
FOREWORD

The Borough of Charnwood lies close to the heart of the East Midlands region, extending over 280 square kilometres (108 square miles) of northern Leicestershire. The City of Leicester abuts the southern boundary of the district while Nottingham and Derby lie some 24km (15 miles) to the north.

The 1991 Census recorded some 142,000 residents. This increased to 153,500 by 2001. The main concentrations of population occur within the County Towns of Loughborough and Shepshed, around the fringes of Leicester, and along the connecting river valleys of the Wreake and Soar. Together these communities form a broad arc of development sweeping north westward from the City boundary through the central area of the Borough.

To the south and west of this more urban corridor lie the uplands of Charnwood Forest where rocky outcrops, heath, woodlands and varied relief combine to form a most attractive landscape in which farming and countryside leisure pursuits continue side by side. The area forms part of the National Forest.

To the north and east, the Borough is characterised by the open rolling countryside of the Leicestershire Wolds which fall gently towards the river valleys affording extensive views over a typically English patchwork quilt of fields and hedgerows.

The Borough enjoys excellent access to the national communications network with the M1 passing through the western quarter of the district supported by the A6 and A46 trunk roads. Loughborough is served by the London/Sheffield main line railway and local commuter services have been re-established as part of the Ivanhoe Line initiative. Finally international travel is facilitated by the expanding East Midlands International Airport which is located within 8km (5 miles) of Loughborough.

Over recent years the local economy has diversified to reduce its previous dependency upon hosiery, knitwear and engineering. While these traditional industries, and the skills they require, survive in no small measure the economic base has broadened with the expansion of the service, warehousing and distribution sectors. Loughborough is acquiring an increasingly important reputation, building upon the centre of excellence provided by its University as a major location for research and development facilities. AstraZeneca and 3M are already established and the town is also the location of the County's first Science Park.

These developments have helped the Borough to avoid the most severe effects of the economic recession experienced elsewhere in Britain. Nevertheless local employment blackspots persist and it is anticipated that traditional employers will continue to shed labour with the adoption of new technologies and the pursuit of greater efficiencies. Clearly, therefore, there is a continuing need to sustain and encourage growth and diversification in the local economy.

The relative economic buoyancy of the Borough together with its well developed communications and pleasant environment has made it popular with both house builders and home buyers, resulting in a youthful population profile. It is evident that these factors will continue to make Charnwood an attractive location for further such development.

The challenge for the Local Plan is to ensure a balanced approach to future development providing the homes, jobs, roads and supporting amenities needed by society within a high quality environment. Current Government advice lays considerable emphasis upon the encouragement of sustainable development and growth. In particular local planning authorities are urged to pursue policies which protect the best aspects of the natural and man made environment for the benefit of future generations.