13 National planning policy guidance emphasises the need to protect the countryside for its own sake. With the reduced dependency upon agriculture the imperative now is to enable new forms of rural enterprise to sustain the rural economy while protecting the countryside for the sake of its natural beauty, the diversity of its landscape and its ecological, agricultural and recreational value. Policy CT/1 sets out those uses that will be acceptable in principle in the countryside and will apply with other countryside policies in the plan.
- 6.14 The Structure Plan also requires the definition of Green Wedges and allows for the identification of areas of local separation as discrete policy areas quite distinct from the countryside.
- 6.15 The guiding principles within these areas of essentially open land will be to ensure that new development is small scale and does not adversely affect the appearance and character of the landscape. Wherever possible new development should be focussed on towns and villages in locations which reduce travel needs and extend transport choice accessibility. Particular care must be exercised in allowing development even for so called "soft uses" such as recreation. The quality of agricultural land and the landscape character will be important considerations.

## **Development in the Countryside**

### **6.16 POLICY CT/2**

**In areas defined as Countryside, development(s) acceptable in principle will be permitted where it would not harm the character and appearance of the countryside and provided it could safeguard its historic, nature conservation, amenity, and other local interest.**

*(See also in particular Policies CT/1, CT/6)*

- 6.17 Whilst it is recognised some new development will be necessary outside settlements, the countryside within the plan area will be protected from inappropriate or harmful developments. The range of developments acceptable in principle is defined in Policy CT/1.

## Development in Green Wedges

### 6.18 POLICY CT/3

**In the Green Wedge areas development acceptable in principle will be permitted where it would:**

- i) protect the predominately open and undeveloped character of the area; and**
- ii) be consistent with safeguarding the area's function to provide, strategically important separation between settlements; and**
- iii) maintain or enhance public access for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders compatible with land use activities; and**
- iv) secure landscape improvements usually in the form of tree groups and woodland.**

**The green wedges are defined on the Proposals Map. They include land between:**

- i) Leicester (Beaumont Leys)/Birstall/Thurcaston/Anstey/Cropston;**
- ii) Birstall/Leicester/Thurmaston (Soar Valley North);**
- iii) Beaumont Leys/Glenfrith/Anstey/Groby;**
- iv) Syston/Thurmaston (east of Melton Road);**
- v) Loughborough/Shepshed;**
- vi) Loughborough/Quorn;**
- vii) Loughborough/Hathern.**

*(See also in particular Policies ST/1(v), CT/1, CT/6)*

- 6.19 The guiding principle of Green Wedge policy is to safeguard those areas of structurally important open land around Leicester and Loughborough which provide important separation between communities, and so help protect the individual identities of those communities. Apart from protecting and enhancing these predominantly open areas it will also be important to improve access to them given their proximity to the main areas of population, and to secure landscape improvements. Further guidance on green wedge policy is included at Policy ST/1(v) and paragraph 2.31.
- 6.20 Green Wedge areas face continuing pressure to accommodate new development. The consideration of individual proposals will have regard to the cumulative impact of change in these areas and how it is affecting their overall character, appearance, and function.
- 6.21 Development in Green Wedges will only be acceptable for certain uses provided they do not damage the open and undeveloped character of the Wedge. The range of appropriate development is defined in Policy CT/1. Further background information is set out in Technical Report No.3. Proposals for transport routes or infrastructure located in green wedges will be allowed only in exceptional circumstances. The environmental impact of such schemes will need to be controlled to safeguard the open and undeveloped character of the locality.
- 6.22 The Borough Council will also use all available powers to maintain and improve the overall environment of the Green Wedges and encourage their positive management.

## Development in Areas of Local Separation

### 6.23 POLICY CT/4

In areas of local separation development acceptable in principle will only be permitted where the location, scale and design of development would ensure that:

- i) the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the area is retained; and
- ii) the already narrow gap between settlements is not reduced.

Areas of local separation are defined on the Proposals Map to include land between:

- a) Loughborough/Woodthorpe;
- b) Quorn/Mountsorrel;
- c) Mountsorrel/Rothley (East and West of Mountsorrel Lane);
- d) Sileby/Cossington;
- e) Sileby/Barrow upon Soar;
- f) Thurcaston/Cropston/The Ridgeway Area of Rothley;
- g) Wanlip/Birstall;
- h) Rearsby/East Goscote;
- i) East Goscote/Queniborough;
- j) Queniborough/Syston
- k) Syston/Thurmaston (west of Melton Road);
- l) Syston Barkby;
- m) Anstey/Newtown Linford

*(See also in particular Policies CT/1, CT/6)*

- 6.24 The dense settlement pattern alongside the Soar and Wreake river valley and on the edge of Leicester and Loughborough results in narrow gaps between many of the settlements. In previous local plan exercises local residents have stressed the importance they place on preserving the separate identities of communities. These already narrow gaps should remain predominantly open and undeveloped to secure effective separation. The range of appropriate development is defined in Policy CT/1. Further background information on the evolution of this policy is set out in Technical Report No.2.

## Local Separation – The Ridgeway Area of Rothley

### 6.25 POLICY CT/5

Planning permission for appropriate development within the Ridgeway Separation policy area defined on the Proposals Map will be granted where all the following criteria are met:

- i) the character and appearance of the countryside is not harmed;
- ii) the separation between the residential areas and between those areas and the village of Rothley and Mountsorrel is not unacceptably reduced;
- iii) the historic and architectural interest of the individual residential areas and their open setting in the landscape are safeguarded;
- iv) the amenities of existing properties are not adversely affected.

*(See also in particular Policies CT/1, CT/6, H/20)*

- 6.26 The Ridgeway area of Rothley is quite unique in Charnwood deriving its spacious and dignified character in a mature landscaped setting from the concepts of the Garden City movement of the early 20th Century. The area comprises three distinct enclaves of residential development separated by areas of open land from one another and from the neighbouring settlements of Rothley and Mountsorrel. The range of appropriate development is defined in Policy CT/1.
- 6.27 The residential areas are contained by the defined Limits to Development and the Borough Council is anxious to ensure that any further development within them does not damage the unique character and appearance of the area. Accordingly any development proposals will be determined within the context provided by policy H/20.
- 6.28 Clearly the residential enclaves derive their particular character from the areas of open land which surround them and the Borough Council therefore attaches considerable importance to the retention of these spaces to prevent consolidation and to resist any trend towards coalescence with the villages of Mountsorrel and Rothley. Given the particular characteristics of this area it is not considered that countryside policy alone could achieve that objective while the purpose of local separation policy is to preserve the separate identity of settlements, rather than separate communities within the same settlement. Accordingly the Council is persuaded that the historical and environmental considerations which combine to lend this area its unique character and quality justify the designation of a specific separation policy for the Ridgeway Area.

## **Planning Criteria for Development in Areas of Countryside, Green Wedges and Local Separation**

### **6.29 POLICY CT/6**

**Where development is acceptable in principle in the countryside, Green Wedges or Areas of Local Separation planning permission will be granted provided all the following criteria are met:**

- i) any buildings are sited where possible in association with existing buildings and structures and are themselves not intrusive in the landscape;**
- ii) the form, mass, scale and design of the proposed development including any access roads, would conform with the established character and appearance of the site and its surroundings;**
- iii) colours and textures of materials used would blend with the local environment;**
- iv) existing trees, hedges, walls, ponds, water courses and other important features are retained and integrated into the proposals;**
- v) visual and acoustic screening/landscaping is provided where necessary on a scale and of a nature in conformity with the site and its surroundings. Where appropriate landscaping works will be required outside the development site by legal agreement;**
- vi) the proposal does not generate noise, dust, fumes, smell, light or other nuisance to the detriment of residential or visual amenities and the enjoyment of the area by other users;**
- vii) the proposal would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile farmland;**
- viii) essential agricultural and forestry operations are not prejudiced;**
- ix) existing off-road public access for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders is maintained and, where practicable, extended when compatible with land use activities.**

*(See also in particular Policies EV/2, EV/3, CT/1, CT/2, CT/3, CT/4, CT/5)*

- 6.30 Where development proposals are acceptable in principle in the countryside, Green Wedges and areas of local separation having regard to the policy context provided by Policies CT/1 to CT/5. It will be important to ensure that their implementation is compatible with the local environment. This guidance will apply to all proposals for development and changes of use requiring planning permission.

## Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside

### 6.31 POLICY CT/7

**Within the designated Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside planning permission will be granted for uses where the proposal would not detract from the essentially undeveloped rural character of the landscape, damage natural features and landform or diminish the visual amenities afforded by important viewpoints by reason of:**

- i) the introduction of prominent, visually obtrusive or incongruous elements by reason of poor siting, design construction and landscaping; or**
- ii) the use of materials or designs incompatible with the traditional vernacular or otherwise unsuitable due to their colour or reflective qualities;**
- iii) the removal of traditional buildings and structures, or particular elements of them, or other landscape features which contribute to the special character and appearance of the locality.**

**Where development is acceptable in principle it will be expected to maintain or enhance the character and appearance of the landscape.**

**Proposals by statutory agencies involving the construction of large buildings or structures, including overhead power lines, will be acceptable where they are shown to be essential to operational requirements, and are located to minimise the visual impact on the landscape.**

*(See also in particular Policy CT/1)*

- 6.32 The plan area contains three areas where the landscape is of sufficient quality to merit designation within an 'Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside' (A.P.A.C). Each definition continues beyond the local plan area into other districts. Within each defined area there may be pockets of relatively ordinary landscape but it is the overall area which functions as the defined APAC.
- 6.33 Each APAC possesses distinct characteristics. The Charnwood Forest area has an intimate character due to frequent and irregular changes in topography. It is an area largely free from dereliction with a rich ecological diversity, hard rock outcrops, extensive tracts of woodland, water features and dispersed farmsteads in the vernacular style. The widespread use of local building materials including Swithland slate and stone in many of the buildings in the small dispersed villages give the area a common theme and unique quality. Much of the designated area falls within the National Forest area where policies will be applied to enhance and diversify the landscape, enrich natural habitats, improve recreation and public access, and foster the aims of rural diversification in a manner compatible with the special landscape characteristics of this area.
- 6.34 The northern Wreake Valley is a small scale intimate valley landscape which for the most part retains much of its unspoilt rural character. North of East Goscote small largely unspoilt villages stand on the higher land either side of the valley, sitting comfortably in the landscape. From the higher land to the north-west and south-east fine views across the river valley can be enjoyed.

- 6.35 High Leicestershire is an extensive tract of upland landscape focused on Tilton-on-the-Hill to the east of the Borough. This landform extends into Charnwood around South Croxton to meet the lower lying landscape of the eastern edge of the Wreake Valley. The landform comprises three valleys where the Gaddesby, Queniborough and Barkby Brooks flow north-westwards eventually to join the River Wreake. On either side of these watercourses the land forms a series of ridgelines sloping down to the river valley. The area is characterised by dispersed farmsteads and small unspoilt villages like South Croxton, Barkby and Beeby. For the most part the area is unaffected by large scale built development. With the exception of Barkby Holt, tree cover is limited to strong planting along the brooks coupled with a few isolated stands of woodland. Visually the area forms the western edge of the more extensive area of High Leicestershire where pleasing long range views can be enjoyed across a broad sweep of countryside largely unspoilt by built development. More background information is set out in Technical Report No.1.
- 6.36 The specific guidance for the APAC provides an additional cover above other normally applicable policies. The range of appropriate uses is defined in policy CT/1. It will be applied to ensure development in the APAC is strictly controlled, and to safeguard those features which contribute to the special character and appearance of the designated areas.
- 6.37 The Charnwood Forest area is one of the most important areas of landscape, ecological and geological interest in Leicestershire. It is subject to pressures for change especially related to recreation and mineral extraction and is worthy of special protection. The Borough Council would support any efforts to designate the area, for example, as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## **Soar Valley Area of Local Landscape Value**

### **6.38 POLICY CT/8**

**Within the Soar Valley area of local landscape value planning permission will be granted for development where the proposal would not damage the intimate pastoral character based on a water meadow landscape nor impair its ecological interest by reason of:**

- i) the introduction of prominent, visually obtrusive or incongruous elements in terms of siting, design, construction and landscaping; or,**
- ii) the use of materials or designs incompatible with the river valley character or otherwise unsuitable due to their colour or reflective qualities;**
- iii) the removal of buildings and structures, or particular elements of them, or other landscape features which contribute to the special character and appearance of the locality;**

**Where development is acceptable in principle it will be expected to maintain or enhance the character and appearance of the landscape.**

*(See also in particular Policy CT/9)*

- 6.39 The valley of the River Soar is an important natural resource which also serves as a principal communications and settlement corridor. It is an area which faces continuing pressures for change from new road schemes, sand and gravel extraction, flood alleviation measures, the encroachment of urban development, demand for recreation and rural diversification. The river valley is flanked by the most densely populated parts of the Borough with about 60 per cent of its population living within a mile of either side of the valley.
- 6.40 The area is particularly vulnerable given its linear form, close proximity to settlements and the open nature of the landscape. Many parts are prominent in views from adjacent higher land. The traditional landscape qualities should be safeguarded from inappropriate development. All new development which demonstrates a need to locate in the 'Area of Local Landscape Value' will need to be sympathetic with the area's special character and appearance. It will also need to ensure that there is no adverse impact on the floodplain of the river Soar, and that any necessary compensatory measures are included as part of a proposal.

## Environmental Improvement of the Countryside, Green Wedge and Areas of Local Separation

### 6.41 POLICY CT/9

In the determination of planning applications for development in the areas of countryside, green wedge and local separation, but in particular within the Soar Valley Area of Local Landscape Value and elsewhere in the Countryside Priority Area identified on the Proposals Map, the Borough Council will seek to secure environmental improvements compatible with existing land-use activities in terms of:

- i) improvement of rights of way and off-road access for walkers, cyclist and horse-riders, as a co-ordinated network;
- ii) the protection or enhancement of traditional natural habitats of ecological value and the creation of new areas;
- iii) upgrading natural landscape cover of trees, hedges, woodland and other habitats using traditional plant species and other features;
- iv) implementation of countryside management projects;
- v) safeguarding or enhancement of key features of acknowledged archaeological or landscape interest;
- vi) reclamation of derelict land;
- vii) reducing the intrusiveness of existing unsympathetic development by securing comprehensive landscaping as part of any proposals for conversion or extension of buildings;
- viii) better integration of new development including transport schemes and service installations into the landscape.

*(See also in particular Policies CT/1, CT/2, CT/3, CT/4, CT/5, CT/6, CT/7, CT/8)*

6.42 The open land within the plan area is for the most part attractive or unspoilt. However there are areas which would benefit from improvement by the removal of unsightly features and creating better public access. Implementation of measures will create opportunities for informal recreation which take pressure off the most popular areas. The Countryside Priority Area is an area where improvements are required. The County Council's "Countryside 2000" document gives guidance on the conservation and enhancement of rural landscapes. Local Plans must include policies in respect of the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of the land and for improving the physical environment.

6.43 The Proposed Soar Valley Area of Local Landscape Value is an area in need of particular attention. Whilst much of the river valley is pleasant, in parts attractive, there are areas where the natural landscape requires regeneration and traditional management. The 'Wanlip Action Area Plan' and 'Management Scheme' for Watermead Country Park prepared by the County Council together with the Borough and Leicester City Councils has helped the successful restoration of the area of the valley penetrating the Leicester urban area where past sand and gravel extraction has ravaged the landscape. The preparation of an 'Improvement Scheme' for the 'Area of Local Landscape Value' could help safeguard and enhance the traditional qualities of the river valley. At the same time improved public access could increase the river valley's value for informal recreation and tourism. The river valley has a role to play as an alternative to Charnwood Forest for many informal recreation trips, using footpaths and rights of way with little or no harmful environmental impact. It is immediately accessible to people living in adjoining settlements. More background information is set out in Technical Report No.6.

6.44 The Environment Agency in August 2001 published a 'Soar Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP) Consultation Report' for the river's catchment area. This sets out a framework for protecting and improving the local environment on a partnership basis with the intention to direct resources to where they are most needed. The aim is to ensure a balance is achieved between the conflicting demands placed upon this natural resource.

- 6.45 The measures should be seen as inter-dependent and the aim is to secure an acceptable balance between them to the benefit of the areas of open land. Measures will be implemented after they have been discussed and agreed with landowners and interested parties. The Local Plan guidance provides a general context for the assessment of individual schemes as they arise. The Borough Council will seek to negotiate contributions from development to the implementation of measures where this is reasonably and directly related to it. Where resources allow initiatives for specific improvements will be considered for direct funding.

## Rural Diversification

### 6.46 POLICY CT/10

**Planning permission will be granted for proposals to diversify the rural economy in locations outside the Limits to Development defined on the Proposals Map provided all the following criteria are met:**

- i) **the proposal enables economic activity likely to retain or provide additional jobs in rural areas;**
- ii) **features of landscape, ecological or historic importance are properly safeguarded;**
- iii) **the proposal would not generate significant noise or, other nuisance problems;**
- iv) **levels of traffic generated would not be detrimental to the quality of the rural environment or highway safety;**
- v) **any new buildings and structures or extensions to existing buildings would be small-scale and essential for the proposed use.**

*(See also in particular Policies CT/1 to CT/9 and CT/18)*

- 6.47 The maintenance of the rural landscape depends on a successful rural economy. Structural changes taking place in agriculture suggest a continuing need to diversify away from traditional practices to achieve a stronger economic base and wider employment opportunities. However any change must not take place at the expense of the character and appearance of the countryside.
- 6.48 A range of alternative uses may be acceptable on existing farms and farmsteads such as processing farm produce and timber, craft manufacture and the repair and renovation of agricultural machinery, farm shops, direct sale of pick-your-own fruit and vegetables, holiday accommodation, catering, facilities for sport and recreation, education facilities related to farming/countryside issues, and livery for horses and ponies. Whilst large areas of land might be subject to diversification it is intended that new built development will be strictly controlled.

## New Dwellings for Farm and Forestry Workers

### 6.49 POLICY CT/11

**New housing development, including conversions, in locations outside the limits to development shown on the Proposals Map will be strictly controlled.**

**New permanent dwellings will be permitted where they support existing agricultural activities on well-established agricultural or forestry units, and provided all the following criteria are met:**

- i) **suitable accommodation is not available on the unit or in the locality, and could not be provided by conversion of an existing farm building on the site; and**
- ii) **the dwelling is acceptable in terms of siting, size, design and external appearance and would not harm the character and appearance of the locality; and**
- iii) **functional requirements of the unit justify a full-time worker living on site.**

**Temporary and removable agricultural accommodation will be granted where essential to support a new agricultural or forestry activity where the following criteria are met:**

- a) it is demonstrated that there is clear evidence of a firm intention and ability to develop the enterprise and that it is planned on a sound financial basis; and
- b) there is a proven functional need; and
- c) suitable accommodation is not available on the unit or in the locality; and
- d) the accommodation is in a location where a new permanent dwelling would be acceptable.

Temporary accommodation must be removed at the end of the permitted period if a new dwelling is not justified.

Any accommodation permitted will be subject to a condition limiting the occupation of the dwelling to a person solely, mainly, or last working in the locality in agriculture or forestry, a widow or widower of such a person, and to any resident dependents.

Where the approved accommodation is an additional dwelling on a particular unit then as well as imposing an occupancy condition on that dwelling, the Borough Council will consider whether there is a need to impose the same or a similar condition on any existing dwellings on the unit which are under the control of the applicant.

- 6.50 New permanent residential accommodation in locations outside the defined limits to development will be restricted to those occasions where the specific needs of farm and forestry workers justify accommodation on the basis of a technical appraisal carried out before determining any planning application, and where the accommodation satisfies planning considerations including current government guidance as set out in Annex I to PPG7 'The Countryside: Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development'. For clarification, paragraph 15(b) of that guidance says that the need relates to a full time worker, or one who is primarily employed in agriculture.
- 6.51 In exceptional circumstances permission may be granted for mobile accommodation for a temporary period to help assist in the establishment of a farm or forestry enterprise, and a permanent dwelling would be appropriate. Such circumstances would usually be where it is clearly demonstrated and that the scale of investment and long-term commitment would enable the normal test of viability to be met by the end of the temporary period. If at the end of the temporary period a permanent dwelling is not justified the mobile accommodation must be removed. Caravans and mobile homes can have a detrimental effect on the environment and amenity value of an area and their location will be treated in the same way as a permanent dwelling.
- 6.52 The Borough Council will impose occupancy conditions to ensure that new accommodation and, where appropriate, existing accommodation on a farm unit are restricted to use by people suitably involved in farming or forestry or defined dependents.

## **Removal of Restrictions on Occupancy of Dwellings**

### **6.53 POLICY CT/12**

**Planning permission for the retention of a dwelling without compliance with a condition restricting occupancy will not be granted unless the Borough Council can be satisfied that:**

- i) a long term need for the occupancy condition no longer exists in the locality; and
- ii) there is clear evidence of a genuine effort having been made to sell or rent the dwelling to prospective occupiers able to comply with the occupancy condition.

- 6.54 Occupancy conditions are used to limit the occupation of dwellings in the rural areas to those for whom it is essential to live at or in the vicinity of their workplace; usually for those who work in forestry or agriculture. This approach will help avoid the proliferation of dwellings outside the defined Limits to Development.
- 6.55 An occupancy condition will only be removed if an applicant demonstrates the property has been marketed for a period of at least 18 months at a realistic price reflecting the location and condition of the property and that no interest has been shown in its occupation on a restricted basis.

## **Riding Stables, Kennels and Similar Establishments**

### **6.56 POLICY CT/13**

**Proposals for loose boxes and stables for recreational purposes which do not require on-site supervision and management will be granted planning permission in locations outside the Limits to Development defined on the Proposals Map where they meet the following criteria:-**

- i) any buildings and structures are of a design, siting and materials, and suitably landscaped, to harmonise with the character and appearance of a locality; and**
- ii) the proposed use would not result in traffic generation, noise, smell or other nuisance unacceptable in its effect on residential amenity, highway safety and the rural character of locality.**

**Larger-scale proposals for riding stables and all proposals for kennels and similar establishments which because of their nature require full-time, on-site supervision and management will only be permitted where an acceptable scheme is submitted in association with, and in close proximity to, an existing dwelling.**

- 6.57 Recreational and commercial schemes involving the care of animals are becoming increasingly popular in locations outside towns and villages. Where these schemes require planning permission the approach will be to ensure they are compatible with residential areas and there is not an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the countryside. This is in line with government guidance seeking to strictly control development in locations outside built-up areas. It is also consistent with the move towards farm diversification and other appropriate changes in the countryside.
- 6.58 In the case of larger scale proposals for riding stables, kennels and similar establishments there may be a need for residential accommodation to enable effective on-site supervision, management and ensure security. Such residential provision will not fall for consideration under the functional and financial tests set out in Policy CT/11, as these uses are not agriculture or forestry related. Rather it will be a requirement that residential needs are provided for in existing dwellings at the outset as part of an overall proposal. This will help avoid the cumulative and damaging effect of sporadic new developments in the countryside. The Borough Council may attach a condition to any planning permission tying the occupation of a dwelling to the related enterprise.
- 6.59 The use of existing farm buildings and erection of new buildings within existing groups of farm buildings would be the most effective means of reducing the landscape impact of such development, as well as securing beneficial use of buildings.

## **Replacement Dwellings**

### **6.60 POLICY CT/14**

**Planning permission for the replacement of an existing dwelling in a location outside the Limits to Development will not be granted unless all the following criteria are met:**

- i) the replacement would not result in the loss of a building acknowledged to be of local historic or architectural interest;**
- ii) the original building is unsuitable for habitation and/or not viable to repair;**

- iii) **the proposed replacement dwelling represents only a modest change in the size of the original property and is of a mass, height, colour, design and materials compatible with the traditional character and appearance of the locality;**
- iv) **the proposed replacement dwelling is on the site of the original dwelling or, if appropriate, in a siting elsewhere within the curtilage where there would be a less damaging visual impact and provided that the original dwelling is demolished;**
- v) **there is no increase in the number of dwellings on the site;**
- vi) **there would be no significant adverse impact on the amenities enjoyed by neighbouring properties.**

*(See also in particular Policy EV/8)*

- 6.61 Areas of open land outside the Limits to Development contain many dwellings of traditional design and construction which contribute to the area's character. Proposals to replace these existing dwellings can result in the loss of farmhouses and other traditional properties with their replacement by more substantial modern properties. The overall effect can be damaging to rural and visual amenities, and result in an increase in the number of new dwellings unrelated to traditional rural activities. Where buildings are Listed under the provisions of the Planning Acts the Borough Council can exercise statutory controls over their demolition. Elsewhere the powers available to the Council are limited but particular priority will be attached to the need to conserve and enhance buildings of local historic or architectural interest whose modest contribution to the rural landscape often belies their value.
- 6.62 Within the plan area it is envisaged that opportunities to replace existing dwellings will be restricted to exceptional circumstances. An example would be where an existing property is habitable but is uneconomic to repair because of structural problems.
- 6.63 Where the Borough Council is satisfied a replacement dwelling has been justified planning permission will be granted provided that the proposal harmonises with the character of appearance of a locality. Replacement dwellings should not increase the volume of the original property by more than 10 per cent. They must also achieve in their design a mass and form which can be absorbed in the landscape and avoid injury to the amenities of any other properties in the vicinity.

## **Conversion of Existing Rural Buildings**

### **6.64 POLICY CT/15**

**Planning permission for the conversion of a building in a location outside the Limits to Development defined on the Proposals Map will not be granted unless development is able to satisfy the following criteria:**

- i) **the form, mass, size and general design of the existing building and its relationship with other buildings in the locality is in keeping with its surroundings. Any proposed changes, including for vehicular access must be shown not to have a significant adverse affect on the landscape;**
- ii) **it is demonstrated the building has been built and used for the purpose for which it was originally approved for a reasonable period of time;**
- iii) **the building is in a structurally sound condition and of permanent and substantial construction. It must be capable of the proposed use or conversion without substantial, alteration, rebuilding and/or extensions;**
- iv) **the proposed use or conversion is designed to safeguard the essential character, form, setting and structure, of the building;**
- v) **the conversion would not lead to the dispersal of activity of a scale and nature which would prejudice the vitality of nearby towns and villages.**

**Suitable uses for buildings in the countryside are those which assist the rural economy. Primarily these will relate to agricultural, employment, community, recreation or tourism uses.**

**Residential use will be approved where it is shown to be impractical to convert or re-use the building for other uses and where:**

- a) **the building is worthy of retention being of acknowledged historic or architectural value;**
- b) **the proposed development involves minimal external change to the building;**
- c) **the creation of a residential curtilage around the building would not harm the character and appearance of the locality.**

**Residential uses may also be appropriate as a subordinate part of a scheme for business re-use in circumstances where the enterprise is completed before the residential element is occupied.**

- 6.65 The reuse and conversion of existing buildings can assist agricultural diversification. However control is necessary to avoid the proliferation of inappropriate development in the countryside, Green Wedges and areas of local separation. Whilst reuse of rural buildings is able to promote rural enterprise and jobs, development will not be allowed on a scale in dispersed locations which would threaten the economic base of villages and towns. Residential use does not contribute to the rural economy and will only be considered favourably in exceptional circumstances in line with policies to restrict new housing outside the limits to development. Residential accommodation may be acceptable as part of mixed business development.
- 6.66 Applications for the conversion of recently constructed buildings will be carefully considered to establish whether they have been used for the purposes they were built.

## **Extensions to Existing Rural Dwellings**

### **6.67 POLICY CT/16**

**Planning permission will be granted for a residential extension to a dwelling in a location outside the Limits to Development defined on the Proposals Map provided:**

- i) **the existing dwelling is of permanent construction, substantially intact and shown to have a reasonable remaining life; and**
- ii) **the proposal is not damaging to the character and appearance of the existing building or the locality in terms of its mass, height, siting, colour, design or materials; and**
- iii) **it would not harm the amenities enjoyed by those living in any neighbouring properties.**

- 6.68 The addition of small-scale extensions to existing dwellings is usually likely to be acceptable. Larger extensions to properties located in areas of special character or prominent locations will not be permitted. Such extensions can be visually very damaging and appear as incongruous features in the landscape.

## **Extensions to Semi-Permanent Recreational Chalets**

### **6.69 POLICY CT/17**

**Planning permission for extensions to semi-permanent recreational chalets in locations outside the Limits to Development, defined on the Proposals Map, will not be granted unless the development meets all of the following criteria:**

- i) **the existing chalet is habitable and of a sound structural condition;**

- ii) **the existing chalet is one of group of similar chalets and not in an isolated location;**
- iii) **the proposed extension is of a design and materials appropriate to the existing chalet and suitable for the location; and**
- iv) **the proposed extension does not increase the height of the building and provides a modest increase in volume, of not more than 15 cubic metres with the increased volume only being permitted to provide for adequate sanitary arrangements.**

**In granting planning permission the Borough Council may consider attaching a condition restricting the use of the chalet to recreational purposes.**

- 6.70 The Borough contains sites of long-established recreational chalets usually of insubstantial construction in informal settings in the heart of the countryside. These chalets are used for weekend or holiday accommodation. It is the intention of the policy to resist proposals which would effectively make these properties into dwellings suitable for permanent use in locations where such a use would clearly be contrary to development plan policies. On this basis proposals for replacement properties or outbuildings requiring planning permission will not be granted. The approach seeks to reduce the number of inappropriate dwellings and so protect the character and appearance of the countryside.
- 6.71 The policy allows only for modest extensions to existing chalets, where the extra space would provide solely for adequate sanitary arrangements. Proposals of a more substantial nature which would have a greater adverse impact on the rural surroundings will be resisted.

## **Safeguarding Agricultural Land**

### **6.72 POLICY CT/18**

**Development involving agricultural land must utilise land of the lowest practicable grade. Planning permission will not be granted for development which would utilise best and most versatile land unless it is demonstrated that:**

- i) **there is an overriding need for the development; and**
- ii) **suitable land in urban areas or of grades below 3a is not available or has special significance which outweighs the agricultural land consideration.**

**For all proposals land take will be restricted to that which is reasonably required for the proposed development. Applicants will also be expected to submit details showing the effect of the development on farm holdings. Where development would substantially erode farm viability and structure it will not be permitted unless justified under Policy CT/10.**

- 6.73 The plan area contains significant areas of land of grades 2 and 3a in the best and most versatile category. This valuable and finite resource must be safeguarded for the future. Thus, in assessing proposals for development considerable weight will be given to safeguarding such land and it will only be released in limited circumstances. Once agricultural land is lost, even to soft uses, restoration of its original resource value is not usually practicable.

## **Intensive Livestock Units**

### **6.74 POLICY CT/19**

**Applications involving intensive livestock units located in areas of countryside, green wedge, or local separation will be permitted in circumstances where a proposal is acceptable in principle and all the following criteria are met:**

- i) **a proposal would provide adequate safeguards for local residents from problems related to traffic generation, noise, odours, air or water pollution, and visual intrusion;**

- ii) **the proposal would not pollute water resources;**
- iii) **the proposal includes a landscaping scheme showing how built development relates to its setting and incorporates landscaping and planting in a manner which conserves or enhances landscape and ecological value;**
- iv) **the scale, form, mass, design, colour and materials are sympathetic to the character and appearance of an area;**
- v) **the building would not result in the over concentration of such units harmful to amenity of settlements or areas of open land.**

*(See also in particular Policies EV/33, EV/39, CT/1 to CT/5, CT/7, CT/8)*

6.75 Intensive livestock units will only be acceptable in locations where they would not harm the character and appearance of a locality, where there would be minimal potential for conflict between neighbouring land uses, and the potential nuisance and pollution risk is minimised.

## **Improvements to Public Access**

6.76 The Borough Council working in co-operation with landowners, the County Council, and other interested parties will support the achievement of a comprehensive network of public access routes for non-motorised modes in areas outside the limits to development and between these areas and the built-up areas. This will contribute to the overall transportation policy approach of this plan to reduce the need for car based travel by creating conditions where people will be more likely to use non-car modes. This network will be based on:

- i) creating and sustaining a comprehensive network of safe and interesting routes based on footpaths, bridleways and off-road cycle routes and country lanes;
- ii) providing carefully designed and located signposting and interpretation facilities to draw attention to scenic and interesting routes;
- iii) ensuring continuing and increased access compatible with the operations of farming and other locally based activities;
- iv) relieving recreation pressures on the most heavily used areas.

6.77 It will be important to work towards a comprehensive coverage of recreational routes providing safe access for walkers, horse-riders and cyclists. By spreading the availability of routes pressures will be eased on areas already heavily used such as parts of the Charnwood Forest.

6.78 Priority will be given to those areas located within the 'Countryside Priority Area' identified in the County Council's 'Countryside 2000' programme, and to those areas where demand is high and not matched by the level of provision.

6.79 Implementation of the Wanlip Action Area Plan and Watermead Country Park Management Scheme is an example of how improvements can be achieved.

6.80 The policy will be implemented by continuing discussion and co-operation between Leicestershire County Council, the Borough Council, Parish Councils, landowners, representatives of countryside users, and other interested parties.

## **Development Located in the National Forest**

### **6.81 POLICY CT/20**

**Planning permission will be granted for development proposals and related planting within the National Forest area defined on the Proposals Map where:**

- i) **the overall scheme does not conflict with restraint policies to safeguard the attractive rural character of the landscape;**
- ii) **the development is of a high quality with design, layout and materials reflecting traditional local architecture and the setting of the site in the National Forest;**

- iii) **an accompanying woodland planting scheme or other habitat measures provide a landscaped Forest setting appropriate to the scale and type of development and compatible with land uses and the ecological and landscape character of the Forest within the plan area; and**
- iv) **public access links are provided compatible with the scale and type of development and integrated with existing access routes in the Forest area.**

**Other habitat measures may be considered favourably where:**

- a) **they would be more appropriate in landscape and ecological terms; and**
- b) **the woodland planting is not required to screen the proposed development or for other specified reasons.**

**Proposals for development other than housing and employment will be permitted provided that there is a clear and direct relationship between the development proposed and the establishment and maintenance of the Forest.**

*(See also in particular Policies CT/1, CT/6, CT/7 and CT/14)*

- 6.82 The National Forest is a major initiative promoted by the Countryside Commission supported by local authorities in the Midlands. It is a unique concept of national importance opening up opportunities to enhance and diversify the landscape, enrich natural habitats, improve recreation and public access, and foster the aims of rural diversification. The National Forest covers over 500 square kilometres of land in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire. The local plan area contains the eastern margins of the Forest extending as far as The Outwoods, and Swithland Wood. The Countryside Commission's 'National Forest Strategy' forms the basis of planning policies for those parts of the plan area located within the National Forest.
- 6.83 Planting guidelines relating to development in the National Forest will be included in the Borough Council's 'Supplementary Planning Guidance'. These guidelines are intended to assist landowners and developers in negotiating and submitting schemes which accord with the Plan's policies.
- 6.84 That part of the National Forest in the local plan area is predominantly located within the Charnwood Forest Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside. Although the significance of the National Forest merits specific policies it must be emphasised that Forest related developments will only be permitted where they accord with national and local planning guidance to safeguard areas of special significance.
- 6.85 The Forest Strategy recognises that the National Forest within the Borough contains an already well-wooded landscape of great diversity, extensive ecological and historic interest and distinctive upland relief. Given the character of this part of the National Forest it will be undesirable to encourage significant afforestation related to new development. In this case the planting guidelines should be sufficiently flexible to allow a type and scale of landscape treatment appropriate to the particular locality.
- 6.86 The Strategy further recognises that the existing tracts of open land within the Charnwood Forest area often perform an important role in affording views which permit the appreciation of its varied relief and landscape character. Accordingly in certain areas extensive woodland planting in association with any new development would not be appropriate; existing grass or heath land habitats could be lost and important views could be impaired. In these circumstances the Borough Council will exercise a degree of discretion in the application of National Forest related policies to secure alternative habitat creation in place of woodland planting over an area equivalent to that required by the standard.
- 6.87 New housing and industrial development will be expected to provide woodland, or other agreed planting, to contribute to the Forest as well as benefit from the environmental benefits the Forest is expected to bring. Larger scale developments should provide significant planting. The emphasis will be on improving the landscape setting of sites within or adjacent to existing settlements, and their setting in the adjoining countryside. For industrial/commercial development substantial planting will be desirable along road frontages in the Forest area.

- 6.88 Any planning permission granted for proposals to re-use or adapt existing rural farm buildings within the Forest will need to provide a suitable planted setting sympathetic with the Forest's character. The conversion or re-use of buildings for new commercial, industrial, recreation and tourism uses would provide much needed rural employment. However conversion for residential purposes will be of less economic benefit and more likely to harm the Forest character.
- 6.89 Where new agricultural buildings are proposed in the Forest the Borough Council will seek the provision of adequate planting to ensure the building is properly screened and does not have an intrusive impact on the Forest landscape.
- 6.90 The main types of forest-related development likely to come forward in the National Forest are:
- i) operational activities such as car parks and interpretation facilities;
  - ii) tourism, recreation, sport and leisure activities requiring rural locations;
  - iii) restoration of mineral workings to woodland or other habitats, public open space or leisure uses;
  - iv) farm diversification involving land, existing rural buildings and, on occasions small-scale new development;
  - v) rural and forest enterprises for visitor attractions and businesses including timber processing, woodland products, local crafts, tree nurseries.
- 6.91 The policy is framed to ensure environmentally damaging development is not permitted in the National Forest area whilst allowing for appropriate developments compatible with the achievement of the Forest's objectives.
- 6.92 The Borough Council will secure the implementation of planting and landscaping schemes for developments approved within the National Forest area by conditions and/or by the negotiation of planning obligations depending on the individual circumstances of the application. These measures could relate to the means and timescale of implementation or the achievement of off-site planting. Where a developer is not able to provide the desirable level of off-site planting the Borough Council will consider the provision of a financial contribution in lieu of the cost of planting, to be paid into an off-site planting fund for use within the Forest area.
- 6.93 The Borough Council will fund schemes such as tree planting, habitat creation, improved public access or other initiatives in line with the general aims of the Forest Strategy prepared by the Countryside Commission in line with provision made in the Revenue Budget.

## **Maintenance and Management of New Planted Areas in The National Forest**

### **6.94 POLICY CT/21**

**The Local Planning Authority will seek to negotiate agreements with developers to make secure arrangements by appropriate persons or bodies for the maintenance and management of planting and open space proposals associated with developments in the National Forest in line with best arboricultural practice. Dead, deceased or damaged trees and any failed planting will need to be replaced by the developer during the initial five year maintenance period.**

- 6.95 Where woodland or other planting is provided in relation to specific development proposals it will be important that at the outset arrangements are in place, agreed with the Borough Council to ensure the long term maintenance and management of the areas to be planted. This is usually likely to be achieved by legal agreements, or by management agreements between the Borough Council and the appropriate bodies.

- 6.96 The Borough Council will seek to secure management agreements with landowners with respect to new and existing woodlands located in the National Forest taking into account all of the following factors:
- i) the aims of the National Forest;
  - ii) the interests of visual amenity;
  - iii) the interests of rural amenity;
  - iv) the desirability of maximising public access;
  - v) the principles of good woodland and habitat management.