Survey on the use of the Leconfield Open Space

Nanpantan Ward Residents' Group
30th July 2020, version 1.0

The Leconfield open space is of considerable public value. It is being used for a broad range of amenities by large numbers of current residents and has been for generations (photo courtesy of the Percival Family, taken December 1990)

Foreword

We would like to quote from one of our residents who responded to our survey and mused on the fact that the loss of open space in Nanpantan appears relentless, '[there is also] the total destruction of the beautiful wooded area along Ashby Road that made arriving through the forest side of town so countryfied and such a lovely contrast to the motorway. You knew you were home. There is a bleakness coming, a barrenness, a lack of recognition that once these things are lost, they are gone forever.'

Background

The Leconfield open space (LOS) satisfies the definition of being an open space according to National Planning Policy Framework [4, p.62].

All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity

Until 2016, the LOS was under the protection of the Council's policy EV/18 as 'an open space of special character' [21, p.34]. The character of the land and its immediate area have not changed since 2016, so we can only assume that the Council would still regard it an 'open space of special character' even though the protection afforded by EV/18 designation is now lost.

One of the Council's six Open Spaces Strategy [3, p.7] objectives is shown below.

The objectives of this Strategy are to:

- *Understand and fulfil community expectations in providing open spaces in Charnwood*

Survey

To establish that the LOS is of public value in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework definition and make clear what are the community expectations in respect of the LOS, Nanpantan Ward Residents' Group carried out a survey of local residents in July 2020. Based on National and Local Polices, we expect the Council to fulfil the expectations expressed with respect to the LOS.

It is clear that residents highly value the largely unfettered access they have enjoyed for up to 50 years, over which time the LOS has been used for many amenities and this continues to the present day. A new generation of children and now even some of their children have enjoyed this green space. It is clear that the LOS holds a special place in the hearts of residents. It has an important sense of place, being in the residential area and accessible from much of the Ward by quiet roads.

Although it is not shown as public open space on Council policy maps, the LOS is treated as informal open space by residents. There have been attempts to restrict access from time to time, but the fact that notices indicating that the LOS is private land have appeared three times in the last 12 months will have had an effect in reducing its current level of usage. Many residents indicated in the survey that they would use the LOS more regularly if it were in public hands and the unwelcoming heavy gate that has been recently re-installed at the entrance to the LOS many discourage access for many or even prevent access for some of the less physically-able members of the community. A number of residents contacted us to say they do not use the LOS as the access onwards into Burleigh Wood currently involves climbing a fence.

Despite all these accessibility constraints, it is clear from the survey that the LOS remains well-used by local residents; the well-worn paths weaving their way across the LOS that have been here almost as long as some residents are testament to this. A number of residents who say they do not actually

access the LOS have told us they still value it as an amenity because of the more open feeling it gives to the Ward due to its prominence on the hill overlooking the area.

For the survey, we used a database of 97 residents who, during the local plan consultation process, expressed interest in protecting either the LOS or a second site in Nanpantan identified for potential development. We simply asked residents how they currently use the LOS, how frequently they accessed it and how they would like it to be used in the future. We received 79 responses with all indicating they have accessed the LOS at some time, 41 residents indicating they currently use the LOS at least weekly and 19 every day.

Residents' amenity usage is summarised in Table 1. Many of the amenities provided are unique in Nanpantan and some unique to Loughborough, such as the extensive views of the town, the biodiversity, the adjacency to an ancient wood and the geology of the site.

Table 1 LOS residential amenities identified by respondents to the survey. Figures in parentheses show the number of respondents who identified individual amenities.

Type of amenity	Amenity
physical	walking (65), dog walking (24), exercise (11), children's play (16), blackberry picking (10), sledging (11), picnics (7)
visual	views over Loughborough and to the Wolds (37), views and proximity of Burleigh Wood (23), observing biodiversity (25), enjoyment of the land itself (24)
wellbeing	tranquillity (22), safe area (13), feeling of openness (41), interest in geology (8)

It can be seen that the majority of those currently accessing the LOS do so for walking, although dog walking and various forms of exercise both for adults and children are popular too. It is also clear that the reason residents come to the LOS is most often simply to enjoy the wide range of visual and wellbeing benefits it affords.

One recurring theme in our survey is that the LOS provides a *safe* place for children to play and for dogs to roam. Much of our other amenity green space in the Ward is alongside roads and so not well suited to children playing or exercising dogs, but the LOS is away from even the relatively quiet roads in this part of the Ward. Furthermore, the hill on the land allows all parts of the LOS to be viewed from a single vantage point making supervision less demanding and, importantly, the land is contained on all sides by a combination of hedgerows and fencing.

There were many other reasons local residents have told us as to why they value the LOS.

- The hill provides extensive open views over Loughborough, Figure 1(a), including the Carillon and the Wolds, Figure 1(b). This the highest open space in Loughborough and there is no comparable view from any other open space in the town, making the LOS a valuable and unique space that should not be lost.
- There is an impressive approach to the open space, with the land rising away from the main residential area; a gradual transformation to the peace and tranquillity of the upper parts of the LOS and from there on to the natural areas of the adjacent ancient Burleigh Wood, Figure 1(c).
- Residents are able to observe the abundant wildlife, including muntjacs, badgers, foxes, bats, hares, many species of birds (including birds of prey) and many varieties of butterfly.
- A number of residents have grandchildren who live close by and during the Covid-19 outbreak have been able to meet on the LOS and enjoy walking at prescribed safe distances in the open.
- The hill on the LOS provides local children with the opportunity for sledging, Figure 1(d). The hill gets extremely busy following winter snowfall and residents who overlook the LOS estimate that more than a hundred children will sometimes visit in a day. We are unaware of an alternative and *safe* place for our children to access by themselves to engage in this activity. Being the highest open space in Loughborough and near its perimeter, it is often a few degrees cooler on the hill and in winter it can snow on the hill when it is raining in town.
- The hill is important for amateur geologists - it is formed of Cambrian Swithland Formation, a type found elsewhere on the uplands of Charnwood Forest, but the only example within the Loughborough settlement limits of rock of such an age [19]. Following recent excavations on the

LOS, samples can now be readily found which may contain fossils of the earliest multi-cellular life on earth [19].

- University and LUSEP staff living in the Ward can commute to their place of work with an ‘open spaces walk’ through the LOS and along the edge of Burleigh Wood.
- This area allows the uplands of the Charnwood Forest to be accessed by a 15-minute local bus ride from Loughborough (it stops at the top of Leconfield Road).

(a) The view to the east from the LOS provides a panorama over Loughborough

(b) Expanding the superimposed rectangle in (a), the Carillon and the Wolds beyond can be seen

(c) To the west, an inviting path leads into Burleigh Wood

(d) Sledging on the LOS in February 2015

Figure 1 Some of the wide range of amenities provided by the LOS, many of which are unique in Loughborough. These would be lost if the land were developed.

What has become apparent to many residents following the recent posting of signs restricting access to the LOS is that, while it remains in private hands, these important and unique amenities can be removed at the whim of the owner. Recognizing that the land is so important for residents has galvanised us to into action to protect what we care about. The importance of the LOS to residents was apparent in the Draft Local Plan consultation process at the end of 2019, where 100 pages of comments relating to the two Nanpantan open spaces sites were submitted [22].

The survey has shown that many residents use the LOS because of the broad range of physical amenities it provides, but many go there because of the outstanding visual amenities and the sense of wellbeing that it affords despite being so close to the residential area. It is clear the LOS is of enormous public value and the community expectation that the LOS should not be developed is very clear and we now expect that the Council fulfils its duty to protect our open space [3, p.7].

Conclusions

The protection of open spaces is often charged by emotion and sentiment and, in that respect, this case is no different. For the open space at the top of Leconfield Road, the difference lies in the fact that there are so many sound and valid arguments for its protection that are based on solid evidence, many from National and Local Government policies.

For 50 years, the open space has provided many physical, visual and wellbeing amenities and, over the generations, residents have developed a strong fondness for this special place. This affection has been demonstrated by the large numbers of impassioned responses to both the draft local plan consultation and the survey we have carried out for this document.

We now call on the Council to protect our last remaining open space. It would be viewed by the community not as a gain if the LOS were retained, but only as a terrible loss if it were taken away.

Acknowledgments

Much of the detailed content has come from the members of Nanpantan Ward Residents' Group and the many residents who completed our survey. Your responses inspire us to look after your wellbeing and help keep your family memories alive. Thank you also to the Open Spaces Society and the Planning Office at Charnwood Borough Council for informative discussions, particularly in helping us make sure we keep arguments objective.

References

1. Nanpantan Ward Residents' Group, Nanpantan Ward Open Spaces Strategy, July 2020, https://cdn.website-editor.net/a8c2488736374401aecb8666b24a1266/files/uploaded/Nanpantan%2520Ward%2520Open%2520Spaces%2520Strategy.pdf

2. Public Health England, Improving access to greenspace, 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf

3. Charnwood Borough Council, Open Spaces Strategy, 2018-2036, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/open_spaces_strategy_2019/Open%20Spaces%20Strategy%2C%202019.pdf

4. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework, February 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

5. Charnwood Borough Council, Core Strategy, 2011-2028, published 2016, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/adopted_core_strategy1/Charnwood%20Local%20Plan%202011%20-%202028%20Core%20Strategy%20Adopted%20November%202015.pdf

6. Charnwood Borough Council, Draft Local Plan 2019-2036, October 2019, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/draft_charnwood_local_plan_2019_36/Draft%20Charnwood%20Local%20Plan%202019-36.pdf

7. Charnwood Borough Council Corporate Strategy, 2020-24, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/charnwood_borough_council_corporate_strategy_2020_2024/Charnwood%20Borough%20Council%20Corporate%20Strategy%202020-24%20FINAL%2027.02.20.pdf

8. Charnwood Borough Council, Loughborough Town Deal Board Meeting, 27 April 2020, https://www.loughboroughtowndeal.co.uk/help/media/types/pdf

9. Charnwood Borough Council, 'Loughborough Town Deal awarded £750,000 for projects', 9 July 2020, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/news/2020/07/09/loughborough_town_deal_awarded_p750000_for_projects

10. World Health Organization, 'Urban green spaces and health: A review of evidence', 2016, https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/321971/Urban-green-spaces-and-health-review-evidence.pdf?ua=1

11. Leicester Mercury, 'Everything you need to know about coronavirus as UK warned of potential tougher measures', 23/3/2020, https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/everything-you-need-know-coronavirus-3973475

12. BBC, 'Coronavirus: Worst could be yet to come, WHO warns', 29/6/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-53227219

13. BMJ Opinion, 'Covid-19 has highlighted the inadequate, and unequal, access to high quality green spaces', July 2020, https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/07/03/covid-19-has-highlighted-the-inadequate-and-unequal-access-to-high-quality-green-spaces/

14. Charnwood Borough Council, Loughborough Science and Enterprise Park Concept Masterplan Framework, February 2016,

https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/lsep_concept_masterplan_framework_2016_compressed/LSEP%20Concept%20Masterplan%20Framework%202016.compressed.pdf

15. Charnwood Borough Council, The Landscape Character Assessment for the Charnwood Forest Regional Park, 2019, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/landscape_studies

16. The National Forest, Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership, 2018, https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/components/downloads/files/LPS%20prospectus%20%28Aug%202018%29_1.pdf

17. Charnwood Borough Council, Leicestershire's Charnwood Forest secures National Lottery support, May 2020, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/news/2020/05/07/leicestershirers_charnwood_forest_secures_national_lottery_support

18. Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, Charnwood Forest: A Living Landscape, 2012, https://www.lrwt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/charnwood_forest%2C_a_living_landscape.pdf

19. K.Ambrose, J.Carney, G.Lott, G.Weightman and A.McGrath, British Geological Survey, Exploring the Landscape of Charnwood Forest and Mountsorrel, 2007, https://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/publications/pubs.cfc?method=viewRecord&publnId=19867120

20. Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, The Charnwood Forest Living Landscape Project, accessed July 2020, https://www.lrwt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-02/CharnwoodForest_LL_12ppMap_2017web.pdf

21. Charnwood Borough Council, Local Plan, Chapter 3, 2004, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/chapter_3_environment2/adopted_plan_for_charnwood_-_chapter_3.pdf

22. Charnwood Borough Council, Draft Local Plan Consultation, 2019-2036, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/statement_of_consultation_draft_charnwood_local_plan_2019_36/Statement%20of%20Consultation%20-%20Draft%20Charnwood%20Local%20Plan%202019-36%202.pdf

23. Charnwood Borough Council, Settlement Limits to Development Assessment, 2018, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/settlement_limits_to_development_assessment_2018/Settlement%20Limits%20to%20Development%20Assessment%20-%202018.pdf

24. Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/

25. Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Rural Urban Classification, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-classification

26. Historic England, Dating Hedgerows, accessed July 2020, https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/parks-gardens-and-landscapes/hedges/#Section2Text

27. Charnwood Borough Council, Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites, March 2019, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/landscape_sensitivity_assessment_of_shlaa_sites_march_2019/Landscape%20Sensitivity%20Assessment%20of%20SHLAA%20Sites%20%28March%202019%29.pdf

28. Charnwood Borough Council, Refusal of planning permission for residential development, land rear of 49-57 Tynedale Road, 88/2599/2, 1998, https://cdn.website-editor.net/a8c2488736374401aecb8666b24a1266/files/uploaded/Leconfield%2520Road%2520Decision%2520Notice%2520P.88.2599.2-1.pdf

29. Office for National Statistics, Local area report for Loughborough Nanpantan Ward, 2011, https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E05005437

30. Charnwood Borough Council, Planning Application for Land West of Snells Nook Lane, P/19/0524/2, 2019, https://portal.charnwood.gov.uk/Northgate/PlanningExplorerAA/ApplicationSearch.aspx

31. Open Spaces Society, Local Green Space Designation, https://www.oss.org.uk/faqs-about-local-green-space-designation/

32. Thrusington Neighbourhood Plan, December 2018, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/thrussington_np_made_version/Thrussington%20NP%20Made%20Version.pdf

33. Queniborough Neighbourhood Plan, May 2020, https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/files/documents/a_queniborough_submission_neighbourhood_plan_may_2020/a%29%20Queniborough%20Submission%20Neighbourhood%20Plan%20May%202020.pdf

34. Spelthorne Borough Council, Local Green Space Assessment Methodology, March 2019, https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/media/20315/Local-Green-Space-Assessment-Methodology/pdf/Local_Green_Space_Assessment_Methodology.pdf?m=636911861509070000

35. National Forest Company, https://www.nationalforest.org/

36. Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, https://www.lrwt.org.uk/

37. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Potential funding for community green spaces, 2012, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/potential-funding-for-community-green-spaces