



Charnwood Forest Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment



LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CHARNWOOD FOREST
LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

SECTION 1: CHARACTER ASSESSMENT REPORT

1.0	Introduction	Page 5
2.0	Purpose and Objectives	Page 6
3.0	Method	Page 8
4.0	Policy Context	Page 18
5.0	Existing Landscape Character Studies	Page 26
6.0	Landscape Context	Page 34
7.0	Landscape Character Area Boundary Analysis	Page 42
8.0	Landscape Character Assessment	Page 48
9.0	Settlement Character Assessment	Page 51
10.0	Charnwood Forest Regional Park: Proposals for a working boundary	Page 55
11.0	Conclusions	Page 63

SECTION 2: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

SECTION 3: SETTLEMENT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

SECTION 4: FIGURES

SECTION 5: APPENDICES

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT SHEETS

- **Bradgate & Beacon**
- **Ulverscroft**
- **Charley**
- **Swithland**
- **Rothley Brook**
- **Thornton & Markfield**
- **Bardon**

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT SHEETS

- **Agar Nook**
- **Anstey**
- **Cropston**
- **Groby**
- **Loughborough (Charnwood Forest fringes)**
- **Markfield**
- **Mountsorrel**
- **Newton Linford**
- **Quorn**
- **Ratby**
- **Rothley**
- **Shepshed (Charnwood Forest fringes)**
- **Swithland**
- **Thornton**
- **Thringstone**
- **Thurcaston**
- **Whitwick**
- **Woodhouse**
- **Woodhouse Eaves**

FIGURES

Figure 1	Charnwood Forest Map
Figure 2	Local Authority Boundary Areas
Figure 3	National Landscape Character Areas
Figure 4	County Level Landscape Character Areas
Figure 5	National Forest Landscape Character Areas
Figure 6	Agricultural Land Classification
Figure 7	Hydrology
Figure 8	Infrastructure
Figure 9	Settlement Pattern
Figure 10	Charnwood Forest Historic Landscape Character – Settlements
Figure 11	Cultural Heritage
Figure 12	Sites of Ecological and Geological Interest
Figure 13	Policies for Landscape Protection and Enhancement
Figure 14	Historical Boundaries
Figure 15	Charnwood Forest Boundary Stakeholder Consultation
Figure 16	Proposed Charnwood Forest Boundary
Figure 17	Proposed Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Areas
Figure 18	Comparison of National Forest and Proposed Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Areas
Figure 19	Proposed Charnwood Forest Regional Park Working Boundary
Figure 20	Greenspace Land-Use Typologies
Figure 21	Charnwood Forest Woodland Type Typology Map
Figure 22	Greenspace Typologies Percentage Cover Analysis
Figure 23	Greenspace Typologies Character Area Percentage Cover Analysis
Figure 24	Woodland Typologies Percentage Cover Analysis
Figure 25	Woodland Typologies Character Area Percentage Cover Analysis

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Landscape Typology Analysis
Appendix 2	Review of Landscape Character Assessment Best Practice
Appendix 3	Review of Relevant Conservation Area Appraisals
Appendix 4	Review of Relevant Village Design Statements
Appendix 5	Landscape Character Assessment Field Survey Sheet
Appendix 6	Settlement Character Assessment Field Survey Sheet
Appendix 7	The Future of Charnwood Forest Consultation Responses
Appendix 8	Draft Landscape Character Assessment Stakeholder Consultation Responses

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Charnwood Forest is a distinctive area of rugged upland landscape which lies towards the north-western corner of Leicestershire. The Forest is rural in character and is valued for its rich ecological, geological and historical interests. The area is known for its rolling topography, high woodland content and areas of rocky outcrops. It is bordered to the south and east by the floodplain landscapes of the Rothley Brook system and to the north-east by the joined Grand Union Canal and River Soar corridor. The National Forest overlaps Charnwood Forest in the west of the area and continues to the west. Charnwood Forest is an important area for recreation and leisure and has long been identified in planning strategies and policies as being unique and requiring special consideration.
- 1.2 The M1 motorway runs through the Charnwood Forest area. It contains other strategically important transport routes, including the A50/A511, the A46 and the Great Central Railway, Figure 1. Charnwood Forest lies close to the urban centres of Leicester, Loughborough, Coalville and Shepshed. Leicester, Loughborough and Coalville are planned as 'Growth Points' in the East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy and are likely to receive the majority of Leicestershire's housing growth over the next 20 years. Charnwood Forest also contains some of the largest hard-rock quarries in the UK.
- 1.3 Charnwood Forest has no national landscape designations although the area is protected by planning policies in local planning documents. Charnwood Forest is partly covered by the National Forest as shown in Figure 5, and contains numerous nationally important ecological designations, as shown in Figure 12.
- 1.4 Distinctiveness in the landscape is created through the interaction between people and places. Landscape character arises from unique patterns and combinations of different landscape elements. Landscape character assessment is a decision-making tool which systematically classifies the landscape into distinctive areas based on the interaction between topography, geology, land use, vegetation pattern, and human influence. Its role is to identify important features and relationships, usually to ensure that future change does not undermine the characteristics or features of value within a landscape. Landscape character assessment is an approach that can make a significant contribution to the sustainable objectives of environmental protection and prudent use of natural resources. It contributes to the evidence base required for producing regional and local planning documents.

2.0 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 TEP was commissioned by Leicestershire County Council in February 2008 to undertake a landscape character and environmental data gathering study to inform the development of future plans and policies for Charnwood Forest. The project was overseen by a stakeholder steering group.
- 2.2 Charnwood Forest has no single administrative boundary or authority. The area covers parts of three district authorities – Charnwood Borough, North-West Leicestershire District, and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough. The County Council's *Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy's* Charnwood Forest landscape character area has been broadly accepted as a basis for policy within planning documents, although Local Plan documents have a tighter boundary which excludes all settlements and focuses solely on the surrounding landscapes. These boundaries are shown on Figure 2.
- 2.3 This document researches and categorises features and characteristics of the landscape. It divides the wider Charnwood Forest area into seven landscape character areas, defined by local distinctiveness and changes in topography, woodland, hydrology, land cover, land use and built form.
- 2.4 These smaller landscape character areas defined within the wider Charnwood Forest landscape have been defined with close reference to the existing landscape character areas and types defined in the National Forest Strategy, Figure 5, to provide an overarching character assessment of the land in the National Forest and the Charnwood Forest landscape.
- 2.5 The study also examines the characteristics of the settlements within Charnwood Forest, and provides an assessment of the urban fringes of those on its periphery. It appraises their individual pattern and character as well as their overall setting and influence in the landscape.
- 2.6 The study also prepares background information to support the emerging concept of a Regional Park and focuses on an examination of a working boundary for the Regional Park initiative.
- 2.7 The objectives of this report are:
- To produce a land use typology map of the land cover of the Charnwood Forest area through the collation of relevant baseline data.
 - To review existing landscape character work covering the Charnwood Forest area, including examining the appropriateness of the current landscape character area boundary, and to provide an impartial character assessment of Charnwood Forest, to bring the area to the same level of detail as that in the National Forest.
 - To carry out a study of the settlement character and provide an analysis of the sensitivity of land around the edges of settlements and its capacity to accommodate change.

CHARNWOOD FOREST LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- To provide a critical examination of the range of Charnwood Forest boundaries and to recommend a preferred boundary for the potential Regional Park initiative.

3.0 METHOD

3.1 This assessment has been undertaken following guidance published in the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage advisory document *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (2002)* and *Topic Paper 6: Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity*. The settlement assessment has been undertaken following these principles; the detailed survey guidance provided within the *Urban Design Compendium* published by English Partnerships; and with reference where appropriate to the former Countryside Agency's *Unlocking the Potential of the Rural Urban Fringe (2004)*.

3.2 The key stages of the process are described as follows:

- Desk study
- Interpolation of desk based data and initial mapping
- Field study
- Classification and description
- Capacity, sensitivity and quality assessment

Desk Study

3.3 Desk-based research included review of current national, regional and local planning policy and guidance such as PPS1, PPS7, PPS15, East Midland Regional Spatial Strategy, the draft East Midlands Regional Plan (RSS8 Review), Regional Environment Strategy (published 2002), Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Structure Plan and the Charnwood Borough, Hinckley and Bosworth and North West Leicestershire Local Development Frameworks. The classification was informed by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy, the landscape character work undertaken for the National Forest and local landscape character and biodiversity assessments.

3.4 The desk based review also included an appraisal of existing landscape character studies including the Landscape Character Map of England (published by the former Countryside Agency), the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy, 2001, Leicestershire Historic Landscape Characterisation, The National Forest Landscape Character Assessment, Hinckley and Bosworth Landscape Character Assessment and the Rothley Brook Meadows Management Strategy. This is summarised in Section 5. The information was mapped so the various levels of character assessment, including the national assessment, the county assessment and the National Forest characterisation study (Figures 3, 4 and 5) could be cross examined to draw out similarities and differences.

3.5 To inform the settlement assessment, a review of all available Conservation Area Appraisals and Village Design Statements was undertaken. These are contained in Appendices 3 and 4.

3.6 Desk-based research included an assessment of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, aerial photography and Geographical Information System (GIS) datasets including hydrological, ecological and archaeological information. From this

data a series of mapped overlays was produced showing common characteristics. These included hydrology patterns, infrastructure and settlement pattern (see Figures 7, 8 and 9).

Typologising

- 3.7 To assist in the process of characterisation a GIS database was developed in which the landscape of the area was broken down into individual mapping units. This required collation of a range of datasets of which the most important were the General Land Use Data (GLUD) dataset and digital aerial photographs.
- 3.8 This information was collated and mapped into landscape typologies, which are a breakdown of the component features of a landscape which provide a basis for determining the landscape character of the area. This produced a detailed map of the land use and landcover as well as the various landscape elements. A full description of the method used to produce the land use typology map is contained in Appendix 1.
- 3.9 Allocation of typologies to land parcels is not always straightforward and assumptions sometimes had to be made about the most appropriate description. For example, a country park is often comprised of a mosaic of amenity spaces and natural habitats. In this assessment emphasis was placed on typologising habitats rather than land uses. This process is further explained in Appendix 1.
- 3.10 Woodland is an important component of the landscape in Charnwood Forest and to further expand the woodland information mapped on the typology map, a more detailed woodland map was produced. This used the typology data as mapped from the aerial photos, as well as additional information from the National Inventory of Woodland and Trees. Woodland was categorised into broadleaved, coniferous, mixed and young woodland. (Young woodland was considered to be under 15 years old, to incorporate all the planting completed through the National Forest, which was established in 1995.) All linear woodland strips, likely to be hedgerow woodland, were removed in order to clearly show the woodland pattern and for resource efficiency when mapping

Interpolation of desk based data and initial mapping

- 3.11 Following the collation and review of the desk-based research and examination of the aerial photographs and maps, the trends and patterns evident in the area were identified. This was achieved by compiling a series of maps combining similar themes and considering patterns and correlations between these themes. The maps were used as broad indicators which enabled the identification of draft landscape character areas. The interpolation maps prepared include:

Agricultural Land Classification – Figure 6

Hydrology – Figure 7

Infrastructure – Figure 8

Settlement Pattern – Figure 9

Greenspace Land Use Typology – Figure 20

Woodland Type and Pattern – Figure 21

Agricultural Land Classification

- 3.12 This map shows the quality of the agricultural land across the area. It includes pockets of grade 2 classification (very good quality) on the peripheries of Charnwood Forest, wide areas of grade 3 classification (good – moderate) covering the majority of the area and pockets of grade 4 classification (poor) on this higher land.

Hydrology

- 3.13 This overlay included ponds, lakes, rivers and associated floodplains to give an impression of the amount of Charnwood Forest which may be influenced by these features and patterns.

Infrastructure

- 3.14 This overlay mapped all main roads, railways, overhead line routes, industrial areas and quarries to provide an overview of where the landscape has a prevalence of man-made elements which have an influence on character. The prominence of these influences however cannot be determined from desk information as this relies on the combination of other factors such as topography and vegetation, which is only apparent from the field survey.

Settlement Pattern

- 3.15 This overlay mapped the shapes of the settlements based on their outer built edges. This does not include recreational activities along the fringes, such as golf courses which often have an urbanising influence on landscape character. Farmsteads and private dwellings within the countryside were also plotted to highlight those areas which have the higher concentrations of built form.

Greenspace Land Use Typology

- 3.16 To analyse the typology information, the percentage coverage of the various elements of greenspace was calculated using the typology map. This was completed for the Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Area as a whole and for each of the landscape character areas within Charnwood Forest. The information was used to test and verify the draft landscape character areas. The percentage cover information is shown on Figure 22 (whole area analysis) and Figure 23 (individual character area analysis).

- 3.17 As shown by Figure 22, farmland covers most of the Charnwood Forest area, accounting for 53% of the land-cover. It is intersected by large areas of public open space and amenity areas which cover almost 4% of the land. The M1 is visible passing through the landscape and the large quarries are obvious around Mountsorrel and Stanton-under-Bardon. There is also a scattering of settlements through the area and consequently the built environment accounts for approximately 9% of the land-cover. The associated private gardens cover 7.5%, a large area.

- 3.18 A more detailed analysis of the character areas (Figure 23) shows the individual characteristics of each area. Bradgate and Beacon (Landscape Character Area (LCA) 1) has the highest percentage cover of public gardens and open space (11%) and the highest amount of sports land (4%), but has a low amount of farmland (43%). Ulverscroft (LCA2) has a high percentage of farmland (57%), by far the highest amount of woodland (31%), but no land used for sports and no public parks and gardens. The typology maps also show the large private gardens found in this area. Charley (LCA 3) has the highest coverage of farmland (66%) and a large area of woodland (15%), but few private gardens. Swithland (LCA 4) has the highest coverage of water (4%) and a high coverage of derelict land, active quarries and landfill sites (4%). Rothley Brook (LCA 5) has a high amount of farmland, built environment and private gardens, but a notably small area of woodland (4%) in comparison to other areas. Farmland also covers the majority of Thornton and Markfield (LCA 6) and woodland coverage is high (19%). Bardon (LCA 7) is notable for its high amount of derelict land, active quarries and landfill sites (14%) and relatively low coverage of farmland (40%).
- 3.19 These landscape features and greenspace elements, shown contribute to the landscape character of the area. The percentage analysis highlights the distinctive and distinguishing characteristics of the area as a whole and the individual landscape character areas. The greenspace typology map has many potential uses which are discussed in Appendix 1 but is used in this instance to inform the character assessment and visually represent some of the landscape elements which contribute to landscape character.

Woodland Type and Pattern

- 3.20 The woodland map has been assessed according to percentage cover of broadleaved, coniferous, mixed and young woodland in the Charnwood Forest area as a whole and in each individual character area. This is shown on Figures 24 and 25. Of the total woodland cover, 58% is broadleaved woodland which is by far the type with the most extensive coverage. Second to this, young trees have an 18% share of the total woodland coverage, which is a high figure for this woodland type and shows the woodland character within Charnwood Forest is changing, and will continue to change, over time. Mixed woodland forms 15% of the total, and coniferous woodland, which is concentrated in certain areas, accounts for 9% of the total.
- 3.21 In Bradgate and Beacon (LCA 1), Charley (LCA 3), Swithland (LCA 4) and Rothley Brook (LCA 5) broadleaved woodland accounts for the highest woodland type coverage, at over two thirds in each case, and up to 85% in Charley. In Thornton and Markfield (LCA 6) young woodland has 39% of the total woodland coverage for that character area. This is due to the woodland planted through the National Forest initiatives, as well as a scattering of young woodland throughout the area. There is also a high proportion of young trees in Bardon (LCA 7), some of which is associated with planting to screen mineral workings and restore disused quarries. Ulverscroft (LCA 2) has the highest proportion of coniferous woodland (34% of the total woodland coverage in the area), as well as the highest proportion of woodland coverage in a character area.

Regional Park Desk Review

- 3.22 The desk based review encompassed a brief assessment of the Regional Park initiative in the East Midlands, in the UK and abroad. This researched existing regional policy and the concept of Regional Parks to inform the Charnwood Forest Regional Park working boundary. Documents reviewed included: East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy: emerging LDF policies, *A review of Regional Parc – a New Concept in the Management of Green Space* (a document produced for the River Nene Regional Park Initiative) and a review of several regional parks including the River Nene Regional Park, Mersey Waterfront Regional Park, East Lancashire Regional Park and Emscher landschaftspark (Landscape Park) 2010 (Ruhr, Germany).
- 3.23 The Regional Park research, review and recommendations are detailed in Section 10 which focuses on the potential designation of Charnwood Forest as a Regional Park.

Stakeholder Consultation

- 3.24 Comments on an appropriate boundary for a Charnwood Forest Regional Park were invited from attendees at the Future of Charnwood Forest Update held in December 2007, a follow up to the June 2007 Future of Charnwood Forest conference. The desk study incorporates a review of these stakeholder comments and their proposed Charnwood Forest boundary maps. This information is discussed in Section 14 which examines a working boundary for the Regional Park, with additional information in Appendix 7. Responses from organisations have been mapped in Figure 15.

Summary of the Desk Study

- 3.25 Following analysis of the baseline information the draft landscape characteristics were identified as:
- There is a lack of development, including settlement, infrastructure, quarrying and even scattered farmsteads in the central core of the Charnwood Forest area.
 - Settlements are clustered in a ring around the central area of the Forest, with a scattering of farmsteads in the north-west of the area.
 - The Rothley Brook and River Soar corridor in the east form a distinctive floodplain landscape.
 - A string of settlements follows the line of the floodplain corridor.
 - There is a concentration of quarrying and industrial areas in the west.
 - The whole area has a high woodland content and there are areas in the central core and to the south which have an especially high woodland content.
 - It is predominantly an agricultural landscape, with the soil pattern and topography meaning it is mainly pastoral.
 - There are some large recreational areas in the central core.
 - There is a high proportion of ecological and geological designations in the area.

- 3.26 The desk-based research was used to identify the draft character areas. These areas formed the basis for the field study which verified, reviewed and reformed the areas to final landscape character areas.

Field Study

- 3.27 The detailed field study was carried out by Chartered Landscape Architects. Survey work was undertaken both by car and on foot, viewing from publicly accessible locations. During this assessment consideration was given to individual elements such as built form, land use, topography, vegetation, hydrology and aesthetic factors and the interaction between them which cannot be determined by desk study alone. This allowed distinctions to be made between recognisable patterns in the landscape. Key distinguishing characteristics were recorded during field surveys using a standardised survey sheet, an example of which is included in Appendix 5. Representative photographs were also taken for each character area and have been used to illustrate the character area descriptions. The field survey included analysing the landscape for suitable boundaries to the proposed Regional Park.
- 3.28 The settlement field study was undertaken in a similar way using a bespoke survey sheet which is provided in Appendix 6. This survey included a comprehensive walkover survey of each settlement where consideration was given to building design, materials and skyline as well as more subjective, aesthetic factors which influence character such as attractiveness and nature of surrounding vegetation.
- 3.29 The assessment looked at approaches and gateways, heritage, distinguishing features and green corridors that link into the surrounding countryside. The study also focused on land within the urban fringes and the nature of the urban edge to determine its prominence in the landscape. This enabled judgements to be made regarding potential for integrating new development within the urban edges across the district and provided recommendations for where improvements could be made.
- 3.30 Field assessment work was carried out in spring 2008, with judgements based on a spring landscape. It is appreciated that seasonal variations will occur and visibility and perceptions may be different when trees are fully in leaf or not in leaf. For example the degree of urban edge screening and changes in the appearance of the agricultural landscape particularly relating to the changing vegetation within arable fields.

Classification and Description

- 3.31 Following the field survey, the identified draft landscape character areas were refined and classified into final landscape character areas. The information was collated to provide a detailed factual description for each of the landscape character areas. The text describes the key elements which create a sense of place, the landscape's intactness from a visual and functional perspective, topography, land use, field pattern, and makes reference to ecology, built form and vegetation where appropriate.

Capacity, Sensitivity and Quality Assessment

Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Assessment

- 3.32 Whilst surveying landscape character areas and settlements, consideration was given to sensitivity and their capacity to accommodate change without detrimental effect to their character. Reference was made to guidance provided in the former Countryside Agency's *Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity* and to other published landscape assessments which address capacity and sensitivity.
- 3.33 Landscape capacity refers to the degree to which a landscape can accommodate change without detrimental effects on its character. This varies with:
- Existing land use
 - The pattern and scale of the landscape
 - Visual enclosure, openness of views, and distribution of visual receptors
 - The value placed on a landscape
 - Extent, type and nature of vegetation present within the area
- 3.34 Rather than set out sensitivity and capacity for character areas either on a relative scale or by reference to 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' development types, this study has considered the key features within landscape character areas and identified the important characteristics that should be protected and where possible enhanced or increased. It addresses sensitivity by highlighting these key characteristics.
- 3.35 The landscape character areas include reference to key pressures; these have been derived from information in the 'Future of Charnwood Forest' conference report. They relate to land use and agricultural trends and development pressures. The current pressures that have potential to influence the landscape character of the area in the future are:
- Infill development
 - Settlement expansion and Growth Points
 - Increased recreation and leisure use as a result of housing expansion
 - Expansion of quarrying to meet the demands of the aggregate industry
 - Major infrastructure works to accommodate increasing vehicle pressure on the local road network and M1 widening
 - Tourism and increased visitor pressure

Landscape Quality Assessment

- 3.36 Using the information gathered in the desk and field studies, landscape character areas were identified through observation of patterns of similar elements. Each landscape character area is described and its quality evaluated.
- 3.37 Landscape quality is a judgement reached by combining an assessment of the landscape condition with an assessment of the strength of landscape character.

- 3.38 A landscape strategy matrix, as shown in Table 1 on P14, is used as a basis for guiding landscape judgements and forming management recommendations for the character areas. This is a useful tool as it provides a consistent basis upon which judgements can be based and is an easy reference point for Local Authorities and other users of the information. The matrix requires consideration of the **strength of landscape character** and **landscape condition** of each identified character area. From these judgements the matrix suggests the most appropriate landscape management strategy, which provides the basis upon which to form landscape management recommendations for each character area.

Strength of Landscape Character

- 3.39 The strength of landscape character is determined by a range of criteria:
- An assessment of how characteristic features and elements combine to form a sense of place.
 - How distinctive and recognisable is the pattern of elements that makes up the character, including both positive and negative elements e.g. consistent use of local building materials.
 - Presence and quantity of distinctive features.
 - Identification of landscapes containing historic patterns and features which may have declined or become fragmented thereby weakening character but which could be reinstated.
- 3.40 Based on these criteria a three point scale is used to make judgements as to strength of character of an area: **Weak**; **Moderate**; and **Strong**. Examples of each include:
- **Strong character** - Bradgate Country Park. This is due to the distribution of distinctive characteristics including: frequent rocky outcrops; extensive areas of heathland; woodland clusters enclosed by stone walls; and a proliferation of veteran oak trees. The sense of place is strengthened by the the landscape features which are numerous and combine to form the parkland landscape. A network of footpaths throughout the park allows visitors many opportunities to experience views of the various features which in turn heightens their presence. Unique or uncommon features such as the ruins of Bradgate Hall and the occasional glimpses of roaming deer in the landscape add interest, historical reference and individuality to Bradgate Park.
 - **Moderate character** – farmland around Swithland. The prevalent characteristic elements of woodland, open fields bounded by hedgerows, scattered small settlements and rolling farmland form a recognisable pattern but one which is not uncommon or unusual. The settlements use local stone as a building material which contributes to local distinctiveness. There are a small number of defining features in the landscape, although their combination and relative uniformity creates a typically rural landscape.
 - **Weak character** – settlement edges, for example the Loughborough southern fringes. Fringe locations often comprise a mix of different uses

and generally lack consistency. Characteristic elements are a mix of man-made and natural features comprising: built form such as housing estates and industrial developments; mixed agricultural land, hedgerows, woodland blocks, main roads, isolated trees, irregular field pattern. Features do not follow a distinctive pattern but are often randomly distributed. Natural features such as hedgerows are present although changes in land use and management practices can cause decline, fragmentation and interruption of historic field pattern. There are many positive and negative features and competing uses within urban fringes. The lack of coherence between the elements results in weakened landscape character.

Landscape Condition

- 3.41 A professional judgement is made by consideration of the **state** or **intactness** of landscape features, elements and characteristics and how these combine to form a visual impression. This includes elements and features such as hedgerows and woodlands, drystone walls, urban edges, communication routes, industrial influences, quarried landscapes or restored landscape and infrastructure routes. Judgements of condition are made as to how identified characteristics positively or negatively influence the appearance of the landscape.
- 3.42 A three point scale was again used to make judgements on the landscape condition: **Good; Moderate; and Poor**. Examples of each include:
- **Good condition** - the landscape of the central part of Charnwood Forest. It comprises: dense and well-maintained hedgerows; extensive areas of mature woodland; frequent, well-maintained stone boundary walls; individual dwellings within large gardens containing substantial tree cover; woodland interspersed with pockets of agricultural land.
 - **Moderate condition** – the landscape along the Rothley Brook. The hedgerows are generally dense with few gaps and well-managed and hedgerow trees are frequent. The brook is a significant landscape feature, waterside vegetation following the natural meandering watercourse is largely intact although views of this lowland floodplain landscape are interrupted by infrastructure such as overhead electricity lines, towers and major roads.
 - **Poor condition** – the landscape surrounding Bardon Hill. This is primarily due to the historical influence of mineral extraction in this part of Charnwood Forest and the fragmentation of the natural landscape by urban expansion. Some restoration of quarries has taken place although new elements such as woodland planting are young and presently have a limited visual impact.
- 3.43 Table 1 shows the matrix which has been used to determine landscape quality based on an assessment of strength and condition. The various levels of landscape quality in the matrix were used to develop a landscape strategy containing a series of categories and recommendations aiming to guide future management.

3.44 These strategic categories for landscape quality are:

- **Conserve**
- **Enhance**
- **Restore**
- **Create**

3.45 **Conserve:** where the landscape quality is good (due to good condition and strong character) there should be an emphasis on protecting or safeguarding the key features and characteristics of the landscape in their present form.

3.46 **Enhance:** emphasis should be on improving existing features which may not be currently well-managed or where existing features are of good quality but could be of greater benefit if improved. This may include improvements to landscape management practices and the introduction or removal of elements or features in order to strengthen character and/or improve perceived condition.

3.47 **Restore:** emphasis should be on repairing or re-establishing features that have been lost or are in a state of severe decline.

3.48 **Create:** where the landscape quality is poor (due to poor condition and weak character) and there is a need to form new and different landscapes. These new landscapes present opportunities to provide a number of community and environmental benefits such as habitat restoration/improvements. This could include the promotion of new community woodland schemes, National Forest intervention and grant funding.

Table 1 - Landscape quality and associated landscape strategy matrix.

Landscape Condition	Good	Moderate <i>Enhance</i>	Moderate – Good <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>	Good <i>Conserve</i>
	Moderate	Poor – Moderate <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	Moderate <i>Enhance</i>	Moderate – Good <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>
	Poor	Poor <i>Restore/Create</i>	Poor – Moderate <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	Moderate <i>Enhance</i>
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		Strength of Landscape Character		

Source: Exmoor National Park Landscape Character Assessment (2007), adapted from guidance in Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity.

4.0 POLICY CONTEXT

- 4.1 Charnwood Forest has a long planning history. Fifteen years before the first Planning Act of 1947, the area was nominated for designation as a National Park by the Leicestershire Regional Planning Report. In 1945 the area was recommended for inclusion in a list of "Other Amenity Areas" not suitable as National Parks, but as areas of landscape beauty which merited some form of national protection. In 1947 Charnwood Forest was listed in the Hobhouse Report of potential National Parks, confirming that the view of the time was that the area required some level of national protection. However, it was not chosen as one of the National Park areas. Figure 14 shows the Charnwood Forest boundary considered for designation as a National Park in 1947. In 1952, to support the case for Charnwood being designated as a National Park, the County Planning Officer prepared a report about the value of the area. He proposed a slightly different boundary, which is also shown in Figure 14. In 1957 Charnwood Forest was considered for designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), but the designation was not made due to the construction of the M1 through the area.
- 4.2 In the absence of a national planning designation, Structure Plans and Local Plans have provided policies to protect the area. This protection was achieved primarily through the allocation in the Structure Plan of Charnwood Forest as an *Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside (APAC)*, supported by specific Local Plan policies.
- 4.3 In the most recent update of the Leicestershire Structure Plan (2005) the local designation was not renewed as national guidance no longer supported such policy. Guidance in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* advises that nationally designated landscapes require particular protection but all other landscape should be protected equally for its character and beauty.
- 4.4 Present policy protection is discussed in detail below, but is mainly based on landscape character areas using policies in the Local and Structure Plans which state that protecting landscape character and beauty has priority over other planning considerations.

National Policy

- 4.5 Planning Policy Statement 1: *Planning for Sustainable Development* requires local planning authorities to adopt sustainable principles when writing Local Development Framework policies. It specifically states that high levels of protection should be afforded to the most valued townscapes, wildlife habitats, landscapes and natural resources and that development decisions should take account of the need to protect the character of the wider countryside.
- 4.6 Planning Policy Statement 7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, sets out the Government's objectives to ensure that good quality sustainable development respects and enhances the local distinctiveness and intrinsic qualities of the countryside. It confirms the need to protect the open

countryside for the benefit of all and to raise the quality of the environment in rural areas.

- 4.7 Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: *Planning and the Historic Environment* states that the whole landscape is a historic and archaeological artefact to varying degrees and distinction lies in its complexity and local distinctiveness. This is of particular relevance to the built form and heritage of the settlements.
- 4.8 Although there are no nationally designated landscapes in Leicestershire, PPS7 recognises the importance of areas of land outside such designations in providing valuable landscapes at the local level. Regional and local strategies and plans offer landscape protection through their policies, which are typically based on landscape character assessment. PPS7 requires local authorities to carry out landscape character assessments in order to inform relevant policies.

Regional Policy

- 4.9 The study area boundary, the Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Area, is a boundary defined in Leicestershire County Council's *Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy*. This study is therefore mainly conducted at county level.
- 4.10 Regional policy is contained in the Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016, the adopted East Midland Regional Spatial Strategy and the draft East Midlands Regional Plan (RSS8 review).

Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016

- 4.11 The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996 - 2016, was adopted on 5th March 2005. At a similar time, under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, a requirement for the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies was introduced. Consequently, policies in the newly adopted Structure Plan were "saved" for a 3 year period, ending on the 5th March 2008, to allow time for the preparation of the RSS. All these policies have now expired, with the exception of Housing Policy 1 and 2. The Structure Plan will be replaced by the RSS and district Local Development Framework (LDF) documents, (Core Strategies to be adopted through 2009 and 2010.)
- 4.12 The Structure Plan policies have only recently expired and offer relevant guidance to the management of the landscape. Many of the concepts contained within the policies have been carried forward to the RSS. Those policies which have potential influence on landscape character include:
- Policy 3 – Greenfield Development
 - Policy 5 - Green Wedges
 - Policy 6 – Review of Green Wedges
 - Policy 7 - Separation of Settlements
 - Policy 8 – Development in the Countryside
 - Policy 10 – Good Design
 - Policy 13 – The National Forest
 - Policy 14 – Charnwood Forest
 - Environmental Policy 3A – Protection of Species and habitats
 - Environmental Policy 4 – Geology

- Resource Management Policy 5 – Agricultural Land
- Resource Management Policy 6 – Safeguarding Mineral Sites
- Housing Policy 1 – the Quality of Housing Land
- Housing Policy 2 – Strategic Greenfield Housing Sites

4.13 Policies 13 and 14 are of particular importance to this study. Policy 13 relates to the National Forest, stating that within the National Forest provision is made for the planting of woodland with public access. Development is required to be accompanied by proposals for creating an appropriate woodland setting. Substantial proposals must reflect the National Forest context in their landscaping and planting proposals. Within the National Forest, beyond the Charnwood Forest boundary, provision is made for the creation of new leisure and tourism facilities, subject to environmental considerations.

4.14 Policy 14 relates specifically to the Charnwood Forest policy area, as defined by boundaries shown on current Local Plan proposal maps. Development within or which affects the Charnwood Forest Policy Area will be acceptable where it can be demonstrated to conserve or enhance the character of Charnwood Forest, including its landscape, ecology, cultural heritage, built heritage and recreational value. Development should reflect and complement the character of the surrounding landscape. Any necessary development which may harm the character of the area must compensate for the adverse impact it causes.

Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8) (adopted in March 2005).

4.15 The East Midlands Regional Plan, officially known as the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8) provides a broad development strategy for the East Midlands up to 2021. Policies cover the main topic areas of housing; economy and regeneration; natural and cultural resources including new targets on biodiversity and flood risk; and the transport strategy. These policies are intended to be applied at local level within each district through newly emerging Local Development Frameworks. The main policies of relevance to this study are:

- Policy 1- Regional Core Objectives
- Policy 4 - Promoting Better Design has an emphasis placed on achieving this through design-led approaches which take account of local and historic character.
- Policy 30 - Priorities for the Management and Enhancement of the Region's Landscapes, establishes that Local Development Frameworks should be informed by Landscape Character Assessments to *"underpin and act as key components of criteria based policies"*.

Draft East Midlands Regional Plan (RSS Review)

4.16 The above mentioned RSS was based on a review of the former RPG8 and is a broad development strategy. Detailed matters were to be covered in the next major review, which is presently in process under the title of the draft East Midlands Regional Plan. This was published for public consultation on 28th September 2006. A public examination took place in 2007 and on the 22nd July 2008 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government published

the proposed changes to the East Midlands Regional Plan for consultation. The document is therefore well advanced but not yet formally adopted.

- 4.17 This document provides a broad development strategy for the East Midlands up to 2026. One of its primary focuses is on housing and sustainable development and recommendations are made for required levels of development and infrastructure which could have marked impacts on the character of the district over the next 20 years. It is divided into two parts, Part 1: Regional Strategy and Part 2: Sub-Regional Strategies.
- 4.18 Policies of relevance to landscape character in Part 1 are:
- Policy 1- Regional Core Objectives
 - Policy 3 – Promoting Better Design
 - Policy 13 – Development in the Three Cities Sub-area (within which Charnwood Forest lies).
 - Policy 26- Protecting and Enhancing the Region’s Natural and Cultural Heritage
 - Policy 27- Regional Priorities for Environmental and Green Infrastructure
 - Policy 30- Priorities for the Management and Enhancement of the Region’s Landscape
- 4.19 Policy 13, **Development in the Three Cities Sub-area** recognises that the sub-area contains many important environmental assets, including most of the National Forest, Charnwood Forest, the Rivers Soar and Wreake and the Trent Valley. Development should support the continued growth and regeneration of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham whilst recognising there are significant opportunities to enhance the environment of the sub-area through regeneration and green infrastructure initiatives.
- 4.20 Policy 26, **Protecting and Enhancing the Region’s Natural and Cultural Heritage** states sustainable development should ensure the protection, appropriate management and enhancement of the Region’s natural and cultural heritage. Damage to other natural and historic assets or their settings should be avoided wherever possible, recognising that such assets are usually irreplaceable. It says unavoidable damage must be minimised and clearly justified by a need for development which outweighs the damage that would result.
- 4.21 Policy 27, **Regional Priorities for Environmental and Green Infrastructure** also mentions Charnwood Forest specifically. This policy focuses on the potential for creation of Regional Parks to improve the Green Infrastructure provision and contribute to conservation and recreation in the region. The policy states that there is potential for Regional Park initiatives in parts of the East Midlands, including in the Charnwood Forest.
- 4.22 Policy 28, **Priorities for enhancing the Region’s Biodiversity** identifies Charnwood Forest as a Regional Biodiversity Conservation Area. This will protect the Biodiversity Action Plan habitats in the area and ensure there is no net loss of valuable species and habitats.

- 4.23 Policy 30, **Priorities for the Management and Enhancement of the Region's Landscape** also makes specific reference to Charnwood Forest, along with Sherwood and Rockingham Forests, saying the distinctive landscape character and the scale of ecological, historic and woodland interest in these areas combine to create areas that are special to the people of the East Midlands. The distinctive character of these and other areas is threatened by pressure from a range of factors. These landscapes should be protected and enhanced by *'the promotion of initiatives to protect and enhance the particular character of the Sherwood, Charnwood and Rockingham Forests'*.
- 4.24 The Draft East Midlands Regional Plan (the emerging RSS) thus recognises the need for measures to protect and enhance the particular character of Charnwood Forest, potentially through a Regional Park initiative. Leicestershire County Council is leading the development of options for the future of the area in partnership with Charnwood Borough Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, North West Leicestershire District Council, Natural England, the Government Office for the East Midlands and the National Forest .
- 4.25 Policies of relevance in Part 2 are in the **Three Cities Sub-Regional Strategy** which is based around the cities of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby. The policy provides guidance for developing local policy through LDFs and sets the context for sustainable regeneration and growth in the sub-area. The sub-area policy was developed to fulfil the requirement in Policy 16 of RSS8 for a Three Cities Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 4.26 The policy aims for the area, which are relevant to the landscape, are to provide green and environmental infrastructure around sustainable developments in the area and to protect natural and cultural assets.
- 4.27 Policies 4 and 6 relate directly to Charnwood Forest:
- **Policy 4 – Housing Provision:** Charnwood Borough is to develop 760 dwellings per annum, which will mainly be focused around Loughborough and Leicester. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough is to provide 460 dwellings per annum and North West Leicestershire District is to provide 480 dwellings per annum, mainly centred on Coalville. These are the three districts which have land within Charnwood Forest; although it is unlikely much development will be proposed within Charnwood Forest itself, the surrounding development will have implications for the Forest.
 - **Policy 6 – Green Infrastructure and the National Forest:** In considering major development proposals, especially those associated with New Growth Point proposals, local authorities and others will co-ordinate the provision of new and enhanced green infrastructure. Strategic priorities in this respect include a proposed Charnwood Forest Regional Park. The policy states that the natural assets of the sub-region, should be protected and enhanced to develop the distinctiveness of the sub-region, improve quality of life, increase biodiversity, and support the sub-regional economy. In the National Forest, local authorities should work with other agencies across regional boundaries to promote the development of the National Forest, to protect and enhance the landscape, make provision for woodland planting, provide recreation opportunities and support the economy.

Regional Environment Strategy (published 2002)

- 4.28 This strategy sets out the key components of the region's environment and provides policies and actions. It is intended as a guide to assist in the production of other strategies. It identifies a number of policies of relevance, these are:
- ENV1 – Management of the historic environment
 - ENV2 – Ensure that local distinctiveness is conserved and enhanced
 - ENV12 – Achieve a balanced agricultural system which is both economically viable and enhances the environment
 - ENV13 – Protection of existing and enhancement and promotion of new woodlands
 - ENV22 – Enhancement of the character and quality of the Region's landscapes.

Local Policy

Charnwood Borough Local Development Framework (draft)

- 4.29 Charnwood is a predominantly rural district with some areas of high landscape and ecological value. It is also located adjacent to Leicester, which has considerable development and expansion pressure. The district has 31 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), 150 sites of importance for nature conservation, 36 Conservation Areas, 20 Scheduled Monuments and three Historic Parks and Gardens. The emerging Charnwood Local Development Framework (LDF), although not yet adopted, recognises Charnwood Forest as an important area in the district. It describes it as having '*a distinctive character of wooded upland areas with rocky outcrops*'.
- 4.30 The previous Local Plan identified Charnwood Forest as an Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside. However, recent national policy guidance in PPS7 discourages the designation of areas of local landscape value and indicates that the local authority should adopt a character area approach instead.
- 4.31 Consequently, one of the key issues within the LDF is maintaining the local landscape character, and Charnwood Forest is named specifically. Policy SO17 states that alongside supporting the National Forest Strategy, the distinctive landscape character of Charnwood Forest should be protected, and Chapter 5 (Delivering Sustainable Development) of the Preferred Options Paper recognises Charnwood Forest as the most distinctive of Charnwood Borough's landscapes.
- 4.32 Notwithstanding guidance in PPS7, it is considered that Charnwood Forest has a particularly special character which justifies a designation in the Core Strategy. Draft Core Policy 9: *The Charnwood Forest*, states that within the Charnwood Forest policy area (to be defined on the proposals map), development will only be acceptable where it is appropriate to a countryside location and to the special character of the area in terms of its landscape, ecology, cultural and built heritage, and where the recreation value is conserved and enhanced. Development which could adversely affect these special qualities

will not be permitted unless a clear overriding need can be demonstrated and appropriate compensation works are proposed.

- 4.33 With regard to development, the LDF states that although there is some potential for development around Shepshed and areas to the west of Loughborough, development elsewhere is not preferred due to the impact on Charnwood Forest. Also of relevance to this point, although not within the LDF, is saved Local Plan Policy EV/9 *Historic Parks and Gardens* which seeks to retain and conserve the character and setting of significant parks and gardens, this includes Bradgate Park, within Charnwood Forest and Garendon Park, adjoining the landscape character area . Policy EV/9 states that development which would have an adverse effect on the character or setting of these areas will not be permitted. The policy seeks to encourage the reinstatement of these areas as historic landscapes for public use and *'whilst agricultural and informal recreation uses will generally be appropriate within these areas, the introduction or intensification of development for other purposes will be resisted'*.

Hinckley and Bosworth Local Development Framework (draft)

- 4.34 Hinckley and Bosworth is also a rural district, but has fewer areas of landscape and ecological value than Charnwood, with seven SSSIs and a low percentage of woodland cover. Local policy in relation to the study area acknowledges the value of Charnwood Forest and recognises that it has a special character derived from the ecology, geology, archaeology and visual appearance of the area.
- 4.35 The Core Strategy has a particular focus on recognising and implementing the RSS policy which recommends Charnwood Forest as a Regional Park. Although the draft LDF states that the regional policy for green infrastructure and Regional Parks is not well-defined, it supports the concept and will implement policy accordingly. It considers that the Regional Park will have a core objective of protecting the landscape of the area.
- 4.36 As the policy is still in draft there are several options considered. The Core Strategy could have a 'landscape lead', a 'visitor lead', a 'forestry lead' or a 'biodiversity lead'. The landscape lead would focus on protecting the landscape character and development control policy would be established around the landscape character. A visitor lead would allow visitor-orientated development that would fund the management costs of ensuring that the value of the landscape would not be harmed by increasing numbers of visitors. This approach would sit well with the Growth Point funding of green infrastructure development, but would increase pressure on the area. Green infrastructure is an overarching policy, an amalgamation of all these benefits and it is likely the policy will encompass all the possible 'lead' policy areas.
- 4.37 It is not yet decided what will be the preferred policy approach but there is clear support for the Regional Park initiative in this LDF. It is seen as the way to protect the Charnwood Forest area, and to best conserve and enhance this attractive landscape area.

North West Leicestershire Local Development Framework

- 4.38 North West Leicestershire is predominantly a rural district with significant urban centres at Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch. It is at the heart of the National Forest and has areas of attractive countryside, including Charnwood Forest.
- 4.39 The boundary of the Charnwood Forest policy area is defined on the Local Plan proposals map and has been long established as a locally designated landscape, '*Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside*'. Within the Local Plan, there are policies to protect the character of the Charnwood Forest area from development, including infrastructure development. Only development to relieve recreational pressure on Charnwood Forest would be permitted.
- 4.40 The Local Plan is now being replaced with the LDF and consideration is being given as to how best to manage and protect the area. There are no policies as yet, but it is possible that a development plan document, *Charnwood Forest Area Action Plan*, will be produced to offer guidance on managing the area. The process is currently at the issues and options stage and is progressing through consultation.

5.0 EXISTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDIES

5.1 This section provides a summary of existing information relating to the landscape character of the study area. This includes broad scale, national and regional information and where relevant, more localised studies which have been consulted and reviewed. This information provides a broad introduction to the landscape character of Charnwood Forest and highlights the main features of importance.

5.2 National and regional landscape assessments provide a broad context of the overall landscape character of the area. These studies include the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character Areas as well as more detailed locally produced character assessments. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the key characteristics of the landscape character areas described in published assessments which cover the Charnwood Forest area.

National

Countryside Agency Countryside Character Volume 4: East Midlands

5.3 This document was published in 1999 and divides the whole of England into broad landscape character areas. It recognises key overriding characteristics and identifies key pressures and forces for change within the landscape. Within the study area there are three countryside character areas, identified as follows and illustrated on Figure 3:

5.4 *94 – Leicestershire Vales*

- Gentle clay ridges and valleys with little woodland present.
- Strong patterns of Tudor and parliamentary enclosure are evident.
- Distinctive river valleys, prominent parks and country houses and frequent imposing spired churches are features.
- Large towns dominate much of the landscape although a number of attractive stone buildings are present in older village centres and eastern towns and villages.
- Great diversity in the landscape and settlement pattern with many sub-units.

5.5 *73 – Charnwood*

- Unique landscape with upland qualities, rising out of lowland farmland.
- Strongly rectilinear pasture fields bounded by a mix of dry stone walls and hedges.
- Woodlands, attractively sited reservoirs and pools are common landscape features.
- Large settlements are located around the edges of the area with a few villages and scattered farmsteads.

5.6 *69 – Trent Valley Washlands*

- Flat broad valleys contained by gentle sided slopes.
- Wide rivers slowly flowing defined by willow pollards and poplars.
- Constant presence of urban development mostly on valley sides.
- Contrasts of secluded pastoral areas with good hedgerow structure and open arable land with low hedges.

- Open character punctuated by massive cooling towers of power stations and is strongly influenced by pylons, sand and gravel extractions.

Natural England Natural Areas

5.7 Natural England has examined the local distinctiveness of each part of England and identified its characteristic wildlife and natural features. The characteristics of these areas may manifest in distinctive landscapes although landscape is not the basis of their identification. Natural England has identified a series of Natural Areas; each has nature conservation objectives defined. Those covering the study area are:

5.9 *Trent Valley and Rises*

- Important habitats remain within agricultural land uses including neutral grassland, and acidic and calcareous grasslands.
- Wet floodplain grasslands are important for many breeding birds.
- Poorly wooded landscape and the woodlands that exist are important.
- Standing water habitats such as gravel pits, reservoirs and canals provide particular wildlife interest.
- Rivers, streams and associated habitats are also significant features.

5.10 *Charnwood*

- Variety of habitats including extensive woodlands, remnant medieval parks, acid grassland and lowland heath.
- Heathland is important for rare invertebrates and hay meadows and pastures are rich in wildlife.
- Upland Charnwood is characterised by clear, fast flowing streams that support an abundance of wildlife.

Regional

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy, 2001

5.11 This strategy is focused at a more local level than the Countryside Agency assessment. Within this county-wide assessment the Charnwood Forest is recognised as an individual character area. Four other areas border this character area and features and characteristics of these bordering areas may be present along the Charnwood Forest boundary. The landscape character areas are illustrated on Figure 4 and a summary is provided below.

5.12 *Charnwood Forest*

- Upland landscape with distinctive rocky outcrops and fast-flowing streams with many sites of ecological value.
- Characterised by its high proportion of woodland cover.
- Landuse is a distinctive mixture of woodland, farmland, heathland and parkland. Buildings and walls are typically constructed in local stone.

5.13 *Upper Soar*

- Elongated basin and is predominantly an open and rolling landscape with an urban influence from Leicester and settlements such as Blaby, Whetstone and Narborough.

- Land use is predominantly a mix of agriculture with little woodland, which where present, tends to be small and scattered in nature.
- Agricultural land use is a mix of pasture to the east and arable to the west.
- Adjacent to urban areas the landscape character becomes more fragmented and forms a transitional zone between the rural and urban environment.
- Localised outcrops of intrusive igneous rocks are described the most conspicuous being as Croft Hill.
- Quarries tend to be unobtrusive in the area and there is evidence of former quarries present.
- The River Soar forms a significant landscape feature flowing through the built up area.

5.14 *Soar Valley*

- Elongated floodplain.
- Land uses tend to be pasture on floodplain and arable on valley slopes.
- Settlements are small to medium sized often situated on edges of floodplain.
- City of Leicester is the main urban influence in south of character area
- Willows along rivers.
- Numerous urban influences include road, rail, canal and power lines.
- Marina developments and other water based recreation uses.
- Gravel extraction.

5.15 *Langley Lowlands*

- Rolling landform dissected by minor watercourses draining northwards.
- Well wooded appearance influenced by woodland within adjacent character area.
- Commercial activity generally small scale, most prominent at Breedon Hill and Breedon Cloud.
- Many hedgerow trees contribute to the wooded character of the area.
- Small villages spread through the area connected by narrow winding lanes.
- Parkland influences.

5.16 *The Coalfield*

- Gently undulating landform.
- Visible effects of past and present coal and clay workings such as subsidence flashes, spoil heaps and former railway lines.
- Dense settlement pattern of former mining towns and villages which follow main roads.
- Groups of roadside cottages.
- Mixed farmland with low woodland cover.
- Hedges and hedgerow trees sometimes give a wooded effect locally.
- Localised concentrations of woodland.

Historic Landscape Character Mapping

- 5.17 The Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Programme for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland was carried out by the Community Services Directorate of Leicestershire County Council. A wide variety of data sources was collated and integrated into a single Historic Landscape Character map for the study area. Sources included physiographic evidence comprising: landform; geology; soils; land use and land cover data. A statement of how this data has been gathered is

contained in *Historic Landscape Characterisation Project for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland - Method Statement*.

5.18 In order to categorise areas a polygon shape is created in GIS which is assigned a historic landscape character type. These character types include;

- Unenclosed Land
- Enclosed Land
- Orchards and Allotments
- Woodland
- Industrial
- Extractive
- Military
- Ornamental, Parkland and Recreational
- Settlements
- Water and Valley Floor

5.19 The historic data are built up layers within each character type. For example, the settlement type includes categories such as Historic Settlement Core, Pre-1880s Settlement Terraced, Pre-1960s Semi Detached, Post-1960s Semi Detached and Country Houses. The information is collated on one map, to show a picture of the present day situation. In the HLC each landscape type is not broken down chronologically so it is not possible to view the information as a snapshot in history for a specific date. With the exception of settlement information which is based on OS data, there are no given dates for much of the historical data therefore it is not possible to produce a map which shows chronological development of landscape features.

5.20 The Historic Landscape Classification is a complex and detailed study containing valuable historical information. This assessment used the HLC to inform the settlement assessment by creating a map showing changes from the historic formation of the settlement core to the present day. This is shown in Figure 10 which identifies the shape and directions of expansion from the settlement cores over approximately the last 150 years. Figure 10 also demonstrates how the Conservation Areas, which are crucial to preserving the character of the settlements, are usually focused around the historic cores of settlements. Further review of these Conservation Areas, where available, is provided in Appendix 3.

The National Forest Strategy

5.21 Part of Charnwood Forest lies within the eastern section of the National Forest. The National Forest Strategy was prepared in 1992 and identified the landscape character types and areas which are present within the National Forest. The document sought to provide a consistent level of detail for the area which was covered by three county level assessments which were completed at different scales and detail. This also enabled landscape guidelines on the type, scale and design of woodland planting which would be suited to the different landscape character types. The National Forest is an evolving landscape which since its establishment has seen considerable change through restoration of former industrial sites and planting of new woodlands and other habitats. An update of the National Forest Strategy was undertaken in 2004 and redefined the descriptions of some of the landscape character types and areas within the

National Forest to reflect these changes. The types which are of relevance to Charnwood Forest are shown on figure 5 and are as follows:

5.22 *Enclosed Farmlands*

- Open sparsely wooded mixed farmland that has a strong rural character and few urban influences
- Field pattern defined by hedgerows or stone field walls
- Areas of intensive cropping have a large scale open field pattern with poorly defined hedges
- Pockets of permanent pasture along watercourse and around villages
- Watercourse trees and clusters of small estate woodlands give a well wooded feel in places
- Settlement is characterised by farmsteads and villages.

5.23 *Historic Settlement and Enclosures*

- Unspoilt landscape with an ancient and enclosed character and dispersed settlement pattern
- Many small, irregularly shaped pastoral fields bounded by thick hedgerows
- Well-wooded with numerous hedgerow trees, small woods and tree-lined watercourses
- Dispersed settlement pattern, typified by cottages which have encroached on common land
- Significant heritage features

5.24 *Urban/ Urban Fringe Landscapes*

- Large, often sprawling settlements, new development and occasional mineral workings
- Major roads and railways are prominent
- Cropped farmland with poorly managed fragmented hedgerows
- Remnant pasture is occasionally present around settlements
- Urban trees, open spaces and new woodland planting contribute to landscape setting
- Horse grazing, allotments and other non-agricultural activities fragment the character

5.25 *Coalfield Village Farmlands*

- Fragmented character marked by red brick mining villages, granite quarries, new development and reclaimed land
- Tracts of open medium to large scale gently rolling farmland
- New woodland increasing in prominence which helps to soften the appearance of development and mineral workings
- Mature hedgerow trees are sparse in the landscape
- Hedgerow pattern is in decline with many defunct or low cut and fragmented
- Long distance views include industry and settlement edges

5.26 *Wooded Parklands*

- Distinctive ancient landscape of considerable interest and diversity
- Varied topography with steeply sloping stream valleys and prominent granite outcrops
- Enclosed, strongly wooded character with many ancient woodlands, large wooded estates, parklands and numerous hedgerow trees

- Woodlands characteristic of hilltops, steep valley slopes and along stream corridors
- Mixed arable and pasture farmlands
- Hedgerows and stone walls reinforce a strong field pattern
- Remnant semi-natural vegetation such as heathland, acid grassland, bracken and gorse
- Settlements characterised by scattered farmsteads, country houses, hamlets and small villages with vernacular buildings.

5.27 Within the National Forest Landscape Character Assessment the landscape character areas are sometimes very small-scale, and focus on landscape elements. Although the present study was originally intended to extend the National Forest assessment over the remainder of Charnwood Forest in a similar fashion, it was considered more appropriate to use the National Forest assessment as a starting point and guide. The present study used broader assessment criteria, focusing on the character created by the collective landscape elements. Consequently, the character areas are generally larger, however, the two studies have basic similarities and are considered to be complementary (see Figure 18).

Local

5.28 A number of landscape character assessments have been undertaken within Charnwood Forest covering one of the local planning authority areas, the urban fringes of Leicester and one of the Green Wedges around Leicester.

Hinckley and Bosworth LCA

5.29 This assessment was completed in 2006 and formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in July 2006. The borough lies within the western part of Charnwood Forest as illustrated on Figure 2. There are two character areas adjacent to Charnwood Forest; their main landscape characteristics are listed below:

5.30 *Charnwood Fringe Character Area*

- Prominent landform with localised steep slopes around rocky outcrops.
- Diverse land uses which relate to the varied geology although dominated by pasture and woodland.
- Woodland cover of varying ages.
- Large clustered villages.
- Long distance views towards the urban edges of Leicester and Charnwood Forest.

5.31 *Forest Hills Character Area*

- Gently undulating landform with small plateaus on higher ground.
- Rural landscape with arable and rough set-aside enclosed by hedgerows and scattered trees.
- Changing landscape through restoration of quarries and mines.
- Linear settlements of former mining villages with sparsely scattered farms between.
- Open views from high ground.

Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project LCA

5.32 TEP was commissioned in 2005 to undertake a landscape character assessment of the Stepping Stones project area which covers the countryside surrounding Leicester. This included a review of the existing landscape character areas that covered the study area and production of a landscape character assessment of the remaining areas. This was a relatively broad scale assessment which identified the suitability of each of the character areas to accommodate new woodlands. The study included the southern fringes of Charnwood Forest meaning there is a slight overlap with the Charnwood Forest project area. Three of the identified character areas include land within Charnwood Forest. These are listed below:

5.33 *Thurcaston Agricultural Slopes*

- Pocket of agricultural land surrounded by development and roads.
- Woodland on high ground and railway embankment visually prominent.
- Large scale arable land use with scrub vegetation on low ground.
- Unkempt feel to parts of the area where field boundaries have been left to mature.

5.34 *Cropston and Rothley Parkland*

- Parkland character influenced by large estates and golf courses.
- Woodland parkland contained by spinneys on high ground and around villages.
- Isolated trees within hedgerow boundaries, fields and watercourses.
- Meandering Rothley Brook flows through northern part of area.
- Charnwood Forest has a localised influence on the character area.
- In localised areas urban influences are fragmenting the character.

5.35 *Anstey Open Farmland*

- Open large scale farmland with views dominated by Charnwood Forest.
- Little woodland although wooded backdrop formed by Charnwood Forest.
- Loss of field boundaries.
- Arable land use with scrub establishing towards urban fringes.
- Villages screened by woodland retaining rural character.

Rothley Brook Meadows Management Strategy

5.36 Rothley Brook is an area of Green Wedge to the north-west of Leicester and links to Anstey Green Wedge. It has urban development to all of its boundaries, with Groby and Ratby forming the western boundary and Glenfield and Kirby Muxloe the eastern and southern boundaries. The assessment, carried out in 2004, identified seven local landscape character areas within the Green Wedge. These are as follows:

5.37 *Groby Fields*

Open rolling agricultural fields with unhindered views in all directions. There is little woodland cover, mature and stag headed trees in the hedgerows are a distinctive feature. Land use is mostly arable farming with fields demarcated by species poor hedgerows.

5.38 *The Ponds*

This is a low-lying area compared with surrounding fields. Fishing ponds surrounded by groups of trees and dispersed vegetation characterise this area.

5.39 *Martinshaw Fringe*

This is an open landscape, however, enclosure is provided by surrounding built development. Tree planting is sparse, although Martinshaw Wood is a characteristic and important feature.

5.40 *Brook Pastures*

Flat low-lying small pasture fields and enclosed tree lined paths contrast with the more open fields. Across the area land use is dominated by rough pasture with a strong urban influence created by main roads, industrial units and the settlement of The Brantings. There are many recreational areas although little woodland is present. Mature trees along Rothley Brook create a wooded character.

5.41 *Castle Meadows*

Enclosed, flat landscape comprising mown grass fields and arable farming. Contained due to its low-lying topography and periphery vegetation. Recreational uses dominate.

5.42 *Upper Fields*

Open rolling arable fields with a strong sense of exposure. Limited small and fragmented hedgerows contribute to the sense of exposure.

5.43 *Western Golf Course*

Open parkland character although pockets of enclosure are created by groups of trees. The area has a diverse mix of vegetation which has an attractive aesthetic and ecological contrast between the natural historic landscape and the manicured golf course.

6.0 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

- 6.1 This section addresses the physical factors which have an important influence on the Charnwood Forest landscape.

Geology

The Precambrian Period

- 6.2 Rocks laid down during the Precambrian Period are the oldest found within the Charnwood area, and date from around 560-600 million years ago. At this time England lay within the southern hemisphere along a subduction zone, where the pressures from plate movement caused magma to rise to the surface and form a chain of active volcanoes known as an island arc. The material erupted from these volcanoes accumulated on the sea floor surrounding the volcanoes, forming the rocks of the 'Charnian Supergroup', which is at least 3.5km thick. Primitive life began to evolve at this time, the fossils of which can be found throughout Charnwood Forest. Igneous rocks, for example the diorites that intruded the Charnian Supergroup, are worked in quarries throughout Charnwood Forest.

The Cambrian Period

- 6.3 When subduction finally ceased, the volcanoes were worn down by erosion allowing the sea to advance over the land. The Swithland Slates represent the muddy material laid down on the sea floor at this time, probably about 530 million years ago. Fossilised animal burrows can be found within these rocks and examples are particularly notable on slate gravestones, as at Ratby churchyard. Swithland Slate has been quarried since Roman time and continues to be worked, mainly for roofing, in the areas around Swithland, Groby and Woodhouse Eaves.

The Ordovician Period

- 6.4 During this period, 450 million years ago, igneous rock, created through the solidification of molten magma forced to the surface by subduction, formed as the Mountsorrel Complex. These igneous rocks are known as granodiorites and are made up of large crystals due to a slow cooling process. It is believed that Ordovician granodiorite has been worked around Mountsorrel since Roman times but there is also evidence of Late Neolithic, Early Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Norman activity. The Buddon Wood (Mountsorrel) Quarry currently exploits a particularly large mass of Ordovician granodiorite

The Silurian and Devonian Periods

- 6.5 The collision of two continental plates occurred towards the end of the Silurian Period, approximately 420 million years ago. This caused the formation of mountains, the remnants of which today form the Charnwood hills. Structures produced by this movement include folds and cleavage, the latter formed when the crystallisation of new minerals cause rocks to break along parallel surfaces. This occurs in all Charnian rock but is particularly prominent in the Swithland Slates.

The Carboniferous Period

- 6.6 At the beginning of this period, 355 million years ago, England and Scotland lay close to the equator and formed part of a continental landmass that was partially covered with a warm sea. Sediments from this period were rich in calcareous fossils and formed as Carboniferous Limestone, which can be found in the northern parts of Charnwood Forest, such as at Grace Dieu. This rock does not extend throughout the whole area, however, since much of Charnwood was still a mountain range at this time.
- 6.7 In the latter part of the Carboniferous Period the sea over sections of Charnwood was replaced by a large delta, containing humid swamps and rainforests, in which the Coal Measures accumulated. Coal seams, ironstone and fireclay deposits resulted from these environments, and can be found to the west of Charnwood Forest where they form part of the Leicestershire coalfield.

The Permian and Triassic Periods

- 6.8 The Permian Period was one of constant erosion, lasting about 40 million years. This erosion stripped away most of the Carboniferous rock. During the Triassic Period the Charnwood area became covered in sediments. The rugged nature of the landscape produced a highly irregular erosional unconformity, seen in many Charnwood quarries, with drainage courses such as wadis commonly developing. Initially, sand and gravel was transported by large rivers flowing north and north-eastwards across England, an example of which is the Shepshed Sandstone. In the latter part of the Triassic period England moved further away from the equator and a vast desert of aeolian dust formed the red muds and silts of the Mercia Mudstone Group. During this period, flash floods caused water to cover large areas which deposited thin beds of siltstone and sandstone. A high, saline water table caused the precipitation of gypsum. The continual accumulation of sediment coupled with subsidence eventually caused the Mercia Mudstone to completely bury the Charnwood mountain range. Amongst features that have been uncovered are 'tors' of granodiorite formed by wind erosion during the Triassic Period, seen in Buddon Wood Quarry.

The Jurassic and Cretaceous

- 6.9 Once the Charnwood Hills had been buried, a tropical sea advanced across the area, depositing Jurassic and Cretaceous mudstone and limestone. This sea was destroyed by tectonic movement accompanying the opening of the Atlantic Ocean.

Quaternary (Ice Age)

- 6.10 By the beginning of the Quaternary Period around 2 million years ago, much of the strata formed during the Jurassic, Triassic and Cretaceous Periods had been eroded from the Charnwood Forest area. The onset of the Anglian Ice advance, approximately 440,000 years ago, saw the advance of glaciers across much of England. From tills deposited in Charnwood, two ice-sheets covered the area: a sheet from the north-west carrying Triassic and Carboniferous rock; and a sheet

from the north-east carrying fragments of flint and chalk. As the glaciers retreated 'superficial deposits' accumulated consisting of sand and gravel and till.

- 6.11 In more recent time the development of rivers has formed floodplains floored by clay and silt (alluvium).

The Minerals Industry

- 6.12 As highlighted, the rocks underlying Charnwood Forest are some of the oldest in England and Wales and consist of a mixture of Precambrian and sedimentary rocks. The geology of Charnwood Forest is defined by sediments (drift geology) covering the underlying solid geology. This has led to a large number of quarries operating in the area.

- 6.13 There are three active quarries and many disused quarries in the Charnwood Forest area. A range of rock types reflecting the diverse geological nature of Charnwood have and continue to be extracted from these quarries. These rock types include:

- Blackwell Group (at Newhurst and Longcliffe Quarries);
- Maplewell Group (Bardon Hill);
- Precambrian intrusions of North Charnwood Diorite (Newhurst and Longcliffe) and South Charnwood Diorite (Cliffe Hill, Groby and Hill Hole Quarries);
- Ordovician granodiorite intrusions can be found at Mountsorrel Quarry;
- Swithland Slate was once quarried in Swithland, Groby Park and Woodhouse Eaves;

- 6.14 There is also a small brickclay site at Shepshed.

- 6.15 Quarrying in and around Charnwood Forest can be traced back to Neolithic times, continuing on a small scale through Roman times for use as rubble stone and construction of walls and buildings in Roman Leicestershire. Aggregate from Charnwood continued to be quarried and used in the construction of defensive and religious structures during medieval times. During the 16th century maintenance of roads passed to the parish through which the road passed and as a result each parish had a 'parish pit' to supply stone to repair roads.

- 6.16 The creation of the Turnpike Trust, for the construction and maintenance of roads, led to a higher and constant demand for broken rock, and igneous rocks, such as those quarried in Charnwood, became known as a hard-wearing road surface. The abolition of the Turnpike Trust and the Local Government Act 1888, which passed the responsibility of road repairs and construction to local authorities, led to an increase in quarrying and the opening of a number of new quarries within Charnwood Forest. Demand increased further with the construction of the railway which provided both a constant demand and a means of transporting aggregates.

- 6.17 By 1890 Leicestershire had become the main source of aggregates for the whole country producing a million tons per year. Between 1990 and 2000, Leicestershire accounted for between 45% and 52% of the East-Midlands total crushed rock production, stressing the continued importance of quarrying in Leicestershire.

- 6.18 Today quarrying continues to influence the character of the local landscape. Currently active quarries in the Forest are Bardon, Cliffe Hill and Mountsorrel. The importance of the area for national provision of aggregates means that these quarries will continue to have a presence and visual impact on the Charnwood Forest landscape for the foreseeable future. Whilst there are currently no building stone quarries within the Forest, there may be future demand for stone to use in local buildings, in order to conserve the character of the settlements.

Soils

- 6.19 The Agricultural Land Classification analyses soils for their intrinsic quality and value. Grade 1 indicates excellent soils which have minor limitations to agricultural use and high crop yields can be expected. Grade 5 indicates poor soils with a limitation in suitable crops and these areas tend to be best suited to permanent pasture and rough grazing.
- 6.20 Soils in Charnwood Forest are predominantly acidic, shallow, infertile, stony and poorly drained. The land cover consists of drystone walls, hedges and woodlands. Rough grazing and pasture land are common and arable land is scarce.
- 6.21 The majority of soils in the area are Grade 3 which is defined as good to moderate land capable of providing consistent yields in a limited range of crops. This varies depending on whether soil is sub-divided into grade 3a and 3b. Land in Charnwood Forest tends to be predominantly used for pastoral, farming. Land along the Rothley Brook floodplain in the east is generally Grade 4, which is poor soil and is consequently used for grazing or foraging crops. There is also a scattering of Grade 4 land in the central core of Charnwood Forest, where the topography is high and there are frequent rocky outcrops.
- 6.22 There are some areas of Grade 2 farmland on the lower rolling slopes of the area. This good quality soil is used for arable farming. The Agricultural Land Classification is mapped in Figure 6.

Topography

- 6.23 The topography of Charnwood Forest is distinct and varied. The central Charnwood Forest area is high, and rocky. It forms an upland island, isolated within the Midland plain, which is generally low and flat. The highest point, Bardon Hill, is 278 m high. The hill has two very distinct faces: one preserved as a SSSI, the other removed by Bardon Hill Quarry. It is also the site of a radio mast. Beacon Hill is the second highest point in Charnwood Forest, rising to a height of 245m. It has long views over Charnwood Forest and the Soar Valley and beyond. Other high points and viewpoints include Old John Tower in Bradgate Country Park, Billa Barra Hill near Stanton under Bardon and Hill Hole Quarry at Markfield.
- 6.24 The topography rises to form a characteristic spine down the centre of Charnwood Forest. Land in the rest of the area is gently rolling or undulating and small streams and brooks transect the area creating localised changes in topography. The River Soar, Rothley Brook and Grand Union Canal corridor form

a low lying floodplain landscape in the east. The landscape to the north, beyond Loughborough and Shepshed, is the typical low and flat land of the Midland plain.

Hydrology

- 6.25 The hydrology and drainage of Charnwood Forest and the surrounding area are defined by Charnwood's high relief and the fast flowing streams that drain from Charnwood to the north and east into the River Soar and to the south and east into the River Sence, which lies beyond the Charnwood Forest landscape character area. The Grand Union Canal runs parallel and at points crosses the River Soar emphasising the flat floodplain landscape to the east of the Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Area. The Rothley Brook flows into the River Soar and also forms a flat floodplain that separates the south-eastern extent of the Charnwood Forest area from the urban extent of Leicester City.
- 6.26 A number of smaller brooks and streams carve through their way through fields and woodland from the higher land of Charnwood Forest into the several reservoirs or towards the River Sence, the River Soar or Rothley Brook. The streams tend to be small but provide ecological interest and influence the character of the landscape surrounding them.
- 6.27 There are a number of large waterbodies within Charnwood Forest. Swithland, Cropston and Thornton reservoirs are all man-made and constructed in the late 19th century while Blackbrook Reservoir was first constructed in the late 18th century but replaced with a gravity dam in 1906. Groby Pool is an SSSI, as are Swithland and Cropston Reservoirs; all of which are important nature reserves for wetland birds.
- 6.28 The hydrology of Charnwood Forest is shown on Figure 7.

Ecology

- 6.29 Charnwood Forest contains a wealth of ecological habitats and species which, because of the upland topography, wetter and cooler climate and poorer soils, are rare in other parts of Leicestershire. These include:
- Heathlands and acid grassland - Charnwood contains a patchwork of heathlands which are an important characteristic of the area. Heather, cross-leaved heath and bilberry and a wide variety of associated vertebrate and invertebrate species are common. These habitats are at risk from woodland regeneration.
 - Meadows – Fragrant orchid, meadow buttercup, meadow saxifrage and many other species are found in this habitat.
 - Woodlands – The area has many valuable woodlands. There are areas of semi-natural ancient woodland, as well as some woodlands which are known to have been present since the Domesday Book of 1086. This is because they sit on a pre-Cambrian spine which has made the site unsuitable for agriculture. Examples include Buddon Wood and Swithland Wood.
 - Rivers and streams - These are largely unpolluted, fast flowing and well oxygenated. Species include brown trout, minnow, crayfish and much invertebrate life.

- Pools and reservoirs - Groby Pool, which has a rich aquatic flora and fauna, and Blackbrook, Cropston and Swithland Reservoirs make a major contribution to the wildlife and birdlife.
- 6.30 As shown on Figure 12, there are numerous ecological designations in the area. There are 20 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, both ecological and geological, covering geology, woodland, heathland, old grassland and lakes. This equates to almost 12% of the character area (according to English Nature's Charnwood Forest Natural Area Profile), which is a high proportion.
- 6.31 Charnwood Lodge is designated as a National Nature Reserve due to the pre-Cambrian rocks which are visible as jagged peaks protruding through the overlying Mercian Mudstones.
- 6.32 There are also locally designated wildlife sites including three Local Nature Reserves, Woodland Trust sites, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust sites and the Country Parks.
- 6.33 Charnwood Forest is important for species within the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan because of its wide variety of habitats. Species include:
- All of Leicestershire's nine species of amphibians and reptiles.
 - A high number of breeding bird species at approximately 85.
 - A high proportion of the mammal species of the East Midlands.
 - Approximately 20 species of spider found in the county are confined to Charnwood Forest.
 - A long and detailed list of beetles, insects and plants which is fully detailed in the Charnwood Borough, Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland and National Forest Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs).

Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

- 6.34 There is a rich tapestry of archaeology and cultural heritage in the Charnwood Forest landscape. This has led to the designation of numerous Scheduled Monuments, a wide variety of listed buildings and a Conservation Area in the historic core of almost every settlement in and around Charnwood Forest. These designations are marked on Figure 11. This section gives a brief overview of the cultural heritage of the area.
- 6.35 The earliest archaeological record is found at a site in Bradgate Park which provides clear evidence of man's presence in the area in Palaeolithic times. This is an important site as archaeological remains of the period are rare. Mesolithic activity is evident at Grace Dieu and in the vicinity of the present Mount St Bernard's Abbey. Buddon Hill and Beacon Hill are sites of Bronze Age and/or Iron Age settlements. Beacon Hill is a nationally important site and is a Scheduled Monument. It is the site of a Bronze Age hill fort, evident today in a series of earthworks. Spearheads, the mould of an axe and bronze bracelets have been found in the area. Beacon Hill is now owned by Leicestershire County Council and is a publicly accessible open space.
- 6.36 Charnwood Forest has several castle sites, such as the site of the motte and bailey Castle at Mountsorrel, Whitwick castle site, the remains of a castle at

Groby and a hill fort site at Woodhouse, all of which are scheduled monuments. There are also moated sites such as a prehistoric site at Bardon, a moated lodge at Newton Linford and a moated lodge at Quorn. Other Scheduled Monuments in the Forest include the Packhorse Bridge at Anstey, the Market Cross at Mountsorrel, Bradgate House at Newton Linford and Rothley Cross at Rothley.

- 6.37 There are a number of large country houses within the area including Quorn Hall, built during the reign of Charles II, Beaumanor Hall, a stately home in Woodhouse which was built in the nineteenth century, and Swithland Hall, ancestral home of the Earls of Lanesborough.
- 6.38 The Great Central Railway passes through Charnwood Forest, with stations at Quorn and Rothley. It was opened in 1899, and closed due to a decline in use in 1966. It was then re-opened as a tourist facility in 1969 and is the UK's only double track, main line heritage railway. Between 1791 and 1794 the Charnwood Forest Canal was built to take coal from mines to in the north north-west of the county to Loughborough. Problems with the engineering meant the canal was never used to its full potential and when the feeder canal from Blackbrook Reservoir was destroyed as the reservoir dam burst in 1799 the canal became unused. Remains of the canal can still be seen in places, particularly south of Osgathorpe, but there is generally little evidence of the canal to be seen in the landscape.

Formation of Landscape

- 6.39 The natural resources of the Charnwood Forest landscape have been exploited since Neolithic times, when Charnwood stone and wood from the forests were used to make hand-axes. It is believed prehistoric activity was generally localised. Roman activity in the area tended to remain within the Soar valley but Swithland Slate is known to have been quarried for use in Roman Leicester.
- 6.40 Exploitation of the landscape continued around the edges of Charnwood Forest throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and there is evidence of Scandinavian influences around Charnwood, evident in place names such as Groby.
- 6.41 Within the Domesday Book Charnwood was identified as a wooded tract called Hereswode. By this time most of the settlements in Leicestershire existed in some form however colonisation of the Charnwood area predominantly occurred some 200 years later in the 12th and 13th centuries. The only Domesday settlement recorded was Charley, with settlements such as Woodhouse Eaves and Newton Linford first recorded in the late 13th century. Many of these new settlements were linked to those around the edge of Charnwood, for example Newton Linford was a daughter settlement of Groby.
- 6.42 During the medieval period monastic orders settled in and around Charnwood: Ulverscroft Priory was founded between 1134 and 1150; Charley Hall Augustine Priory in 1190; and Grace Dieu in 1230. The medieval period also introduced hunting parks to the Charnwood area including Groby, Bradgate, Quorndon, Beaumanor and Bardon. The end of the medieval period saw the development of a number of larger 'country houses' set in formal park landscapes, such as the 15th century Bradgate House, remains of which still stand within Bradgate Country Park.

- 6.43 Unlike much of Leicestershire, colonisation within the Charnwood area slowed beyond the Middle Ages. As a result the landscape remained largely unaffected by enclosures until the 19th century. By this time many of the hunting parks and much of the woodland had gone.
- 6.44 Change started to occur within Charnwood Forest with the expansion of quarrying and the introduction of canals. Systematic quarrying of the granite began in the late 18th century, at sites such as Mountsorrel and Shepshed. The Soar and Wreake Navigations and the now defunct Charnwood Forest Canal enabled aggregates to be transported countrywide. Extensive quarrying continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, in particular for roadstone. The slate industry also expanded rapidly but by the 1840s went into rapid decline as a result of competition from Welsh slate.
- 6.45 Other major 19th century landscape changes included the construction of Swithland and Cropston Reservoirs and the introduction of railways with branch lines to serve the quarries.
- 6.46 In the 20th century the principal changes included the steady expansion of the settlements at the edges of Charnwood Forest into farmland and undeveloped land; the reduction in grazing of the surviving heathland areas; a change from pasture to arable farming stimulated by agricultural subsidies; a reduction in hedgerows and hedgerow trees due to intensified farming practices and Dutch Elm Disease; the construction of the M1, roads and other communications infrastructure that sever fields. The changes brought about by settlement expansion have been mapped using the information provided in the Historic Landscape Classification, shown in Figure 10.

7.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA BOUNDARY ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Charnwood Forest is not an administrative area; there is no single authority responsible for the area known as Charnwood Forest and at present there is no definitive boundary. The boundary most frequently referenced in plans and policies is that based on the Charnwood Forest landscape character area as defined in the *Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy*. This boundary was established by a County Council landscape character assessment carried out in 1995.
- 7.2 One of the main aims of this study undertaken by TEP is to undertake a review of the character area boundary defined by the *Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy* and to assess whether landscape change in the intervening period has meant that it should be redefined. Since 1995 the county's Historic Landscape Characterisation map has been completed which has helped to inform the boundary analysis below. Stakeholder comments and suggested boundaries, drawn from the *Future of Charnwood Forest Conference Update* proceedings in December 2007, also contributed to the boundary review. These responses are summarised in Appendix 7 and Figure 15.
- 7.3 The desk study revealed several potential areas for change in the boundary. These areas identified for further investigation during the field work were:
- Land to the south-west of Charnwood Forest around Thornton, previously included in The Coalfield county landscape character area. This area is within the National Forest and due to extensive land restoration over former collieries and other planting schemes the landscape has become significantly more wooded which has influenced the character. This area was also highlighted as a potential area for boundary change because of its designation in the Hinckley and Bosworth landscape character assessment as *Charnwood Fringe Character Area*.
 - Land between Loughborough and Shepshed. The national level landscape character area is called Charnwood and has a boundary which extends further north than the county assessment to include land north of the A512 at Garendon Park and west of the M1. Analysis of the historic boundaries shows that the Hobhouse Report drew a boundary to Charnwood Forest which included land extending approximately 2km to the north of the A512.
 - Land to the west of Shepshed. The Local Plan Charnwood Forest policy area boundary (see Figure 2) includes land to the west of Shepshed but this differs from the county level landscape character area which does not include this land.
 - Land west of Thringstone, Whitwick and Green Hill. The national level landscape assessment places the Charnwood character area boundary further west than the county level assessment boundary.

- 7.4 The stakeholder consultation gathered information regarding the preferred or perceived Charnwood Forest boundary from delegates of the *Future of Charnwood Forest Conference Update*. The outcomes were varied, covering a wide ranging area from approximately 5km north of the A512, 1.5km further south than the county assessment boundary line at the southern edge, to the outskirts of Coalville on the western edge and east to include the Rothley Brook. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust suggested extending the boundary south to include the landscape around Thornton Reservoir. Several stakeholders suggested extending the boundary north to include the area between Loughborough and Shepshed. Few changes were proposed for the western boundary. A central core was consistently shown and indicated that the Charnwood Borough Local Plan's boundary shown in Figure 2 is influential in determining people's perception of Charnwood Forest. The core area identified by stakeholders is within the proposed Charnwood Forest boundary identified within this study.
- 7.5 Field work examined the boundaries and potential changes identified above to assess whether these were justified. The changes recommended by this study are discussed below.

Proposed Boundary Changes

- A) Alteration to the boundary between Shepshed and Loughborough;
- B) Alteration along Loughborough urban fringes;
- C) Alteration to the south-east edge to follow the A46;
- D) Extension south-west to include the landscape around Thornton up to Stanton under Bardon;
- E) Minor alteration to the north-west edge, north of Thringstone and the A512;
- F) Extension into land west of Shepshed.

The recommended Charnwood Forest boundary derived from the results of this assessment and including proposed changes are shown at Figure 16 and is labelled as Proposed Charnwood Forest Boundary 2008.

Area A

- 7.6 The landscape character area boundary is realigned to the south to follow the line of the dismantled railway just north of the A512. The land to the north is largely within the Garendon Park estate and historic parkland. It is considered to share characteristics and to be closely aligned with the Langley Lowlands character area as defined within the county level landscape character assessment.
- 7.7 The two following descriptions are taken from the county landscape character assessment describing the key characteristics of the Langley Lowlands and Charnwood Forest character areas.

The Langley Lowlands is characterised by:

'Rolling landform dissected by minor watercourses. Agriculture is mixed and fields are medium to large and enclosed by well-kept mixed hedgerows.'

Parkland trees are also present around Langley Priory and Garendon Park. Industrial and commercial development is small scale.'

The Charnwood Forest character area is characterised by:

'An intimate mixture of woodland and farmland in mixed arable and pasture uses. Hedges and hedgerow trees contribute to the well wooded appearance of the area. The hilly nature of the area gives many long distance views over the surrounding countryside.'

- 7.8 The land north of the A512 and between Shepshed and Loughborough is within the transitional zone of these two character areas. It is generally recognised that landscape character boundaries are rarely starkly defined lines in the landscape, but that character areas tend to subtly merge into each other. This area can therefore be reasonably predicted to contain some of the characteristics of each of the above character area classifications. However, it is considered that it has closer landscape connections with Langley Lowlands due to the rolling, relatively open farmland, larger field sizes, high proportion of hedgerow trees and historic parkland influences.
- 7.9 The proposed Charnwood Forest character area boundary follows the southern border of the Registered Historic Park at Garendon Park and the northern edge of a former railway line which is defined in the landscape by a tree and shrub-lined corridor.

Area B

- 7.10 Loughborough is distinctly urbanised and as such bears little relation to the characteristics of the Charnwood Forest landscape. The settlements within Charnwood Forest are often small villages characterised by natural building materials of granite and slate which is not reflected by the heavily developed nature of Loughborough. The urban fringes to the south of the town are transitional areas, fragmented from the centre and adjoining open countryside. The views into and out of the urban fringes closely relate to the surrounding landscape and key characteristics such as rolling landform, distant high ground, and blocks of woodland are often strong influences.

Area C

- 7.11 The A46 has been constructed through the landscape relatively recently and therefore was not a prominent landscape feature at the time the previous character assessments were undertaken. This road broadly follows a line parallel to the Rothley Brook around the settlements of Groby, Anstey and Thurstaston and forms a logical physical boundary feature to the south-eastern edge of Charnwood Forest.

Area D

- 7.11 The landscape around Thornton village was previously included in the Coalfield landscape character area adjoining the Charnwood Forest character area within the county level character assessment. The key characteristics of the Coalfield area are:

'undulating landform, mixed farmland and past and present effects of coal mining and clay extraction. Large former mining villages characterised by 19th century terraced housing follow the main road lines. The area has few woodlands but hedges, hedgerows trees and small copses sometimes give a wooded effect'.

- 7.12 It is considered that a portion of the Coalfield landscape around Thornton, to the south-west of Markfield and Groby, should be included in the Charnwood Forest landscape character area. This is partly because planting, established as part of the National Forest Strategy, has greatly increased woodland cover in the area. These woodlands are now approximately 10 – 15 years old and are beginning to have an effect on the character of the landscape. This is a changing landscape and in time will be heavily wooded and enclosed, increasingly similar to the character of Charnwood Forest and less typical of the Coalfield area. Thornton Reservoir, a large open water body provides this area with a further shared characteristic with Charnwood Forest.
- 7.13 The Coalfield area is generally characterised by a relatively dense settlement pattern with former mining towns and villages typified by red brick terraced housing. Charnwood Forest has a dispersed settlement pattern, characterised by small, often linear, villages with a predominance of granite and slate building materials. Thornton is a small linear settlement with slate, red brick and granite as notable building materials, reflecting its location in the transitional zone between the two character areas.

Area E

- 7.14 A minor alteration to the county Charnwood Forest landscape character area boundary is also recommended at its northern edge, north of Thringstone. The boundary of the character area would logically follow the A512 around the northern edge of Thringstone. Beyond this the landscape slopes gently towards Grace Dieu Brook becoming flatter, open, with less woodland cover and is more characteristic of the Langley Lowlands.

Area F

- 7.15 The land to the west of Shepshed is currently within the Langley Lowlands character area. As described above, this is characterised by rolling landform, influenced by woodland within and beyond the character area, with many hedgerow trees and parkland. At the edge of Charnwood Forest it falls within a transitional area but has characteristics in common with the Charnwood Forest character area. This is due to the large blocks of woodland, sharply undulating or rolling nature of the landform, patchwork of fields and high incidence of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. It is therefore appropriate that the Charnwood Forest landscape continues north of the A512 and sweeps round the western edge of Shepshed.

Boundaries Remaining Unchanged

- 7.16 Sections of the existing county Charnwood Forest landscape character area boundary which are proposed to remain the same are:
- G) The eastern boundary around Rothley, Mountsorrel and Quorn;
 - H) The western boundary from Stanton under Bardon to Thringstone;
 - I) To the north-west around Osgathorpe (identified in the National Landscape Character Assessment as 'Charnwood');

Area G

- 7.17 Little has changed along this eastern boundary line since the previous character assessment was completed and it is not considered necessary to amend the boundary line. The line follows the road network through the settlements of Rothley, Mountsorrel and Quorn. To the east, beyond the boundary, the landscape is influenced by the River Soar floodplain and the change in character to the adjoining Soar Valley character area is clear within the landscape.

Area H

- 7.18 No change to the county landscape character area boundary is required along its north western edge, although this differs from the national level assessment. The existing county character area boundary approximately follows the line of the Thringstone Fault, which marks a change in underlying geology, although this is not a feature which is visible on the ground surface. This boundary is considered appropriate because settlements to the east, within the Charnwood Forest character area, are on rising landform, have a backdrop of rolling landform, woodland on high ground and wooded ridgelines. To the west this backdrop is less evident. For example, views from within Coalville generally do not contain the steeply rising landform and woodland.

Area I

- 7.19 The desk study revealed the land at Osgathorpe to be included in the Charnwood character area within the national assessment. No other character assessments include it within Charnwood Forest. The landscape around Osgathorpe is gently rolling and is influenced by several streams, which is characteristic of the Langley Lowlands. Dense vegetation including trees is associated with watercourse corridors. Small woodland groups are present although coverage is sparser than in neighbouring areas to the south. The area has a stronger visual connection with the landscape to the north within Langley Lowlands than with the craggy, steeply rolling landscape to the south.
- 7.20 It is considered that this area does not share sufficiently similar landscape characteristics with areas to the south around Thringstone and Ringing Hill and should remain outside the Charnwood Forest character area.

Transitional Zones

- 7.21 It is important to note that the landscape character area boundary reflects an area where the character of the landscape is considered to change. This is

CHARNWOOD FOREST LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

based on factors including: geology; topography; hydrology; woodland cover; land-use; and built form. In defining the recommended boundary line, a professional judgement has been made based on all the factors researched in the desk study and field survey. Along landscape character area boundaries there will be transitional zones where the character changes gradually from that of one area to that of the next. A landscape character area boundary does not represent a restriction on the landscape, but is useful tool to inform local planning policies and future management guidelines.

8.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

8.1 This chapter provides a broad overview of the character of the study area. The individual descriptions of the proposed landscape character areas are contained on the following pages and include a description of the character of each area, as well as explanation as to how the boundaries were defined. The proposed Charnwood Forest landscape character areas are shown in Figure 17. A main aim of the study was to reassess and extend the finer grain of the existing landscape character assessment for the National Forest Strategy to include the Charnwood Forest area. This section compares the character areas identified in this study with those in the National Forest Strategy. It explains where and why the areas differ and are similar. This comparison is shown in Figure 18.

Summary of the Landscape Character of the Study Area

- 8.2 The overriding character of the area is a rolling and wooded rural landscape, with some distinctive areas of rocky outcrops. The topography in the east along the Rothley Brook system is notably different as it is low and flat, characteristic of a floodplain landscape.
- 8.3 In the central area of Charnwood Forest built form is limited to a few small linear villages. Larger villages are located on the edges of the Forest and along the Rothley Brook and River Soar watercourses. Larger urban fringe landscapes influence the area in the north, west and south-east.
- 8.4 Infrastructure is concentrated along the western fringe, where it has the greatest impact on the landscape character, although there are large active and disused quarries scattered across the landscape. The M1 has an impact on the landscape as it passes north–south through Charnwood Forest and the road network is evident in the landscape character in the south-west. The overhead transmission line which passes along the Rothley Brook system has an impact on the local landscape.
- 8.5 Landcover is predominantly agricultural and often pastoral. There is a high percentage of woodland cover, especially in the central area. There are several large country parks where the land is used for recreation and landcover is heathland, rough grassland and rocky outcrops.
- 8.6 Hedgerows are common throughout the area and are mostly well-maintained and in good condition. Hedgerow trees are common in some areas, mainly the gently undulating farmland character areas, and common species include oak and ash. There are some very large mature oaks in the Charnwood Forest landscape. Drystone walls are common in the higher areas with rocky outcrops, typically in the central part of the area and in the west.
- 8.7 Field types vary depending on topography. They are mainly medium sized and regular, although fields are longer and narrower in floodplain landscapes and irregular shapes and sizes to follow the contours on the higher land.
- 8.8 A number of brooks and streams cross the area shaping the landform and influencing the landscape character. The Rothley Brook system has a significant

impact on the landscape character and forms its own character area in the east. Here vegetation is dense and scrubby with a high proportion of wetland species such as willow.

- 8.9 The area is popular for recreation and leisure and there are a number of Country Parks which attract high numbers of visitors. There are a number of high viewpoints with long sweeping views over the surrounding landscape, which are accessible by footpaths. The Leicestershire Round long distance footpath passes through the Charnwood Forest area and there is a dense network of public rights of way.
- 8.10 The landscape character of Charnwood Forest, from the floodplain landscape of Rothley Brook, through the gently undulating farmland, to the rolling, wooded and rocky landscapes characteristic of the central area, has a distinctive and interesting character. It is predominantly colourful, pleasant, peaceful and unified, although the wider landscape is sometimes broken or interrupted by infrastructure.

Landscape Character Types

- 8.11 Landscape character assessment can be undertaken at a range of scales. At some scales of assessment, a landscape type is defined. The landscape character type is a larger unit than a character area and includes a number of individual landscape character areas which share similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern, albeit that there is sufficient distinction within them to differentiate into areas.
- 8.12 The study area of Charnwood Forest is small and the Forest is essentially the defining 'character type'. Each of the defined character areas has sufficient commonality to fall within the overall Charnwood Forest landscape type. The study focuses on the landscape character areas and the distinctions which can be identified between them within the unifying Charnwood Forest landscape character type.

Landscape Character Areas

- 8.13 This document describes the key characteristics of each landscape character area within Charnwood Forest. The area has been divided into seven character areas:
- Bradgate & Beacon
 - Ulverscroft
 - Charley
 - Swithland
 - Rothley Brook
 - Thornton & Markfield
 - Bardon
- 8.14 These character areas are described and analysed in the following pages. Each character area assessment contains a description of the key characteristics, landscape character, woodland and tree cover, and built form in the landscape. It also contains discussion of ongoing processes likely to affect change, green

infrastructure in the area, the ability of the landscape to accommodate change and landscape management recommendations.

Comparison with the National Forest Landscape Character Assessment

- 8.15 The comparison between the two studies is mapped in Figure 18.
- 8.16 Both assessments identified the upland and rocky spine through the central core of Charnwood Forest, although the National Forest assessment is very precise in drawing the character area boundary around individual woodland blocks. In the present assessment the boundary does not strictly follow the line of the woodland as it assumes the character extends further out into the landscape and allows a slightly broader transition area. The National Forest assessment extends the character area covering the central spine of Charnwood Forest to the west, to include the well wooded area of land around Lea Wood, Bailey Sim Wood and Blakeshay Wood. However, the present assessment sub-divides this into two areas, acknowledging that there is less woodland in the rocky upland spine landscape and a far greater wooded character in the smaller area to the west.
- 8.17 The National Forest Strategy includes an area of woodland to the south of Newton Linford (around Lawn Wood, Old Wood and Martinshaw Wood) within the central core area. This assessment has considered that to be part of the restored landscape character area around Thornton, because of the quarrying activity in the area and because of woodland planting in the area, especially around Martinshaw Wood.
- 8.18 In the west of the Charnwood Forest area, the National Forest Strategy has separate areas for Markfield and Bardon Quarry, and for Thringstone and Whitwick fringes. This assessment has grouped those areas together as an area of industry, urban fringe and quarrying, but once again the character areas are broadly similar.
- 8.19 The area to the north-west of the study area, around Blackbrook Reservoir and Ives Head is where the two assessments differ most in the identification of character areas. The area has rolling topography with a high proportion of heathland and rough grassland around rocky outcrops, as well as swathes of woodland, woodland clumps around rocky outcrops, a high proportion of drystone walls and the reservoir. This assessment has grouped the whole area together, considering that although there are local differences between woodland and heathland, and between wooded enclosed land and rocky, exposed high points, the over-riding character of the area is the same. The National Forest Strategy has made a differentiation based on the more wooded lower enclosed land and the rocky heathland. There is justification for both approaches, but this assessment has placed the emphasis on broader examination of the overall characteristics of the landscape.

9.0 SETTLEMENT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 This section provides a broad overview of the character of the settlements within and on the fringes of Charnwood Forest. An individual assessment of each settlement is given in the detailed settlement assessment section. Each settlement is assessed with reference to key characteristics, a detailed description of the built form and pattern, and its location and context. Recommendations for management and future development are given.
- 9.2 Charnwood Forest is a scenic area and the settlements within it often have a distinctive character. The assessment includes an analysis of the features which create the 'sense of place' in each settlement, including gateway features, landmark features and history and heritage.
- 9.3 Emphasis has been placed on the setting of the settlements in the landscape. This is because the surrounding landscape is of high quality, as defined in Section 6. The setting of each settlement has an impact on its character and the local landscape character. These shape the recommendations for future development of the settlement and management of the landscape. Each individual settlement assessment includes an analysis of the surrounding topography, description of the key views, an assessment of the roofline and a review of the urban edges. This helps to assess its setting in the landscape.

Summary of Settlement Characteristics within and around Charnwood Forest

- 9.4 The settlement pattern within the area is of settlements clustered around the edges of the Forest. There is very little development within the core area; even scattered farmsteads are limited. Settlement pattern is shown on Figure 9.
- 9.5 There is a string of large clustered settlements along the Rothley Brook/River Soar corridor along the east of the character area, including Quorn, Mountsorrel, Rothley, Anstey and Groby. These settlements have expanded considerably in modern times and their fringes sometimes merge. There is a scattering of linear settlements within the rolling and wooded foothills of Charnwood Forest (north-west of the Rothley Brook corridor) including Swithland, Newton Linford, Woodhouse and Woodhouse Eaves. These settlements have generally not expanded much in modern times and have a distinctive and attractive character. Loughborough and Shepshed are large settlements on the northern borders of Charnwood Forest and have urban fringes within the Forest. Thringstone, Whitwick and Agar Nook are large villages which have expanded considerably along the western edge of the Forest.
- 9.6 Post-war expansion has weakened the character of the settlements around the fringes of the Forest and along the Rothley Brook corridor. There is often little or no relation to the historic core in the estates and cul-de-sacs of modern development and the sprawl has meant settlements have merged together, diluting the distinctive village characteristics. This is especially true of the settlements along the western edge of Charnwood Forest.
- 9.7 The small and linear settlements are well integrated into the Charnwood Forest landscape because of the rolling topography and well wooded background. They

have been prevented from expanding because of their setting within Charnwood Forest and consequently have strong village characteristics which extend through the whole settlement.

- 9.8 Whether or not subject to modern expansion, the Charnwood Forest settlements have distinctive characteristics. Granite is a commonly used building material for both buildings and boundaries in most settlements, although it has the strongest association with Mountsorrel due to the quarrying there.
- 9.9 Slate is also a distinctive and commonly used roofing material, and sometimes a building material too; for example, there are several slate-built cottages in Swithland village. Swithland has strong associations with the slate industry which was operational in the area from the 13th to the 19th centuries. Swithland slate was used as a roofing material around the East Midlands and is common in the Charnwood Forest area. Thatched properties are scattered throughout the Charnwood Forest settlements but are particularly characteristic of Newton Linford, where new developments are being built using thatch to maintain the character.
- 9.10 The wooded nature of the landscape is an important feature in many of the settlement rooflines and influences the setting of the villages in the landscape. The woodland filters views of the settlement edges and helps integrate the rooflines into the landscape. Consequently, some of the villages are very recessive in the landscape. These include Woodhouse, Swithland, Woodhouse Eaves and even the larger settlements of Groby and Markfield to an extent. Loughborough's southern and western fringes, which border the Forest, are also well wooded.
- 9.11 Few settlements have a dominant or distinctive roofline because of the nature of the topography and the high woodland content of the landscape. The exception to this is Ratby which has a distinctive rising roofline with the parish church, built on the highest point of the village, as its crown.
- 9.12 The Rothley Brook and River Soar, which effect flow along the eastern edge of Charnwood Forest, have a significant impact on the character of those settlements built on their floodplains. Rothley is especially affected by fluvial features as the brook flows through the centre. Quorn and Mountsorrel also have key characteristics based on the river system, and Anstey's eastern fringe is shaped by the brook.
- 9.13 Quarrying also has an impact on the Charnwood Forest settlements. Markfield, Mountsorrel, Quorn, Swithland, Groby, Stanton under Bardon and Agar Nook all have close associations with quarrying as large quarries, some active, some restored, are found in close proximity to all these settlements. Active quarries in Charnwood Forest are Mountsorrel, Bardon and Cliffe Hill. These are large granite quarries and are of national importance.
- 9.14 Many of the Charnwood Forest settlements have Conservation Area designations to protect their character. Conservation Area status recognises the special value certain areas contribute to the historic environment. The special character is a combination the historic layout of roads, paths and boundaries, characteristic building materials, open spaces, such as gardens, parks and greens; and trees

and street furniture, all of which contribute to particular views and form the local scene. Conservation Areas give broader protection than listing individual buildings as all the features, listed or otherwise, within the area, are recognised as part of its character. Within a Conservation Area the local planning authority has additional controls over demolition, minor developments and the protection of trees.

- 9.15 Conservation Area designation has been highly influential in protecting the character of almost all of the Charnwood Forest settlements. The small linear villages of Swithland, Woodhouse and Newton Linford are almost entirely covered by Conservation Area status. The historic cores of Woodhouse Eaves, Quorn, Mountsorrel, Rothley, Anstey, Groby, Ratby and Markfield are designated Conservation Areas. The settlements on the edge of Coalville, on the western fringes of Charnwood Forest, (Thringstone, Whitwick and Agar Nook) do not have the same Charnwood Forest village characteristics as the other settlements and are not covered by a Conservation Area designation. Some of the Conservation Areas are covered by Conservation Area Appraisals, which articulate their character and important elements. These have been assessed and are included in Appendix 3. The Conservation Areas are shown on Figure 11.

Fringe Settlements

- 9.16 Shepshed and Loughborough border Charnwood Forest and lie partly within the county Charnwood Forest landscape character area. Consequently the fringes of Loughborough and Shepshed within Charnwood Forest have been assessed in detail in this study, but a full settlement assessment has not been carried out. This allowed the study to focus on the impact of the urban edges and the setting of these fringes in the Charnwood Forest landscape.
- 9.17 The fringe assessments of Shepshed and Loughborough do not have a section on built form and settlement pattern and have enlarged sections on setting in the landscape which focus on the urban fringes.

Settlement Character Assessment

- 9.18 The following pages cover each of the settlements included in the study:

- Agar Nook
- Anstey
- Cropston
- Groby
- Loughborough (Charnwood Forest fringes)
- Markfield
- Mountsorrel
- Newton Linford
- Quorn
- Ratby
- Rothley
- Shepshed (Charnwood Forest fringes)
- Swithland
- Thornton
- Thringstone

CHARNWOOD FOREST LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- Thurcaston
- Whitwick
- Woodhouse
- Woodhouse Eaves

9.19 Charnwood Forest has many boundaries used for different purposes. The following table shows which settlements fall within which each of the principal boundaries:

Table 2: Settlements within Charnwood Forest

Settlement	Leicestershire County Council Charnwood Forest landscape character area	Local Plans Charnwood Forest policies boundary	The National Forest
Agar Nook	✓	x	✓
Anstey	✓	x	x
Cropston	✓	x	x
Groby	✓	x	Fringes only
Loughborough (Charnwood Forest fringes)	Fringes only	x	x
Markfield	✓	x	✓
Mountsorrel	Partly	x	x
Newton Linford	✓	✓	✓
Quorn	Partly	x	
Ratby	Partly	x	✓
Rothley	✓	x	x
Shepshed (Charnwood Forest fringes)	Fringes only	x	x
Swithland	✓	✓	x
Thornton	✓	x	x
Thringstone	✓	x	✓
Thurcaston	✓	x	x
Whitwick	✓	x	✓
Woodhouse	✓	✓	x
Woodhouse Eaves	✓	✓	Partly

10.0 CHARNWOOD FOREST REGIONAL PARK: PROPOSALS FOR A WORKING BOUNDARY

The Regional Park Concept

- 10.1 The concept of Charnwood Forest Regional Park is initiated through National and Regional policy. This is a concept deeply rooted in the English planning system since Abercrombie's Greater London Plan in 1944. This pioneered the idea of regional open spaces and has been supported since that time throughout the country in regional and sub-regional policy.
- 10.2 There is no defined model for a Regional Park and there are a variety of interpretations displayed in Regional Parks in the UK and abroad. Some of these are described in more detail in sections 10.15 to 10.27. Interpretations include:
- an area of attractive countryside;
 - a countryside area close to large population centres that offers opportunities for outdoor recreation;
 - a network of linked open spaces in an urban and urban fringe context that brings some aspects of the countryside to the city dweller; and
 - a creative way of conserving and enhancing post-industrial landscapes.
- 10.3 Each Regional Park is unique and is defined by its inherent features which are typically focussed around an area's natural landscapes and cultural heritage.
- 10.4 Regional Parks are individual and for this reason a flexible approach to their future evolution can be appropriate. However, a Regional Park should have a clearly defined purpose which is set out within its aims and objectives. These are pertinent to its special features and qualities and must be developed for each individual case.
- 10.5 The qualities of an area such as biodiversity, landscape character and human interaction are common themes running through the Regional Park initiatives which seek to protect, conserve, enhance and restore landscapes, whilst also encouraging public access and enjoyment.
- 10.6 Regional Park initiatives can be a practical and effective way of bringing together a network of partners to promote and manage landscape assets. Initiatives can be specifically designed to deliver a combination of appropriate environmental, economic and social benefits to a given area.

Regional Park Policy Context

- 10.7 For Regional Park initiatives to succeed they should be embedded within policy at a regional level through Regional Spatial Strategies. In the case of the East Midlands and Charnwood Forest, there are robust policies for the protection of the natural and cultural environment in the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8). In particular, Policies 28, 29 and 30 focus on enhancing biodiversity, increasing woodland cover and the management and enhancement of the landscape. Although there is no specific reference to the role of Regional

Parks there is clear support for the concept. One of the strategic priorities includes the proposal for a Charnwood Forest Regional Park.

- 10.8 The Draft East Midlands Regional Plan, Policy 27 – *Regional Priorities for Environmental and Green Infrastructure*, recommends Charnwood Forest as a potential Regional Park. The policy states:

“Local Authorities, statutory environmental bodies and developers should work with the voluntary sector, landowners and local communities to ensure the delivery, protection and enhancement of Environmental Infrastructure across the Region. Such infrastructure should contribute to a high quality natural and built environment and to the delivery of sustainable communities”

- 10.9 The supporting text which accompanies the policy states that the proposed Nene Valley Regional Park is an good example of new strategic green infrastructure with multiple public benefits and that there is potential for ‘Regional Park’ initiatives in other parts of the East Midlands, including in the Charnwood and Sherwood Forests, as well as for similar ‘sub-regional’ initiatives elsewhere.
- 10.10 At a local level policies are emerging and include support for the general principles of establishing a Charnwood Forest Regional Park. Hinckley and Bosworth Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy makes specific reference to Charnwood Forest becoming a Regional Park. A Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy for Hinckley and Bosworth is also being developed and could be closely aligned to the objectives of a Regional Park.
- 10.11 The Regional Park concept is often linked with the enhancement of GI. GI is the network of multi-functional greenspace provided throughout a region. GI consists of strategic networks of accessible sites which can have many uses (including parks, woodland, informal open spaces, nature reserves and historic sites) as well as linkages (such as river corridors and floodplains, wildlife corridors and greenways). GI encourages for the use of greenspaces to be maximised rather than restricted to a small number of specific uses. It promotes management for more than just recreational use and social benefits. Management for environmental and economic gain are key aspects.
- 10.12 Successful improvements in GI can promote an extensive range of benefits for a region including; sport and active recreation; access to natural greenspace; mental and physical health; image and investment; land and property value; education and life-long learning; social inclusion; intrinsic value of a place to a community; flood management; air; water and soil quality; climate change adaptability; landscape character/sense of place; biodiversity; setting for tourism; availability for social enterprises; and setting for culture.
- 10.13 Regional policy supports developing GI links within the National Forest and therefore within the Charnwood Forest area to ensure development contributes to environmental improvement through provision of GI. The Three Cities SRS Policy No.6 – Green Infrastructure and the National Forest states:

“In considering major development proposals, the local authority will coordinate the provision of enhanced and new green infrastructure”

This may be through protection, enhancement or extension of existing areas, or through provision of new facilities. Regional policy also encourages the provision of GI through Regional Park initiatives.

- 10.14 Although regional policy supports the development of Regional Parks, it is important to note that these are non-statutory, partnership-led environmental initiatives. Creation of a Regional Park is a visionary concept with many potential environmental, social and economic benefits. However there is no statutory protection for the land within Regional Parks and any proposed developments would be subject to the usual planning procedures.

Best Practice Examples of Regional Parks

The River Nene Regional Park Initiative

- 10.15 Established in 2003, River Nene Regional Park is the nearest Regional Park to Charnwood Forest and is also promoted in the East Midlands regional policy. The River Nene rises in Northamptonshire and flows into the sea at The Wash. The river and its tributaries drain about three-quarters of the County. It flows through the major urban areas of Northampton and Wellingborough and either through, or close to, the smaller urban areas of Higham Ferrers, Oundle, Rushden and Thrapston along with a number of villages. The River Nene and its valley is an important resource in terms of biodiversity, sand and gravel supply, economic and social activity, and recreation and tourism.
- 10.16 Having regard to these competing needs a delicate balance needed to be found between development and conservation taking account of economic, social and environmental considerations. To help balance the demands of development, as the area is allocated as a Growth Point for the region, and conservation, it was proposed to establish a Regional Park for the River Nene.
- 10.17 The Regional Park concept provides the opportunity for local authorities, businesses, agricultural interests and other groups to work in partnership to promote sustainable development and management of the catchment as a whole. The Regional Park offers particular opportunities for recreation and sustainable tourism.
- 10.18 The core themes of the River Nene Regional Park are:
- Project Enabling;
 - Place Making;
 - Centre of excellence for environmental initiatives and innovation;
 - The champion for GI across the region;
 - Enabling carbon offset and addressing climate change;
 - GI network of environmental projects linking towns of Northampton, Towcester, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby.
- 10.19 To assist policy, an Environmental Character Assessment and GI Suite has been developed. This gives access to map and text information, policies, and descriptions of historic, biodiversity and current landscape character.

Mersey Waterfront Regional Park

- 10.20 The Mersey Waterfront extends for approximately 135 kilometres of coastal and estuarine waterfront, through seven local authorities. There are resort towns at either end of the park, and a wide variety of landscapes in between. It includes major cities and ports, leafy suburbs, internationally important wildlife sites and the UNESCO World Heritage site of Liverpool Waterfront.
- 10.21 The Mersey Waterfront has developed a strategic framework that sets out the spatial framework for the park, in particular the notion of the 'Windows on the Waterfront', a method of displaying the scale and diversity of the park to investors and users. The wider objectives of the regional park are:
- Regeneration
 - Environment
 - Leisure & Recreation

East Lancashire Regional Park

- 10.22 East Lancashire was the north-west's first Regional Park, becoming operational in 2000, with a £5m grant under the Single Regeneration Budget scheme.
- 10.23 The East Lancashire Regional Park (ELRP) spans six local authorities. Within its boundaries lie the Forest of Bowland AONB, the West Pennine Moors, extensive tracts of farmland, and the ribbon of industrial towns stretching from Blackburn in the west through Accrington, Burnley, and Nelson to Colne in the east. There are several waterways within the park including the Leeds–Liverpool Canal, and the River Ribble. The Park is managed by the Lancashire Economic Partnership (LEP).
- 10.24 The aim of the scheme is to improve local landscapes where people work and live, making the best use of the superb natural environment of East Lancashire. The initiative links culture, heritage and the arts with the natural environment, helping form a positive new identity for East Lancashire.
- 10.25 Since 2000, almost 560 hectares of new woodland have been planted to improve biodiversity and over 85 kms of new paths, cycleways and bridleways have been developed to create a strategic access network linking urban and rural areas, local communities with employment sites and recreation and tourist attractions.

Emscher landschaftspark (Landscape Park) 2010 (Ruhr, Germany)

- 10.26 The Emscher Landschaftspark (ELP) is now in its 18th year and is a regional co-operation project for the creation of a contiguous park system. ELP takes in 20 cities and towns and covers two district (regional) governments. The creation of a "landscape park" was used to drive the restoration of one of the most degraded landscapes in Europe and become a stimulus for economic, social and environmental change. The five key objectives of the project are:
- The regeneration of former industrial sites.
 - The preservation of the area's industrial and cultural identity.

- A high standard of ecological and architectural quality.
- An integrative strategy of urban and economic development.
- The creation of a social and cultural profile and promotion of community participation.

10.27 Key to these projects was the use of cycle networks, green spaces and park spaces to connect areas, projects, cities and neighbourhoods. The project has been a success and 60% of the Ruhr is now classed as 'significant open space'.

The Regional Park Concept for Charnwood Forest

10.28 The above examples demonstrate that Regional Parks can be successful. Each of these parks has been developed with its own unique focus, vision and objectives. For example, a key objective of the Mersey Waterfront is regeneration while a key objective of the East Lancashire Regional Park is to increase public access throughout the area.

10.29 The objectives for the Charnwood Forest Regional Park will need to reflect the unique qualities of the Forest. These must be considered in the near future to ascertain the purpose and goals of designating the area as a Regional Park. This will in turn shape policy, management strategy and promotion of the Park to the public.

10.30 This study has identified that Charnwood Forest has special and distinctive qualities which could shape core objectives. These include:

High biodiversity value: this merits safeguarding, especially as the East Midlands is generally an area with limited biodiversity.

Highly distinctive landscape: this merits safeguarding, and has been protected in the past through regional and local planning policy, if not through designation at a national level.

Large surrounding population: given Charnwood Forest's position relative to Leicester, Loughborough, Coalville and the 6Cs Growth Point, and the emerging priority of green infrastructure, there is considerable potential public benefit in the Forest becoming a Regional Park.

The need for landscape management: the emerging focus on GI can be assimilated into a pro-active approach to landscape management through the Regional Park initiative.

10.31 An important factor to consider for the Charnwood Forest Regional Park initiative is the increasing pressure on the area from the surrounding urban areas and planned growth. Charnwood Forest is an area of high quality natural landscape surrounded by several large urban areas. Government housing targets for the area are 78,000 new homes in the RSS plan period, bringing development pressure, as well as traffic and visitor pressure to the Charnwood Forest landscape. Designating the area as a Regional Park will help to provide a framework and structure to the developing tourism and recreation policies needed to manage this growth in pressure. It will also require the quality of the landscape to be protected and conserved.

10.32 The Charnwood Forest landscape is of high quality and one of the main reasons for designation as a Regional Park is recognition of an attractive but as yet undesignated landscape. The objectives would need to recognise this. At present the specific focus of this Regional Park is not yet defined but there are various topics which have relevance to Charnwood Forest including;

- Landscape protection and enhancement
- Biodiversity protection and enhancement
- Agricultural diversification
- Forestry
- Recreation
- Tourism
- Climate change adaptation
- Access to 'wilderness'
- Tranquillity

10.33 The nature and special quality of the Charnwood Forest landscape means the objectives are likely to be similar to those of National Parks and AONBs. Objectives could also have emphasis on improving the green links between the urban areas and the Charnwood Forest recreational areas, whilst also seeking to protect the special landscape of Charnwood Forest. A focus on landscape protection and the promotion of quiet enjoyment of the area, as opposed to regeneration and improvement is likely to be most appropriate to Charnwood Forest. Decisions in respect of the Regional Park's focus will shape its future and are important for planning professionals and stakeholders to determine.

The Regional Park Boundary

10.34 This section examines the possible options for a working boundary and starting point for the Charnwood Forest Regional Park. This need not be fixed in its early conceptual stages although there are advantages to establishing a permanent boundary as this is useful for obtaining funding, policy making, enforcing and promotion of the park to the public. There are many boundaries associated with Charnwood Forest which is potentially confusing. The boundary for the Regional Park should not contribute further to this confusion.

Existing Boundaries

10.35 Existing boundaries include historical boundaries, ecological boundaries, local and regional planning boundaries, character area boundaries, and administrative boundaries. A boundary assessment is covered in Section 7. In assessing a working boundary for the Regional Park it is necessary to critically assess existing boundaries, with particular reference to the historical ones, which formed the shape of Charnwood Forest in planning policy.

10.36 Figure 14 shows historical boundaries, one from a county survey carried out in 1950 by planning officers and the other from the 1947 Hobhouse Report, written when considering areas for National Park selection. These have formed a basis for the Regional Park boundary analysis within this study. The county level survey draws a tight line around the Charnwood Forest core area, the rolling hills, woodland and rocky outcrops. It excludes the urban fringes. The Hobhouse

boundary extends north to include the land between Loughborough and Shepshed, and south to include the wooded landscape around Ratby. Neither includes the Rothley Brook corridor.

Public Consultation on the Boundary

- 10.37 The Future of Charnwood Forest stakeholder group provided feedback regarding public opinion on the location of a Regional Park working boundary. This consultation extended to various groups and organisations within and around Charnwood Forest. All opinions were taken into consideration and the responses from the organisations are mapped in Figure 15. The written responses were also taken into consideration and these are shown at Appendix 7.
- 10.38 Responses were very wide ranging and varied according to the nature and purpose of the organisation being represented. Almost all include the land within the Local Plans Charnwood Forest boundary as a minimum or follow it as their recommended boundary. Further to this, a number of respondents included the Rothley Brook corridor, including the Friends of Charnwood Forest, Shepshed Countryside Protection Group and the Open Space Society. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust extended the boundary to the south to include the areas with young woodland. Several groups extended the boundary north to include the Garendon Park area. This information is has been analysed and presented in Section 7.

Proposed Regional Park Boundary

- 10.39 Using the information gathered in the landscape character assessment, examination of existing boundaries and the stakeholder consultation responses, this study recommends that the working boundary for the Regional Park should follow that of the county level Charnwood Forest landscape character area as recommended for revision by this report. The proposed boundary is shown in Figure 19 and is labelled as Proposed Regional Park Boundary 2008.
- 10.40 As a Regional Park Charnwood Forest will attract more visitor pressure than at present and having a greater number of assets and a wider physical area to absorb the pressure will be beneficial. The proposed Regional Park boundary includes a range of landscapes over a wide area and would disperse visitor pressures. It also increases public enjoyment due to the wider range of experiences available.
- 10.41 By including some urban fringe landscapes and all of the Charnwood Forest villages within the Regional Park boundary, the landscape surrounding the urban areas becomes just as valuable as that of the rural areas. This means the quality of the urban fringe landscape, often under considerable pressure with housing targets, is carefully considered in planning decisions. Including the urban fringe in the Regional Park also allows positive green infrastructure investment, mainly arising from development, to be channelled towards projects in the relatively pressurised areas
- 10.42 The landscape character based boundary was considered to be the most logical boundary for a designation which is likely to include among its objectives the promotion and protection of the landscape of Charnwood Forest. Selecting the

CHARNWOOD FOREST LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Charnwood Forest landscape character area boundary 2008 as the Regional Park boundary simplifies a potentially confusing situation, reduces the number of boundaries in operation and reduces complications for policy makers, policy enforcers, the public, developers and landscape managers.

- 10.43 This boundary provides a starting point from which to develop the Regional Park initiative. The next steps will further define the aims and objectives of the park and develop positive policies for the future of Charnwood Forest as a Regional Park.

11.0 Conclusions

- 11.1 This study comprised a landscape and settlement character assessment and data gathering exercise to provide baseline evidence to inform the development of plans for the future of Charnwood Forest. This is intended to assist development control decisions on planning applications, inform planning policy formulation, guide actions on landscape management, provide analysis of the possibility of developing Charnwood Forest as a Regional Park and suggest a possible working boundary for such a park. The document has been through a thorough consultation process and the opinions and recommendations of the stakeholders have been incorporated into the document.
- 11.2 The desk-based aspect of the study analysed available GIS mapped data and published documents to establish the landscape context of the study area and identify elements considered of value. This aspect also reviewed published documents relevant to the settlements within the Charnwood Forest area. Interpolation plans were then produced which identified recognisable patterns across the area. Draft landscape character areas were produced from the collation of the interpolation plans.
- 11.3 The field survey was undertaken to verify or adjust the draft character areas and appraise the aesthetic factors and visual interaction between different elements which is not evident from the desk-based assessment. Individual settlements were analysed to identify their character, important gateways and distinguishing features.
- 11.4 The study concluded that the Charnwood Forest landscape character area boundary should be altered in several ways, mainly extended to include areas of land to the north and south which are of similar character, quality and condition to that of the Charnwood Forest landscape.
- 11.5 The landscape character assessment brought the whole Charnwood Forest area to the same level of detail as the National Forest character assessment, although it altered several of the National Forest character areas which were judged to have changed since the previous landscape character assessment in 1992. Seven landscape character areas were identified.

These are:

- Bradgate & Beacon
- Ulverscroft
- Charley
- Swithland
- Rothley Brook
- Thornton & Markfield
- Bardon

- 11.6 The settlements in Charnwood Forest have been described and assessed for their key characteristics, built form and setting in the landscape. Future management and development recommendations have been made for each of the settlements.

- 11.7 An assessment of the Regional Park initiative for Charnwood Forest was undertaken, with specific reference to the park boundary. The study concludes that the Regional Park working boundary should follow that of the landscape character area boundary (2008) for Charnwood Forest. This working boundary is expected to evolve through the early stages of refining the Regional Park initiative, and in the future, as the aims and objectives develop in ways that will conserve, protect and enhance the special qualities of Charnwood Forest and address the issues that it now faces.



Work on this document was financially supported by:

