

# Policy Options for the Watermead Park & Thurmaston Waterfront Area

A Topic Paper

February 2011

# 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, Rushy 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 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 Rushy 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 on jobs and higher order services and facilities.

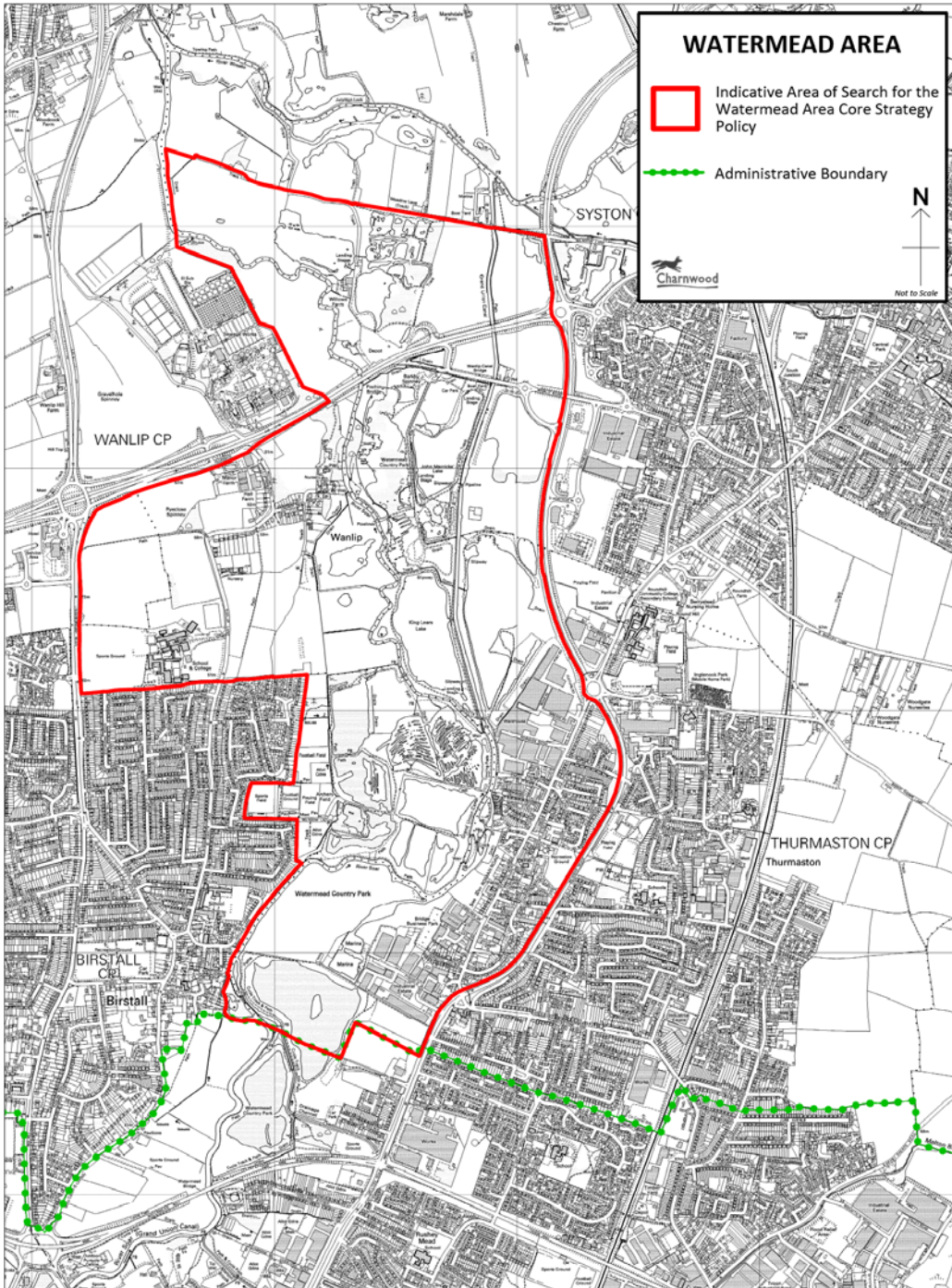
Within this context, the Borough Council is developing a new suite of planning policies in a document called the Core Strategy which will become the principle document within the Local Development Framework (LDF) when it is adopted in 2012. Earlier drafts of the Core Strategy have sought to accommodate 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>.

The document builds on an initial workshop event held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 where stakeholders and partners identified the key issues and challenges facing the Watermead Park and Thurmaston Waterfront Area. It presents a topic paper and a range of alternative options as a basis of a draft policy for the LDF Core Strategy.

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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 rail way 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 Background

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010, the Borough Council ran a workshop event to investigate the key issues and challenges facing the Watermead Park and Thurmaston Waterfront Area. Over 75 experts from the public and private sector, and including local ward and parish councillors, were invited to the event and around 35 attended the event. A further 17 letters or emails were received before or after the event providing written comments. Background information, a summary of the event and the comments received are available from the Council's website<sup>3</sup>.

The workshop event considered the issues and challenges within four themes:

- Ecology, Landscape, Tourism and Recreation
- Heritage and Design
- Access and Connectivity
- Regeneration

These themes are taken forward in this topic paper. However in the light of the comments received during the workshops along with other evidence it is apparent that a slightly different set of themes is more suitable for formulating policy options for the core strategy guidance. This is explained in section 4.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/watermead\\_and\\_thurmaston\\_water\\_front\\_area](http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/watermead_and_thurmaston_water_front_area)

# 4 Devising Policy Options

## Introduction

The aim is to develop an overarching policy framework to guide future change and investment in the Watermead Park and Thurmaston Waterfront Area of Charnwood. This area is located close to and readily accessible from Leicester and other significant centres of population. It is subject to significant development and visitor pressures which need to be carefully managed in order to secure economic, social and environmental benefits and minimise harmful impacts. There are a number of complex, interrelated and potentially conflicting needs to be carefully considered before arriving at the preferred policy approach. The main needs are:

- To maintain and enhance nature conservation interests,
- To provide for access and recreation needs
- To safeguard important areas of floodplain and open land/green infrastructure separating local communities
- To contribute towards efforts to regenerate Thurmaston Priority Neighbourhood
- To address the poor environment in the village centre and shopping area, which lacks vitality
- To help meet future needs for housing and employment land
- To integrate with policies for surrounding areas

Policy formulation needs to take account of the evidence base including the aspirations of local communities and key stakeholders.

The strategic policy framework needs to be:

- Consistent and capable of providing a clear context for more detailed policies to be developed later
- Sufficiently flexible to allow for changing circumstances over time
- Complementary to other policies and programmes such as Management Plans for Watermead Country Park, the emerging Thurmaston Masterplan, Connect2, relevant Leicester City plans and proposals and potential major growth north of Leicester, possibly located east of Thurmaston.

The policy framework needs to focus on key local issues in this area. It cannot address every issue. Wider issues (such as Sustainable Design, Green Infrastructure and Transport) will be dealt with in other Core Strategy policies or in other guidance and policy documents produced later.

## Sustainability Appraisal and Equalities Impact Assessment

Sustainability Appraisal is an objective exercise that tests policy options against a set of economic, social and environmental indicators so that their effect, whether positive or negative, can be understood. This information will be used to shape the final wording of the draft policy, which will then be subject to a final appraisal.

The procedural approach to developing the planning policy has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment so that the potential for a diversity groups being treated less favourably can be understood. The appraisal has identified the groups most at risk of differential impact and their representatives have been specifically invited to take part in the workshop events and provide comments. In addition to appraising the overall procedure, an assessment has been carried out of the policy options themselves to identify the potential risk to diversity groups. This information will also be used to shape final wording of the draft policy, which will then be subject to a final assessment.

The results of the sustainability appraisal and the Equalities Impact Assessment are explained under each set of policy options within the 'commentary'. They rely on professional judgements which may be seen to be subjective and you may therefore disagree with their conclusions. If you do disagree, please tell us so that we can take on board your views. The full appraisals and assessments are available as separate documents on the website<sup>4</sup>.

## **Approach**

In order to assist policy formulation the issues and opportunities emerging from the evidence base and initial consultations are categorised into five main themes:

1. General planning principles to safeguard floodplain and open land
2. Management of Watermead Country Park and scope for related development
3. Potential for recreation and tourism activities outside the Park
4. Access and connectivity in particular between the Park, neighbouring communities and any new development areas
5. Potential for new development and the regeneration of Thurmaston village centre and Waterfront. This theme also embraces site specific design issues, heritage and tourism, and potential developer contributions

Each theme is considered in turn using a consistent format in the following way:

### **Key elements of the evidence/policy background**

1. First, a summary of key elements of the evidence base/ policy background

### **Main issues and opportunities from workshop 1**

2. A summary of the main issues and opportunities identified at workshop 1 held in December 2010

### **The Broad Policy Option**

3. Having regard to 1) and 2) broad policy options are suggested for each theme. A commentary is provided after each theme that considers the advantages and

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/watermead\\_and\\_thurmaston\\_water\\_front\\_area](http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/watermead_and_thurmaston_water_front_area)

disadvantages of each policy option and/or their contribution towards sustainability objectives. These comments are evidence by the Sustainability Appraisal and Equalities Impact Assessment that have been carried out for each option.

The December workshop event elicited a depth of detailed comments which may not necessarily feature in the Core Strategy as this document is intended to set the strategic overview for the area. Specific details will be important considerations in later development plan documents or in preparing masterplans or planning guidance in the form of Supplementary Planning Documents.

**The second workshop gives stakeholders the opportunity to discuss the themes and options and help narrow down the options so a preferred policy approach can be found. This could be one or more of the suggested options, a variation or perhaps something not mentioned.**

The preferred options will provide the basis for drafting the overall policy for the Watermead Area for inclusion in the draft Core Strategy, which is currently programmed for formal public consultation at the end of this year.

# Theme 1: General planning principles

## Key elements of the evidence/policy background

The Watermead Park and Thurmaston Waterfront Area comprises:

- The significant tract of open land between Birstall, Wanlip, Syston, Thurmaston and Leicester City mainly located between A6, A46 and A607 corridors; plus
- The older part of Thurmaston between A607 and Watermead Park including the village centre and Waterfront areas

### Borough of Charnwood Local Plan (2004) guidance:

Open land outside defined limits to development for built up areas is safeguarded under a combination of policies:

- Countryside policies north of A46 and land near Wanlip village.
- A green wedge covering land penetrating into the City south of A46 and providing separation between local communities.
- Local separation policy between Birstall and Wanlip; and
- Soar valley area of local landscape value in the river valley corridor.

The only exception to these safeguarding policies is the site of the Wanlip Country Club site. This is enveloped out of the green wedge to allow redevelopment for a range of uses in line with specified principles.

Watermead Country Park is subject to guidance indicating the appropriate types of development within the Park and design principles to be met.

The existing policy framework includes no guidance on phasing new development.

Within the built up area of Thurmaston existing main employment areas including the Pinfold/Bridge Industrial Estate are safeguarded as Primarily Employment Areas. The village centre is defined as a Local Centre. Key recreation land is safeguarded. Elsewhere land not otherwise designated is defined as part of Primarily Residential Areas.

The majority of the Watermead Park and Thurmaston Waterfront Area is land that is liable to flood, including parts of built up areas notably Thurmaston waterfront, Pinfold/Bridge Industrial Estates and the village centre.

## Main issues and opportunities from workshop 1

None identified

### **Broad policy options: General planning principles**

**PP1: Maintain the current approach with a range of simplified policies safeguarding floodplain and different functions of open land in the Watermead Park and Thurmaston Waterfront Area from inappropriate development. Within this area development is only permissible where in line with safeguarding policies or allocated in the local plan ie: the Wanlip Country Club site.**

**PP2: Apply a simplified policy framework safeguarding floodplain, important open land and green infrastructure in the Watermead area from inappropriate development. Indicate suitable locations for regeneration and additional development within the Watermead Park and Thurmaston Waterfront Area**

### **Commentary**

These two options provide a choice between doing something for the area and maintaining the status quo (business as usual). This option may seem obvious but its purpose is to remind us there is a fundamental choice whether to intervene or to carry on with the current approach. This distinction is important as it is perfectly legitimate to carry forward the existing approach.

At this very strategic level the impact of the options on sustainability objectives and equalities is dependent on how the policy will be implemented. However, the more proactive and wider approach detailed in option PP2 provides greater scope to achieve better outcomes than PP1 in relation to the following sustainability objectives:

- To maintain and enhance settlement identity, townscape and landscape character
- To increase the efficient use of land and buildings
- To promote a strong community where people feel they have a say in the future
- To increase access to the countryside, open space and semi urban environments (e.g. parks)
- To encourage a sustainable economy supported by efficient patterns of movement attractive to investors

At this broad scale, the ability to identify specific equalities issues is very difficult as much will depend on how the policies are implemented. Whilst there are potential issues around the accessibility of the park and Thurmaston area for those with disabilities or maternity related issues these factors can be addressed through planning policies and controls.

## Theme 2: Watermead Country Park

### Key elements of the evidence/policy background

#### Background documents:

- Watermead Country Park Development Proposals 1995-2005
- Watermead Country Park Management Plan 2010-2015 (North area)
- Watermead Country Park Management Plan 2010-2014 (South area)

The northern part of the Park is located within Charnwood and the southern part in Leicester City. The Park is administered by County and City Councils. The Borough Council (landowner & funding contributor) and British Waterways (landowner) are also key partners.

Considerable progress has been made in implementing previously adopted policies and proposals. The area has been transformed from derelict wasteland of worked out gravel pits to a major recreational facility and environmental asset with about 250,000 visitors each year, but scope for significantly more. Local authorities and partners work to meet the following objectives:

1. Provide a major site for countryside recreation
2. Maintain and enhance the ecological interest of the Park
3. Provide improved facilities for quiet water based activities
4. Improve interpretation and information for visitors
5. Develop education and life long learning opportunities

New Management Plans should help ensure the Park evolves in a planned, co-ordinated and comprehensive way taking account of local constraints and opportunities and balancing different user demands. Proposals are developed for areas of similar character, constraints and opportunities but there is flexibility to allow for other opportunities that may arise.

The County Council's current review of the Country Parks service could reduce resources available to manage the Park in the future. In difficult economic times innovative ways of generating funds will merit consideration.

#### Current Local Plan guidance

Policy RT/17 states that planning permission will be granted for development of:

- A caravan and camping site on about 5 hectares of land accessible from Wanlip Road entrances
- An Information Centre with warden's accommodation centrally located and easily accessible from the main car park
- Other buildings and structure of a minor scale supporting leisure and recreation uses in the Park
- Footpaths, cycleways and bridleways with bridges

#### Relevant development proposals

Planning Permission was granted<sup>5</sup> on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2005 for development on land within the north of Watermead Country Park for erection of information and educational centre with ancillary shop, cafe and offices; two bedroom flat for respite accommodation; car and coach parking and associated landscaping. This scheme, known as the MOSAIC scheme, which could have provided a visitor centre was not implemented and there no longer appears to be interest in pursuing it.

Comment [R1]: When – date?

Comment [R2]: check

There are currently two potential schemes that could provide a visitor centre:

- A proposal for a Park Centre on a 1 hectare site within the Park close to the present main car park off Wanlip Road. This could provide a multi-use indoor and outdoor facility for sports, innovation and education. Facilities would include exhibition and conference space, a classroom facility for group visits, café, toilets, gymnasium, car parking and an office and small store. A similar facility is currently being developed in Leicester on the southern fringe of the Park encouraging community participation.
- Latest proposals to redevelop the adjacent Wanlip Country Club site are for a mix of employment/office uses, hotel/restaurant and active water based leisure. The scheme providing a new bridge across the canal into the Park might fund a visitor centre in the north of the Park, or possibly within the redevelopment itself.

### **Main issues and opportunities from workshop 1**

From the comments received it is very clear that the ecology and landscape of Watermead Park is an important asset that must be protected and enhanced. The importance of the landscape to local people in providing a 'green lung' for local communities and into the Leicester urban area, providing access to the countryside as well as its association with the River Soar valley and floodplain and the legacy of mineral extraction all contribute to the special character of the area.

There is a great variety of wildlife in the area and the wetland areas provide an important corridor for migrating birds. The Local Nature Reserve and a number of Local Wildlife Sites are identified as particularly important but also sensitive areas of the Park where careful management will be required.

#### Value of Watermead Park

- The Park is a major green corridor emanating out of Leicester city.
- The Park should be viewed in ecological terms a) within the overall context of the Soar Valley and b) as a single entity with Local Nature Reserves and private land of high ecological value eg as an important corridor for migrating birds.
- The Park is attractive because of its variety. Specific parts have different characteristics, different levels of activity and degrees of tranquillity.
- The wetlands are valued as a resource reducing flood risk for surrounding areas.

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<sup>5</sup> Planning application ref: P/05/0991/2

### Wildlife and ecological links outside the Park

- The wildlife benefit spills out of the Park into surrounding areas. Areas adjacent to the park provide a buffer from neighbouring urban areas
- There are not enough wildlife areas within Thurmaston.
- An ecological link is needed from Hamilton Country Park to Watermead Park
- Wanlip village's parkland feel and setting should be protected from Birstall and Syston
- There are sites not designated which should be considered such as the nature reserve at Wanlip, the Raynsway Lake and Willows Farm, Wanlip.

### Recreation within the Park

- The County Council should consider operating a caravan and camping site
- Northern part of the Park seen as good for recreational activity

### Provision of a Visitor Centre

- There are mixed views about the location of a visitor centre.
- As the area attracts a wide variety of visitors, there should be a visitor centre also promoting other nearby tourist attractions. Consideration should be given to including a café and car park as part of the business model.
- Visitor Centre will need to be economically viable as it will need revenue funding to cover management and possibly staff costs.
- Learn from Attenborough Nature reserve as this is a victim of its own success
- The visitor centre is not viable. There should be a number of visitor orientation points throughout the Park or incorporated within new bars, cafes, or hotels (outside the park).
- Possible locations for a Visitor Centre are:
  - next to the existing car park and access road off Wanlip Road
  - near the new County Council Car Park
  - Land at the Wanlip Country Club Site just north of the existing toilet block in the car park area or land west of the Wanlip Country Club
  - By Mill Lane/near to marina although there is inadequate parking presently
  - Within Thurmaston to optimise regeneration benefit to the local centre

### Management issues

- A cohesive wildlife and nature conservation management regime is essential to protect the great variety of wildlife, the habitat network and connectivity.
- Certain areas of the Park should be sanctuaries for wildlife with nature conservation as the key objective. Other areas may be less sensitive but any alternative activities would need to be carefully considered in terms of their impact on the Park's special character.
- Examples suggested:
  - i. Do not sever corridors along the river valley or to surrounding areas;
  - ii. King Lear's lake and the meadows should not be disturbed because of its value to wildlife and visitors
- Given potential future financial constraints volunteers should be used to help manage the Park.

- Consider a joint policy with the City Council that recognises that the Park straddles the administrative boundary and is cognisant of plans already laid out by the City
- Phasing: Improvements outside the Park should be prioritised first

### **Broad policy options: Watermead Country Park**

#### Park Management

**WP1: Continue with current management practices giving priority to nature conservation, quiet recreation and education activities**

**WP2: Adopt a more flexible approach allowing for additional uses and activities eg: a camping and caravan site, conference facilities or more intensive leisure able to generate wider benefits and more visitors for the Park**

#### **Commentary**

In terms of sustainability both options perform positively in the main especially around social and economic objectives. However there are differences in terms of each option's impact on environmental objectives to improve local air quality and to reduce vulnerability to climate change

In terms of environmental objectives that seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity, settlement identity and landscape character, continuing with current management practices (option WP1) performs better than a more flexible approach taken under option WP2. Allowing more uses and activities in the Park is likely to encourage more car travel and potentially longer trips to the Park. The additional emissions generated could harm local air quality. Furthermore allowing more development in the Park could increase flooding risk. With climate change likely to increase the number of flooding events, new buildings would need to be designed with adaptation in mind.

A more flexible management approach (option WP2) performs better in terms of objectives to maintain and enhance settlement identity and landscape character and to increase access to services and facilities. With this option there are opportunities to improve the attractiveness of the Park, its sense of place and the facilities available whilst at the same time ensuring the Park's peace and tranquillity is protected.

In terms of equalities both options have the potential to provide access to all. There are particular opportunities to improve access for people with disabilities, of all ages and mothers with young children.

### **Broad policy options: Watermead Country Park**

#### Provision of a Visitor Centre

(Note: The Core Strategy policy does not need to specify the location.)

**VC1: Provide a visitor centre within the existing park area**

**VC2: Provide a visitor centre outside the Park eg: on the Wanlip Country Club site or at Thurmaston**

**VC3: Provide more limited facility (classroom & store) in the Park plus interpretative facilities throughout the Park and in neighbouring communities**

### **Commentary**

In terms of sustainability objectives option VC1 offers the best accessibility for visitors but it also has the most potential for conflict with social and environmental objectives. It could lead to more anti-social behaviour, noise and crime within a sensitive environmental area and depending on its location, could affect landscape character. A more limited facility in the Park (option VC3) and information boards could decrease the overall environmental impact but could have fewer benefits in terms of social objectives. It may be less effective in attracting people to enjoy the park than the other options.

Whilst a visitor centre located in Thurmaston (option VC2) has potential to help with regeneration and improve the townscape it may not increase the attractiveness of the Park as a place for local people to visit. Similarly locating a visitor centre on the Wanlip Country Club site would reduce the risk of crime but it may not be as attractive for visitors to the Park.

In terms of equalities issues the location of a visitor centre is unlikely to create a differential impact on diversity groups. However if the centre is located on the Wanlip Country Club access across the canal would need to be designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities, older people and mothers with young children.

## Theme 3: Potential for Recreation & Tourism outside Watermead Country Park

(Note: Issues relating to Thurmaston marina and possible new hotel developments are included under Theme 5 'Development & Regeneration' below)

### Evidence/policy background

The '**6C's Green Infrastructure Strategy (2010)**' identifies the River Soar as both a strategic sub-regional Green Infrastructure 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. Funding was provided through the last government's Growth Point initiative. Other funding streams might now be needed.

The Borough Council's '**Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (2010)**' comprises an audit of existing open space, sport and recreation facilities and is based on consultations to establish whether current provision meets the needs and aspirations of residents and visitors. Main issues for Charnwood communities nearest to the Watermead Park & Thurmaston Waterfront Area are set out below:

### Birstall

Significant Issues:

- Although located next to Watermead Park, Birstall has a large quantitative shortfall in amenity green space and no natural and semi-natural green space
- There is pressure on playing pitches for junior football and adult rugby but new pitches will be provided as part of the Hallam Fields development

Other issue

- Allotment provision is slightly below quantitative standards and there is evidence of further demand.

### Thurmaston

Significant Issues:

- A shortfall in the quantity of parks
- a lack of provision for young people in the south of the village.
- a lack of provision junior and mini pitches.
- No allotments.

Other Issue:

- Watermead Park provides natural and semi-natural green space, but residents of East Thurmaston are outside recommended distance with further 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:

- No natural or semi natural open space and shortfalls of amenity green space,
- Lack of facilities for young people.
- Shortfalls in junior and mini football, and for cricket.
- Allotment provision is below recommended standards and residents in the south and south west are outside recommended catchment.

#### **Wanlip**

##### Significant Issue

- Apart from churchyard/cemetery and school, Wanlip lacks any other open space.. Access routes to nearby spaces and countryside will be of particular significance.

### **Main issues and opportunities from Workshop 1**

#### Sports pitches

- There are opportunities for recreation on land north of the A46/A607 junction

#### Waterway improvements

- Canal and towpath offer possibilities for improved tourism and recreation
- Boating activity enhances the visitor experience for all and is a tourist draw in its own right. It should be encouraged with secure moorings, drinking water supply, rubbish facilities and places to discharge toilet waste
- Boating activity will improve natural surveillance of the area
- Waterway users have ability and enthusiasm and could be engaged to improve the waterway.
- Connecting the main waterway to the adjacent Lake north of Johnson's Bridge and providing moorings would enhance the visitor experience to the Park.

#### Recreational use of lakes

- The two Raynsway lakes present an opportunity for water based tourism and activity clubs

#### General

- Ice House (near Wanlip) has tourism value as an ancient/historic monument (This is considered under Theme 5 below)

### **Broad policy options: Tourism and recreation outside the Park area**

#### Waterways

**W1: Maintain current approach with limited facilities and access along the canal and river corridors for boaters**

**W2: Provide improved facilities (including moorings, toilets, water supply and waste disposal) and access along canal and river corridors for boaters**

**W3: Provide improved facilities (including moorings, toilets, water supply and waste disposal) along the canal and river corridors for boaters and connect the canal into the Park allowing boats into King Lear Lake**

### **Commentary**

Generally these options are likely to have minimal effect on sustainability objectives overall. However leaving things as they are (option W1) would be the best way to maintain and enhance biodiversity, flora and fauna, geodiversity, settlement identity, townscape and landscape character.

Provision of improved facilities and access (options W2 & W3) could have negative impacts because of increased activity and the provision of new facilities. Both options are likely to detract from the relatively unspoilt character of the area and its biodiversity. Furthermore built development is likely to attract anti-social behaviour and crime contrary to social objectives.

For equalities issues the current levels of access and facilities (option W1) does not appear to present significant differential impacts on diverse groups. Improvements under options W2 and W3 may have differential impacts but these could be minimised by careful design that ensures access for all.

### **Broad policy options: Tourism and recreation outside the Park area**

#### Sports pitches

There is no need to identify broad policy options for this issue as it is already being considered through the development of Green Infrastructure policies. The issue may be relevant to consider in relation to potential contributions from development under Theme 5 'Development & Regeneration' below.

### **Broad policy options: Tourism and recreation outside the Park area**

#### Recreational use of lakes located outside the Park

**RL1: Use the lakes outside the park for general water based activities (swimming, sailing, wind surfing) similar to those in Watermead Park**

**RL2: Restrict use of lakes outside the park to motorised water based activities not suitable within Watermead Park**

## **Commentary**

The main effects of the two options on sustainability objectives relates to the potential harm to biodiversity caused by increased activity on the lakes. Allowing motorised activity (option RL2) could have significant negative impacts on biodiversity. This option also has potential to generate noise, anti social behaviour and attract crime.

Healthy lifestyles are better served by option RLI if this improves provision for a wider range of non-motorised activities.

Both options could help attract more people into the countryside on the edge of the built up area.

In terms of equality issues neither option is likely to result in a differential impact on diversity groups.

## Theme 4: Access and Connectivity

### Evidence/Policy Background

#### Government guidance

The rationale for the '**Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon: Making Sustainable Local Transport Happen**' White Paper 2011 is to develop a transport system that is an engine for economic growth and greener travel. The aims are to improve links for moving people and goods, encourage people to travel sustainably, target investment in new projects that promote green growth and build a balanced but dynamic low carbon economy essential to future prosperity.

**Planning Policy Guidance 13 'Transport'** emphasises the need to locate development where there is reduced need to travel by car, to minimise the distances people need to travel and to provide high quality alternatives to the car that people will find attractive to use.

#### General Issues

- The Watermead Park & Thurmaston Waterfront Area is mostly located within the Soar valley corridor on the northern edge of Leicester.
- The River Soar & Grand Union Canal Strategy (2009) identified the Soar valley as under utilised with poor signage and promotion. A programme of signage improvements to extend along the river valley was highlighted as a priority.
- Funding was secured from the 6C's Strategic Green Infrastructure Growth Fund for a pilot signage scheme. The Soar Valley Green Infrastructure Signage Strategy is being developed by the County and City Councils along this key Green Infrastructure corridor within Leicester and Leicestershire. The aim is to improve access for existing and proposed centres of population in and around the City. A signing hierarchy and updated cycling and walking route map is being developed using best practice with stakeholders.

#### Connect2 Project

- Commenced in 2007 with £700,000 of lottery funding plus local contributions giving total value of over £1 million. The scheme brings together City and County Councils, the Borough Council, local Parish Councils and local groups such as the Ramblers Association
- Project aims are to improve access to and within the Park. Whilst there are several routes into the Park many are difficult to use. Paths and bridges are being made accessible to all sectors of the community. Existing gravel paths are being hard surfaced to help people with mobility difficulties and reduce maintenance costs. There will be a few 'new' paths along existing grass paths which get eroded from heavy use.
- 'K' Frame motorcycle barriers are to be installed along the canal towpath and at entrance points to the Park at Birstall and opposite the Hope and Anchor
- A Portrait Bench of an Archaeology Trio (two Bronze Age people and an Auroch) is to be installed. Potential locations are:

1. New Nature Reserve
2. Between Thurmaston Lock Bridge and Johnsons Bridge or on the Causeway.
3. Close to Birstall Lock Bridge on the island.

- There are currently no proposals for street lighting. However if needed it would be kept to a minimum in the Park to avoid disturbing wildlife and only used in winter
- At the end of 2010 the project was progressing well. Current priorities are to upgrade access via Meadow Lane, Syston and improve the route towards Cossington.
- There is apprehension about funding for 2011/12 and beyond given difficult economic conditions.

## **Main issues and opportunities from Workshop 1**

### Issues within Watermead Park

- Signage for boat users and pedestrians within the Park is poor. The landscape is flat and difficult to navigate. More interpretive maps required also showing what's on offer in the local centre
- Conflicts between cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians need to be resolved
- Reed beds in the northern end of the country Park should be off limits
- There needs to be a bridleway between the City and County owned land and also east/west across the Park
- The Canal towpath is not complete and there is a gap preventing a continuous route between Leicester and Loughborough
- New bridges are required in the middle of the Park
- Align the strategies of the Connect2 project and the Country Park Management Plan.

### Access to the Park from neighbouring areas

- Wider access:
  - There is potential for a major access route to be created between the Park and Castle Hill Country Park to the West as well as to Rothley, Cossington, Wanlip and Syston to the North
  - A path between Birstall and Syston Schools is planned
  - Need to consider how connectivity through the Park can be improved both north south and east west from Birstall to Thurmaston

### On the Thurmaston side:

- Connections should be improved between the Park and the east side of Thurmaston (to integrate any SUE development) and to Hamilton beyond. The A607 and railway line present major obstacles in this regard and there are only 3 footbridges and 1 underpass.
- Signage from Thurmaston is poor
- There should be a new access to the Park via Osier Walk/Bay Walk as indicated in the Thurmaston Masterplan
- Access is currently poor around the Marina site although at the moment no public access is allowed
- The access to Mill Lane could be widened and made more obvious

- Land opposite the Leicester Office Furniture Shop provides a wide pathway through to the park if this can be secured and tidied up.
- On the Birstall side:
  - Signage into the Park from Birstall is poor
  - There could be pedestrian access from the Birstall Park and Ride site
  - Bus services along the A6 from Leicester are okay and are better than those from the north. There are no stops near Watermead near Rothley and Birstall.
  - Better access from Longslade College and the northern end of Birstall would be desirable
  - Birstall Park and ride takes trade away from Thurmaston and upsets Wanlip
- From Syston:
  - Access for sailing clubs along Meadow Lane is terrible
- From Wanlip:
  - Mixed feelings from Wanlip residents about improving accessibility to the Park from the village
  - Butchers Lane is an unadopted road terminating at the gate to the Park. Increased traffic here would be problematic given the history of the adjacent Rectory Nursery
- From Cossington:
  - There are poor pedestrian links north of Watermead Park along the river and canal and a lack of crossing points
- From Leicester:
  - Rights of way between the City and the countryside beyond the Park require attention
  - Cycle routes linking Leicester to Loughborough from surrounding residential areas are desirable

#### General issues

- New Access points should be considered in terms of their potential to encourage crime and antisocial behaviour
- Parking charges will discourage visitors to the Park

#### Disabled access issues

- Access to and within the Park must be suitable for all
- Wheelchair access from the Canal to the Hope and Anchor is too steep and there is no rail.
- Wheelchair access is difficult to the Canal at Johnsons Bridge/Thurmaston Industrial Estate as it is a higher level than the towpath and Park beyond
- There is no disabled access from Wanlip at Butcher's Lane
- There are problems with some RADAR gates
- There is an obstruction to cyclists and pushchairs at Whiles Lane, Birstall where there is a kissing gate and RADAR gate
- Mobility Scooters should be encouraged
- Johnsons bridge is not wheelchair friendly

### **Broad policy options: Access and Connectivity:**

#### Access to Watermead Park

**API: Maintain existing levels of access and signage to and from Leicester, Birstall, Syston, Thurmaston and Wanlip**

**AP2: Promote and provide integrated and improved access and signage to and from the Park from Leicester, neighbouring communities and other nearby villages, the Birstall Park & Ride site and further afield.**

#### **Commentary**

Both options have similar impacts on sustainability objectives but to different degrees. Improved access (option AP2) with more access points designed to be attractive to users and better parking provision and signage has real potential to attract more people to the Park and countryside. This brings risk of harm that biodiversity and tranquillity will be adversely affected whereas maintaining the existing approach (option API) will limit the potential harm but at the expense of social objectives to realise this asset for all.

In terms of equalities issues the current approach (option API) has improved accessibility for all users in recent years at key entry points. Providing better access (option AP2) would open up the area to more people with the best results coming from high quality signage and well designed and located access points.

### **Broad policy options: Access and Connectivity:**

#### Access within the park

**AWP1: Rely on current access routes (including those proposed by the connect2 project) with a mix of footpaths, running routes, cycle routes, bridleways and limited access routes for cars and restrictions on access by other motorised modes**

**AWP2: Create multi-functional access routes through the park for non-motorised modes.**

#### **Commentary**

In terms of sustainability both options offer similar benefits particularly in terms of environmental and social objectives. Well designed access for a range of different users could help improve local air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce vulnerability to climate change, increase healthy lifestyles, increase access to services and facilities and increase access to the countryside, open space and semi urban environments such as parks.

In terms of equality issues current routes and surfaces (option AWP1) may limit access for older people, those with disabilities and mothers with young children. Providing high quality, multi-user routes (option AWP2) could improve access for more users and reduce the scope for conflicts between different users.

# Theme 5: Development and Regeneration

## Evidence/policy background

### Hope Park

#### Current Local Plan guidance

This area comprises a restored landfill site located north of Wanlip Road, east of the canal and adjacent to the A46/A607/Hobby Horse junction. It forms the north east edge of the Birstall/Leicester/Thurmaston (Soar Valley north) green wedge.

The site is located in an area liable to flood.

#### Current proposals

Raynsway envisage development of a prestigious BI Business Park fronting A46/A607 as a new gateway and landmark feature defining the approach into Leicester from the north. A sports club and improved linkage under the A46 to new sports pitches north of the road corridor would improve facilities for Syston.

### The Wanlip Country Club site

#### Current Local Plan guidance

Borough wide Local Plan Policy RT/18 allows for a range of uses including public house, café, restaurant, hotel, club house, conference facilities, self catering holiday accommodation, indoor and outdoor sports facilities and/or a marina. Developer contributions will be sought towards a Country Park visitor centre. Improvements to access to all areas of the Country Park; and enhancement of the canal corridor

The site is located in an area liable to flood.

#### Relevant regeneration proposals

Planning permission was granted on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2005 for a significant mixed use development on the site (planning application ref: P/04/3997/2) for the erection of an hotel complex, comprising reception suite, guest room block, fitness suite, sports hall/business suite, park pavilion, grounds man's workshop/store, boathouse and ferry terminal with associated access, landscape, parking and infrastructure. A further application to extend the time limit for the implementation of planning permission P/04/3997/2 was received on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010 and was granted conditionally on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2010 (the legal agreement was approved on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010).

The latest proposals envisage redevelopment for a mix of B1/B2 employment/office uses, a hotel/restaurant and active water based leisure. High density 'high tech' blocks would front onto A607 with a transition to smaller, business park units and a hotel/restaurant. Smallest business units would front onto the lakeside and canal. Most buildings would be located

around a landscaped, central car park. The lake based leisure, a canal side piazza and new footbridge across the canal into the Park, with the possibility of a visitor centre, could provide a recreation/leisure hub attracting visitors to the Park.

### **Thurmaston Waterfront and village centre**

#### Current 2004 Local Plan guidance

Within the built area of Thurmaston existing main employment areas including the Pinfold Industrial Estate are safeguarded as Primarily Employment Areas. The village centre is defined as a Local Centre. Key recreation land is safeguarded. Elsewhere land not otherwise designated is defined as part of Primarily Residential Areas.

The majority of the area is land liable to flood, including significant parts of built up areas along the Waterfront, Pinfold Estate and the village centre.

#### 2005 Masterplan for Thurmaston

The Masterplan identifies parts of Thurmaston where improvements are needed to environmental quality and cohesion. It defines important gateways and scope for improvements to access and the public realm. For the village centre improvements suggested include signage and surfaced footpaths improving connectivity. Elsewhere there a number of neighbourhood enhancement zones with potential for community based initiatives. A lack of funding has hindered implementation of the Masterplan.

#### Other possible regeneration proposals

Indicative proposals have been suggested for long term regeneration of Thurmaston marina, the waterfront and Bridge Business Park. The proposals aim to harmonise development with Watermead Park, improve access and create a community water meadow/open space on former tipped land between the marina and the river Soar. Mixed use development is envisaged but with a significant element of housing in place of current employment generating uses.

### **Transport issues**

Modelling of the transport implications of potential growth options on the edge of Leicester was undertaken by MVA Consulting for the Borough Council in 2009. MVA's work demonstrates that if priority is given to meeting demands for travel by car there could be very significant and potentially unacceptable levels of congestion at key junctions on the local road network. These problems need to be mitigated by applying packages of measures to reduce traffic generation and increase travel by non car modes. The level of mitigation achievable will be influenced by the nature of developments and the effectiveness of the measures applied to reduce car use.

MVA also found that significant new employment land provision located on the edge of Leicester could generate dispersed traffic movements from nearby towns and villages that would be difficult to serve by other modes in particular public transport because of the relatively small numbers involved and their wide distribution.

## **Main Issues and opportunities from Workshop 1**

### Location and type of new employment land

- Watermead area should provide space for business tourism and another for leisure tourism
- Development of the site adjacent to the Hope and Anchor (Hope Park) presents an opportunity to reconnect this area with the rest of the Park without adversely affecting the Park
- Space is needed for small to medium sized enterprises and incubator space and affordable low spec units too
- large employers are needed in both traditional jobs and other employment generating uses such as in the leisure industry
- Top specification bigger business units are needed to unlock developments of smaller units
- Larger units should be provided at the northern end of the Park and small affordable units in the south
- There is good evidence of a pressing need for more employment floorspace in the area and limited alternative locations in the short term

### Regeneration of Thurmaston Waterfront

- Waterfront area is a wasted opportunity presently
- Sensitive development of the Thurmaston/Watermead areas can have a positive effect. High quality commercial development acknowledging the waterside setting is a price worth paying in order to regenerate Thurmaston and improve accessibility to the Park
- Employment should be spread across the waterfront area and not concentrated in one area
- Different types of commercial development should be provided along the waterfront depending on the particular location and its character
- The boatyard could be developed to create a visitor destination such as at Pillings Lock
- Land around the Marina site is derelict and could be given over as a wildlife site. The Marina fragments this excellent green space
- The marina site is key to the potential redevelopment of the industrial area off Pinfold Road. Suggested alternatives:
  - 1) A mix of uses including housing, retail, leisure and offices could be realised. Industrial jobs relocated elsewhere; or
  - 2) the marina should be redeveloped for mixed uses including bars/restaurants, residential uses and an improved or expanded marina; or
  - 3) the marina site should be opened up so that there is two way traffic between it and Thurmaston Local Centre.

### Regeneration of Thurmaston Village Centre

- Opportunity to influence visitors to spend more time and money in Thurmaston
- The local centre of Thurmaston has been affected by the ASDA store and District Centre
- Need to improve the retail offer in Thurmaston

### Potential Hotel accommodation

- There is a lack of visitor accommodation in this area and a further Premier Inn type hotel could be supported in this area to provide further capacity.
- A new hotel will increase visitors and will bring further pressure to the Park
- The Wanlip Country Club site has potential for a 100-170 bed 4 star conference hotel with meeting and conference facilities for 500 delegates.
- Additional land for employment purposes would be required to support the viability of a hotel/conference facility

### General Principles for new development schemes

- Generally speaking, the existing built area turns its back on the Park and it is desirable to reverse this trend depending on the nature of specific developments.
- Where the Park meets the built up area, the design and setting of any new buildings needs to be carefully considered. Green fingers should be allowed to permeate the built up areas allowing a blurring of boundaries between development and the Park.
- The Eastern boundary of the Park is formed by industrial buildings that require either better screening or reorganisation so that they face into the park creating a better interface, surveillance and perception of safety.
- Rather than industrial fencing, natural security barriers should be considered between any development areas and the Park
- Key views into the Park include from the back of the Memorial Hall and from the hump back bridge over King Lear Lake. Otherwise views into the Park are limited perhaps explaining why people think it is a hidden asset. Views could be improved by creating a gateway feature to promote the Park either at the Hobby Horse Junction or at Thurmaston local centre as part of a regeneration initiative.
- The boundary along the A46 next to King Lear lake should be screened in a more natural way
- Any development should be Low density and enable green space to surround the buildings
- The distinctiveness of various parts of the Park should be taken into account when devising a site specific approach to design
- Prioritise the development of previously developed land
- Any development must be high quality to maximise green infrastructure asset and have the right balance between commercial and community led activity
- Do not lose sight of the need to protect settlement identity
- Seek wider connections to this green corridor from surrounding built up areas and create a transition from urban to rural environments
- Flood risk will limit the type of land uses within the area to open green spaces; but new development could help reduce flood risk or provide compensatory flood capacity
- No obtrusive large scale renewable energy generating schemes should be considered. However there is scope for micro renewables to be incorporated within new building design
- SHLAA site (PSH 113) would cut the Park in half and should be resisted

### Potential scope for developer contributions

- Development can help to facilitate green infrastructure, economic and built environment improvements in the area and help kick start wider regeneration of Thurmaston

- Allotments are needed
- Public transport accessibility needs to be improved
- Opportunities should be explored to deliver new sports provision. Possible site for leisure uses to the north of the A46
- The Old Forge could be developed as a small museum and heritage centre
- Improvements to Green infrastructure would facilitate high value development and may help to achieve a lower risk of flooding, making the area attractive place to live and work
- The car park at the Mill Lane access is inadequate and should be extended and toilets provided
- An outdoor pursuits centre, cycle hire and visitors centre could be provided in the Park.
- Need a bridge over the river
- Heritage or tourism centre in Thurmaston
- Comprehensive signage strategy within the Park and linking to adjoining communities
- Improved facilities along waterways

### **Broad policy options: Development and Regeneration**

#### Location and type of development

The objective is to find the appropriate balance between meeting needs for housing and employment land and allowing for other uses that could help regenerate the Watermead area, notably the Thurmaston Priority Neighbourhood including the village centre and waterfront area.

#### Pinfold/Bridge Business Park & Thurmaston marina

**TP1: Redevelopment of the existing business parks for primarily large scale general employment uses next to an improved marina and with improved access for all transport modes**

**TP2: Redevelopment of the existing business parks for a mix of uses primarily housing but also with shops, restaurants, leisure uses and good quality, smaller scale employment generating uses including offices next to an improved marina and with improved access for all transport modes**

### **Commentary**

Both redevelopment options TP1 & TP2 have potential to remedy the poor physical environment and utilise previously developed land in the Thurmaston Priority Neighbourhood. Another benefit could be improved energy efficiency in new building designs. Well designed developments would make these areas more attractive with a stronger sense of place and also support efforts to conserve and enhance historic and cultural environments locally.

Redevelopment for mainly employment uses (option TP1) could achieve a better and more energy efficient form of building and layout making sustainable travel more attractive than at present and units more attractive to the market. However a mixed use development

(option TP2) of jobs, homes and other facilities would enable people to live close to their workplace helping reduce travel and levels of car use.

Both options could result in developments that reduce the risk of crime. A redevelopment for mainly employment purposes (option TP1) is unlikely to add much value in terms of improving access to the Park as it is likely to be self contained for security reasons. In contrast a mixed use scheme (option TP2) could create real opportunities to improve connectivity and create a high quality public realm.

Retaining mainly employment uses (option TP1) could encourage a more sustainable economy, whilst redevelopment for a mix of uses, (option TP2) has a slightly negative effect in this respect. However, providing a wider range of uses and activities (option TP2) has more scope to provide a wider choice of jobs.

In terms of equality issues both redevelopment options suggest opportunities to provide better access for people with disabilities. A mixed use development (option TP2) could also be designed to provide better access for people of all ages.

### **Broad policy options: Development and Regeneration**

#### Thurmaston Waterfront

**TW1: Concentration of small scale employment generating uses including offices within existing buildings along the waterfront next to an improved mill lane boatyard with improved and more attractive access via (one or more of) Mill Lane/side of Memorial Hall/Osier Walk/Bay Walk (as in the Thurmaston Masterplan)**

**TW2: Promote and enhance the Thurmaston village centre by redevelopment of parts of the waterfront area for a mix of uses including shops, cafes/restaurants, housing, leisure uses and some small scale employment generating uses next to an improved Mill Lane boatyard with improved and more attractive access via (one or more of) Mill Lane/Osier Walk/Bay Walk (as in the Thurmaston masterplan).**

### **Commentary**

Option TW1 with little change from current conditions has a neutral impact across most sustainability objectives. However there is a slight risk it could further reduce the attractiveness of the local centre. Given complex land ownerships and the dense built form there would be limited opportunities to improve access to the countryside and attract investment to regenerate the area.

There would be opportunities with carefully planned redevelopment schemes (option TW2) to realise a built environment that is more energy efficient, designs out crime, increases access to services and facilities at the same time as attracting investment and a better diversity of jobs. There could also be significant benefits for the village centre and better access to the adjacent Park. However the creation of a more attractive centre and

waterfront would attract more people with many coming by car. Improved access by walking, cycling and public transport provision would be needed to minimise traffic related problems.

In terms of equality issues the design and layout of the local centre and waterfront would need to be designed to enable good access for people with disabilities and mothers. If an improved centre included a church this could disbenefit some religious groups

### **Broad policy options: Development and Regeneration**

#### Wanlip Country Club site

**CC1: Maintain current borough wide local plan approach allowing for specified development on this site (including public house, café, restaurant, hotel, club house, conference facilities, self catering holiday accommodation, indoor and outdoor sports facilities and/or a marina)**

**CC2: Allow a wider range of uses including eg: industry and offices.**

### **Commentary**

Both redevelopment options for the Country Club site (options CC1 & CC2) are likely to have negative effects environmentally because they introduce development and activity into an area of biodiversity and landscape value. However, development would bring former mineral workings into positive use. Any buildings would need to include sustainable design and construction techniques allowing adaptation to climate change and minimising the risk of flooding.

As the Country Club site is relatively remote from local communities and accessed via Wanlip Road it will be difficult to provide good public transport access for the uses proposed under both options. The types of developments envisaged are more likely to be car based with some adverse impacts in terms of air quality and emissions.

Both options make limited contributions to meeting social objectives although development could improve access to the wider countryside by providing a new bridge helping improve access across the canal into the Park.

For economic objectives both options perform well as they help increase inward investment and provide employment floorspace. It is unclear as to extent to which jobs located here might benefit the residents of the Thurmaston Priority Neighbourhood. It seems likely that the more diverse range of service uses under Option CC1 would not create as many new jobs as industrial and office uses (option CC2).

In terms of equality issues as the site is in private ownership less control is possible regarding potential differential impacts on different users. Every effort would need to be made to ensure any redevelopment provided access for all.

## **Broad policy options: Development and Regeneration**

Land south west of the A46 Hobby Horse junction (Hope Park)

**HPI: Retain the whole area as part of the overall green infrastructure network.**

**HP2: Develop this area for employment uses with landscaping.**

### **Commentary**

Retaining the Hope Park area as open land (option HPI) would better meet biodiversity and landscape objectives. The contribution to social objectives is mainly neutral but there is the opportunity to maintain linkages between open spaces and permeability of the countryside into the built up area. There would be no benefits in terms of economic objectives.

Developing the area for employment purposes (option HP2) brings economic benefits through inward investment and job creation; however, this would be at the expense of environmental objectives with development reducing biodiversity value and changing landscape character. The location of the site readily accessible from an already congested main road network and separate from nearby communities is likely to generate car based travel detrimental to local air quality and attempts to reduce emissions. There is scope to develop good cycleway links but the site is not easily accessed via public transport.

Both options have similar impacts on social objectives.

In terms of equality issues for both options as the site is in private ownership less control is possible regarding differential impacts on diversity groups.

### **Planning criteria for new development areas**

All new developments would be expected to provide high standards of sustainable development including renewable energy. General design principles are being developed in a separate policy for the Core Strategy which will need to be taken into account.

The site specific guidance below will only apply if any areas are considered appropriate for development.

#### **Hope Park and Wanlip Country Club: Site specific design principles**

**DPI: Emphasis on creating new entry into Leicester: bold development forms with some tall buildings dominating frontages onto main road corridors<sup>6</sup>.**

**Parking areas behind buildings forming part of the transition to park. Limited awareness of the Park from adjacent communities and along road corridors.**

**DP2: Emphasis on creating new entry to Watermead Park: a softer approach with clusters of new buildings and parking in well landscaped setting**

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<sup>6</sup> As with existing development along the A46 past Pontylue Farm

**complementing the park. More open frontages retained onto roads and the park/waterfront giving greater awareness of Watermead Park, from adjacent communities and along road corridors.**

## **Commentary**

Both sets of design principles (options DPI & DP2) perform similarly across sustainability objectives. They are likely to perform well in terms of reducing crime, encouraging a sustainable economy and reducing disparities in economic performance.

However the more dominant built forms associated with option DPI would have a more negative impact than option DP2 on the objective to minimise detrimental visual intrusion and maintain and enhance landscape character and distinctiveness.

Developments designed more sympathetically with the Watermead Park setting (option DP2) have more scope to maintain and enhance linkages between open spaces and safeguard the identity of nearby communities.

In terms of equality issues neither option would have any differential impacts on diversity groups.

## **All new developments**

The 'Developer Contributions' option below enables comments to be made on the range of benefits that might be the basis for negotiation with developers when any new development is considered. The list of potential contributions included is not intended to be definitive but is a starting point for discussion.

Stakeholders need to be aware that any package of community benefits required as part of development schemes must be:

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
- directly related to the development
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development

They must also be viable and affordable as part of the development proposed.

## Developer contributions

**DC1: Seek to negotiate reasonably and directly related contributions from any new development schemes located in the Watermead area.**

At the December 2010 workshop the following potential benefits were identified by participants:

- Development can help to facilitate green infrastructure, economic and built environment improvements in the area and help kick start wider regeneration of Thurmaston

- Allotments are needed
- Public transport accessibility needs to be improved
- Opportunities should be explored to deliver new sports provision. Possible site for leisure uses to the north of the A46
- The Old Forge could be developed as a small museum and heritage centre
- Improvements to Green infrastructure would facilitate high value development and may help to achieve a lower risk of flooding, making the area attractive place to live and work
- The car park at the Mill Lane access is inadequate and should be extended and toilets provided
- An outdoor pursuits centre, cycle hire and visitors centre could be provided in the Park.
- Need a bridge over the river
- Heritage or tourism centre in Thurmaston
- Comprehensive signage strategy within the Park and linking to adjoining communities
- Improved facilities along waterways

## **Commentary**

There is significant potential for this option to provide benefits in terms of improving biodiversity, enhancing the landscape and townscape, conserving historic and cultural environments, promoting a strong community, increasing access to services and facilities and increasing access to the countryside.

In terms of equality issues there will also be opportunities to improve access across diversity groups but the impact of this depends on how the policies are implemented.

## **Heritage and Conservation**

### **Evidence/policy background**

#### **Local historic assets**

Although there are no designated Conservation Areas in the Watermead Park & Thurmaston Waterfront Area there are a number of historic assets of national and local importance located in Thurmaston Village Centre and in Wanlip parish:

#### Thurmaston

- Church of St Michael, Melton Rd (Grade II\*)
- No 841 to 853 Melton Rd (Locally Listed)
- Remains of Old Chapel, Melton Rd (Grade II)
- St Michaels Church Community Centre, Melton Rd (Locally Listed)

#### Wanlip

- Church of St Nicholas, Church Rd (Grade II)
- Hall Farm, Rectory Rd (Locally Listed)
- Ice House off Rectory Road (Locally Listed)
- Manor Farm, Rectory Rd (Locally Listed)

## **Main issues and opportunities from Workshop 1**

- There are a number of influences including the Canal, the garden suburb at Birstall, Wanlip 'Park' and the generally rural character and farmsteads at Wanlip.
- There are a number of notable buildings in Thurmaston with a good built heritage along Roman Road. However the area has become neglected
- The Ice House, Church and Wanlip Park are cited as good examples of heritage in Wanlip
- There should be a Heritage Centre in Thurmaston to draw people into the village from the Park.

### **Broad policy options: Heritage and Conservation:**

**H1: Seek to improve the historic environment within powers and limited funding currently available**

**H2: Seek to develop a scheme to promote and improve the historic environment by for example creating a heritage trail linking communities, Birstall park & ride and important assets and providing a local heritage centre**

### **Commentary**

Given the limited resources likely to be available the current approach to conservation (option H1) is unlikely to bring any real changes other than continuing to safeguard historic assets and help maintain and perhaps improve the townscape and landscape of the area.

A better resourced approach (option H2) offers potential to do more in terms of promoting and enhancing historic assets, improving townscape, providing better services and community engagement for local people. A well designed heritage trail could encourage increased trips by non car modes and better access into Watermead Park and surrounding countryside. A heritage centre could be designed to meet objectives for built development, flood and crime risk. Option H2 might bring marginal economic benefits but is more likely to be neutral in meeting economic objectives.

In terms of equality issues both options present opportunities to improve access across all diversity groups but the impact of this depends on how the policies are implemented.