
CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL

GREEN SPACE STRATEGY

DRAFT FOR CABINET CONSIDERATION

29TH APRIL 2004

SUMMARY.

Green spaces are an essential component of towns and other built areas. With appropriate management green spaces in built areas, including villages, can give rise to a range of social, economic and environmental benefits. Because of these benefits green space provision can contribute to public policy across a range of cross cutting issues, notably:

- Health and well being.
- Heritage and culture.
- Environment and ecology.
- Education and life long learning.
- Crime and disorder.
- Urban regeneration, economic development and tourism.
- Social inclusion, community development and citizenship.

During the 1990s the quality of green spaces in Britain declined substantially and became an issue of national concern. In January 2001 the Government set up The Urban Green Spaces Taskforce to advise on proposals for improving the quality of urban parks, play areas and green spaces. A key element of the recommendations of the Taskforce in Green Spaces, Better Places, DTLR, 2002, the final report of the Taskforce, was the need for the development of local green space strategies. This reinforced a number of other influential reports from the mid 1990s onwards which also placed emphasis on the development of parks and open space and green space strategies.

The purpose of the Strategy is to provide the context and strategic direction relating to the management and improvement of green space provision in the Borough and provide a framework to facilitate improvements in provision. The Strategy does not set out proposals for specific sites or areas. The development of specific proposals will be subject to further assessments and research. The fulfilment of needs will be subject to land availability, funding and other opportunities.

Although it is hoped that improvements will be made in green space provision in the coming years through the work of the Council and its partners the fulfilment of the vision set out in the Strategy will take many years to achieve. Green space provision can be considered to have declined over twenty to thirty years or even longer. It will probably take an equal length of time to achieve good universal provision. In some areas the level of green space provision will inevitably be restricted by land availability. The Strategy will help to ensure improved provision over time.

At first glance it might be considered that residents in the Borough are served by a good level and range of green space. However, assessments of provision undertaken to inform the Strategy identified significant weaknesses in the level and distribution of provision. The findings of the assessments are set out in Section Two. The key needs identified are:

- Greater access/countryside facilities within the Soar Valley Corridor and elsewhere.
- Provision of district parks within Loughborough, Birstall, Shepshed and Syston.
- Resolution in deficiencies in the provision of local parks and recreation grounds.
- Development of greenways in built areas.
- Clearer policy on very local open space in housing areas and provision of areas which accommodate children's play without giving rise to undue disturbance.
- Appropriate balance between natural and amenity green space thus ensuring everyday contact with nature.
- Equipped play provision which is provided within the context of well planned open space provision.
- Accommodation of sufficient accessible allotments.
- Accommodation of playing pitch needs and resolution of identified deficiencies in provision.
- Recognition of the broad roles of all green space including in respect of contribution to landscape structure, biodiversity and broader environmental issues.

Equally, because of relatively good standards of maintenance and cleanliness it might be considered that the Borough has good quality open spaces. However, when evaluated in the context of the need for integrated landscape provision and the provision of multi-functional green spaces which contribute to social, economic and environmental cross cutting issues the quality of green space provision in the Borough has been found to be quite poor. Section Three sets out key issues.

On all types of sites there is a need to improve the contribution of green space to landscape structure and the character of areas, biodiversity and broader environmental roles. On sites with public access there is a need to improve accessibility, how welcoming sites are, spatial quality, opportunities to experience wildlife, provision of facilities, path provision, information and signage and ensure sensitive incorporation of facilities, ensure the use of only congruous and appropriate furniture and fencing, ensure a sense of safety and ensure individual facilities and components are in good condition.

In common with other Councils the weaknesses in green space provision identified have arisen from the absence of strategic open space planning and management. Problems have been exacerbated by the absence of major capital investment and absence of appropriate professional inputs – notably landscape design and ecology in public open space management and development. However, these issues can be seen as symptoms of the lack of a strategic approach.

Assessment of management practice has also found that the Council's performance in respect of other aspects of good green space management practice including in respect of partnership working, community involvement,

customer research and the development of an information base have also been weak.

Key management issues are discussed in Section Four. The Section provides an overview of current management practice. The Council has made some improvement to its approach to green space planning and management in recent years and wishes to build on these improvements and bring about improved green space provision.

The Strategy the Council will adopt is set out in Section Five.

The Council is committed to maximising the social, economic and environmental benefits of green space provision and ensuring that green spaces contribute to the vision for the Borough. It will seek to bring about improved green space provision over time.

In respect of the range and distribution of green space provision, the Council will seek, over time, an interlinked system of public and private green spaces in built areas relative to the broad roles of green space provision incorporating an appropriate hierarchy of parks and open spaces and appropriate open space provision to serve villages.

The following public open space of recreational value will be sought within built areas where land availability, funding and opportunities permit:

- District park provision in the region of 10 to 20 ha in the north and south of Loughborough, Birstall, Shepshed and Syston.
- Provision of local parks in the region of 2.5 to 10 ha within 400 m of all homes and closer to homes in particular circumstances.
- Provision of local open spaces in housing areas in the region of 0.4 to 1 ha within broader provision to ensure green and attractive housing areas.
- Provision of village recreation grounds where appropriate.
- Accommodation and creation of habitat areas to ensure balanced amenity/natural provision and daily contact with nature.
- Accommodation of equipped play provision in accordance with a local standard.
- Accommodation of playing pitch needs.
- Accommodation of allotment needs.

The Council will also seek the protection of existing country parks and countryside facilities and the development of further countryside facilities to ensure ready access, where appropriate and where opportunities permit, to all residents.

In respect of the nature of green space provision, the Council will seek provision in accordance with the underlying principles and vision for different types of green space given in 3.2 and 3.3 as far as opportunities permit.

In order to bring about improvements in green space provision over time the Council will develop a robust framework including:

- Development of appropriate policies and guidance.

- Preparation of further assessments of green space provision.
- Development of an appropriate information base.
- Preparation of briefs for green space provision arising out of developments.
- Preparation of masterplans and management plans.
- Work to resolve weaknesses in the nature of sites.
- Work to resolve deficiencies in provision.
- Work to develop community use and site presence.
- Development of external funding.
- Development of partnership working and community involvement.
- Fulfilment of strategic landscape management needs on sites over and above maintenance needs.
- Maintenance of good standards of maintenance and cleanliness.
- Tackle daily nuisances.
- Ensuring all green space development work and management is undertaken within the vision.
- Provision of advice and support to all organisations and groups responsible for green space management.
- Establishment of appropriate monitoring and review procedures.

Requirements under the Strategy will be incorporated into the Council's Corporate Plan and annual service plans and specific action plans will be prepared in relation to need.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. BENEFITS OF GREEN SPACES.

Green spaces are an essential component of towns and other built areas. With appropriate management green spaces in built areas, including villages, can give rise to a range of social, economic and environmental benefits. The recognised benefits include:

- Aesthetic and visual benefits and a strong element of the character of built areas.
- Biodiversity and opportunities to experience wildlife.
- Protection of historical, cultural and archaeological heritage.
- Opportunities to participate in cultural, leisure and informal recreation activities.
- Opportunities for circulation and walking including safer routes to school.
- Development of stronger families and enabling social interaction.
- Fostering community development and reduction in inequalities and social exclusion.
- Reduction in poor physical and mental health and promotion of well being.
- Recovery from illness.
- Places which mark the passage of time and places of sanctuary.
- Education.
- Economic development and tourism.
- Increase in property values, aiding urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.
- Reduction in exposure to solar radiation.
- Moderation of temperature, humidity and weather and improvement of air quality.
- Carbon fixation.
- Reduction in vehicular traffic and noise levels.
- Improvement of water quality and assisting in the control of storm water.
- Relief of pressure on the countryside.
- Providing wedges between built areas and defining neighbourhood areas.

Because of these benefits green space provision can contribute to public policy across a range of cross cutting issues, notably:

- Health and well being.
- Heritage and culture.
- Environment and ecology.
- Education and life long learning.
- Crime and disorder.
- Urban regeneration, economic development and tourism.
- Social inclusion, community development and citizenship.

The development of good green space provision is essential to the fulfilment of key policies of the Council and its partners including:

- Charnwood Community Strategy.

- Charnwood Corporate Plan.
- Charnwood Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy.
- Charnwood Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Leicestershire Cultural Strategy.

1.2. NEED FOR A GREEN SPACE STRATEGY.

In order for green spaces to fully contribute to public policy it is essential that:

- Each built area is served by a range of types of green space appropriate to its community.
- The nature, layout and condition of sites meet certain key criteria relative to community needs.
- Each site has a range of facilities appropriate to its role and users.
- There is the adoption of good management practice including corporate consideration of the role of parks and open spaces, community involvement in the management of sites and positive measures to encourage use by all members of the community.

During the 1990s the quality of green spaces in Britain declined substantially and became an issue of national concern. In January 2001 the Government set up The Urban Green Spaces Taskforce to advise on proposals for improving the quality of urban parks, play areas and green spaces. A key element of the recommendations of the Taskforce in Green Spaces, Better Places, DTLR, 2002, the final report of the Taskforce, was the need for the development of local green space strategies. This reinforced a number of other influential reports from the mid 1990s onwards which also placed emphasis on the development of parks and open space and green space strategies.

The introduction of revised Planning Policy Guidance on Open Space, Sport and Recreation (PPG17, ODPM, July 2002) introduced a requirement for local authorities to undertake quantitative and qualitative audits of open space provision against local standards, again reinforcing the recommendations of earlier reports and documents. Audits of green space provision are a key element of the preparation of green space strategies.

1.3. SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT.

This Strategy is concerned with the management and development of distinct green spaces in the built areas of the Borough of Charnwood including villages. This includes:

- Public open space of recreational value including parks, recreation grounds, natural open spaces and other distinct spaces.
- Greenways.
- Cemeteries, the crematorium and closed churchyards.
- Allotments.
- School/college grounds.
- Private sports grounds.

The Strategy is only concerned with countryside sites as far as necessary to consider hierarchies of public open space provision.

The Strategy is not primarily concerned with but relates to broader public realm issues including major highway routes, landscape provision within local road corridors, housing areas and industrial areas and separate buffer areas.

The purpose of the Strategy is to provide the context and strategic direction relating to the management and improvement of green space provision in the Borough and provide a framework to facilitate improvements in provision. The Strategy does not set out proposals for specific sites or areas. The development of specific proposals will be subject to further assessments and research. The fulfilment of needs will be subject to land availability, funding and other opportunities.

Although it is hoped that improvements will be made in green space provision in the coming years through the work of the Council and its partners the fulfilment of the vision set out in the Strategy will take many years to achieve. Green space provision can be considered to have declined over twenty to thirty years or even longer. It will probably take an equal length of time to achieve good universal provision. In some areas the level of green space provision will inevitably be restricted by land availability. The Strategy will help to ensure improved provision over time.

1.4. SOCIO ECONOMIC CONTEXT.

The Borough of Charnwood had a population of 153,462 on census day 2001. The age make up of the population generally reflects the national average with some variation notably more 16-29 year olds than nationally. The population is projected to increase to c.158,100 by 2011. Nationally the proportion of people over retirement age is increasing. The minority ethnic proportion of the population is roughly commensurate with the proportion for Great Britain. Some wards have a high proportion of ethnic minority residents.

The main concentrations of population, and the built areas to which this Strategy relates, are:

- Loughborough and Shepshed to the north west.
- Anstey, Birstall and Thurmaston to the south on the outskirts of Leicester.
- Quorn, Barrow-upon-Soar, Mountsorrel, Rothley, Sileby, Syston, East Goscote and Queniborough running across the Borough in an arc between Loughborough and Birstall/Thurmaston.
- Larger villages in Charnwood Forest to the west including Woodhouse Eaves, Newtown Linford, Cropston and Thurcaston and Hathern to the north.
- Larger villages in the Wolds to the east including Wymeswold, Burton on the Wolds, Walton on the Wolds, Seagrave and Rearsby.

The Borough is ranked 265 out of 354 in the 2000 Indices of Deprivation with 1 being the most deprived borough/district and 354 being the least deprived borough/district. 23 of the Borough's 28 Wards are in the top 50 % least

deprived Wards in England and 9 of the Borough's Wards are in the top 10 % least deprived Wards in England. However, Hastings, Lemyngton and Woodthorpe are in the top 25 % of the most deprived Wards in England and there are also further local pockets of deprivation.

1.5. GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES.

In Loughborough public open space is managed by the Borough Council. In the towns and large villages outside of Loughborough public open space is managed by both the Borough Council and Town and Parish Councils. The Town and Parish Councils primarily manage recreation grounds and other defined public open spaces in their respective areas. The Borough Council manages allotments in Loughborough and the Town and Parish Councils manage allotments outside of Loughborough, although there are also private allotment sites throughout the Borough. School and college grounds are managed by Leicestershire County Council and a range of independent bodies. Private sports grounds are managed by a range of clubs and organisations.

Within the Borough Council there are three teams which have responsibility for green space development and management.

The Landscape, Trees and Wildlife Team in Planning Services develop broad policies and specific planning policies in respect of landscape, green space provision and biodiversity and negotiate provision in relation to new developments. This team is also responsible for Tree Preservation Orders.

The Parks, Open Spaces and Wildlife Development Team in Cultural and Leisure Services has been established to facilitate the improvement of public open space of recreational value across the Borough and is also responsible for the strategic management of Borough Council managed parks and open spaces of recreational value. Public open space of recreational value includes public parks, recreation grounds, playing fields, equipped play provision, greenways and natural areas but excludes highways landscape and verges, amenity open space in housing areas, inaccessible buffer areas and landscape provision in industrial and commercial areas.

Grounds maintenance work on Borough Council managed green space is undertaken by the Council's Contract and Public Services unit through service level agreements.

In respect of the larger sites with public access in the rural areas Beacon Hill Country Park, Jubilee Wood and Watermead Country Park are managed by Leicestershire County Council. Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood are managed by a Trust and Outwoods and Morley Quarry are managed by the Borough Council.

1.6. WORK UNDERTAKEN IN PREPARING THE DOCUMENT.

The preparation of this Strategy follows on from the preparation of a

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy in 2002 which was not finalised. The Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy was prepared before Guidance on assessing needs in respect of open space, sport and recreation provision was released by ODPM in September 2002. It was also prepared before the release of recent guidance on the preparation of green space strategies by CABE Space and the preparation of open space strategies by the Mayor of London.

Because the Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy did not comply with the PPG17 Guidance in respect of scope, methodologies for quantitative and qualitative audits and public consultation it was decided to produce a broader green space strategy and, as far as possible, in accordance with relevant guidance.

The preparation of this Strategy has drawn on the following:

- Review of Government and local policies, strategies and plans and other relevant documents.
- Consideration of the extent and distribution of green spaces in the Borough.
- Qualitative evaluations on certain selected public open space sites and unrecorded overview visits to other green space sites.
- Meetings with and between Borough Council Officers including in respect of management issues.
- Consultation and community research as discussed in 1.7, below.

Consideration of the extent and distribution of open space provision in the Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy was inhibited by a lack of information in respect of provision and the nature/role and size of sites. Some progress has been made in this respect since 2002.

A schedule of public open space of recreational value within a typology and giving the size of each site has been prepared. This has been used to inform the development of a local open space standard and some assessment as set out in Section Two. A schedule of all green space sites and associated plans are also being prepared.

It has not been possible to make sufficient input into consideration of the extent and distribution of green space to fully comply with the PPG17 Guidance. Most notably there are the following outstanding needs:

- Examination of the catchment areas of public open space and allotment sites based on market research.
- Consideration of the value of sites.
- Review of the level and distribution of natural green space.
- Development of a detailed policy on equipped play provision.
- Development of a detailed policy on allotment provision.
- Consideration of the broader environmental role of sites (for example in respect of specific contribution to the character of urban areas and environmental mitigation).

- Consideration of whether any specific area of land could be considered to be surplus to green space needs and consideration of how specific deficiencies may be resolved.
- Detailed consideration of the relationships between the extent and distribution of provision, the quality of provision and social deprivation.
- Further qualitative evaluations as discussed below.
- Public consultation on the extent and distribution of green space provision.

During the preparation of the Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy detailed qualitative evaluations were undertaken on 18 open space sites and unrecorded overview visits were made to all public open space sites in the Borough and certain highway corridors and housing areas during 2002. Detailed qualitative evaluations have been made to 30 public open space sites of recreational value in the preparation of this Strategy between January 2004 and April 2004. This has strengthened the Council's understanding of the quality of the main public open spaces of recreational value. Additionally, unrecorded overview visits have been made to some allotment, school, private sports ground and cemetery sites to gain some insight into the nature of these elements of green space provision in the Borough.

The further detailed qualitative evaluations have been undertaken to a new methodology which includes a description of provision and facilities, an assessment of the quality of sites and consideration of the roles and value of sites as required by the PPG17 Guidance. There will be benefit in undertaking detailed qualitative evaluations to further public open space sites. Given the number of green space sites in the Borough and perhaps a lesser need for information in respect of other types of green space recorded overview visits will perhaps suffice for other sites. It will be important to determine what further qualitative evaluations should be undertaken. To date there has been no public consultation on a vision for different types of green space and this perhaps should be confirmed before further qualitative evaluations are undertaken.

The PPG17 Guidance acknowledges the significant resource implications for local authorities of undertaking comprehensive assessments of green space provision. It recognises that assessment may need to be undertaken in phases over a period of 2-3 years and/or the need to undertake only a sample audit in the first instance.

The omissions in the assessment work undertaken to date primarily relate to work that would be needed in the event of proposals to allow development of specific areas of open space land and also, to a lesser extent, work needed to inform consideration of what on site provision and off site contributions would be required in relation to proposed housing or commercial development. Detailed work may need to be undertaken in such circumstances in any event. General and specific work in relation to the omissions will need to be undertaken over time.

1.7. CONSULTATION.

The following consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this Strategy to date:

- Consultation document (entitled Parks, Open Spaces and Wildlife A Strategy for Charnwood Borough Council) circulated to the Parish Councils, English Nature, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and interest groups in December 2003. This document covered the relationship between parks and open spaces and the work of the Council, overview of the distribution of public open space of recreational value, core values in respect of the nature of provision and strategic aims and objectives.
- Questions included in Citizen's Panel research November 2003 covering parks and similar open spaces of recreational value.
- A consultation exercise with young people on 'urban and rural spaces' by Charnwood Arts in December 2003 and January 2004.

Following approval of the publication of the Strategy for consultation by the Council's Cabinet, the document will be subject to the following consultation:

- Distribution of the document to the Parish Councils, other relevant bodies and interest groups for comments.
- Publication of the availability of the document and invitation for comments from the public.
- Public meeting in the week beginning 7th June 2004.
- Receipt of comments by 25th June 2004.
- Consideration of comments.

It is hoped to finalise the document by the 9th July 2004.

1.8. CONTENTS OF THE DOCUMENT.

Section 2 of the document considers the quantity and distribution of green spaces in the Borough. Section 3 considers the nature and quality of green spaces in the Borough. Section 4 considers key management issues.

The Strategy itself is set out in Section 5.

2.0. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF GREEN SPACES.

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2.1. BREADTH OF GREEN SPACE NEEDS.

National documents indicate that built areas should have interlinked green space systems with:

- Provision of parks and open spaces serving whole towns and each local area.
- Accessible natural space within urban areas.
- Sufficient provision for children's play in each locality.
- Sufficient space for outdoor sport.
- Allotment provision.
- Access to the wider countryside.
- Levels and distribution of open space relative to the character of areas.
- Levels and distribution of open space relative to the fulfilment of environmental functions.

2.2. BASIS OF ASSESSMENT OF THE QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE.

In order to comply with PPG17 Guidance the Council needs to establish a local open space standard which sets out the size, distance to and accessibility of different types of public open space of recreational value. This will provide a measure to identify deficiencies in provision and decide whether any sites or areas might be considered to be surplus to need.

Local open space standards are developed from an assessment of local patterns of provision (including provision considered to be good and poor), the local context and studies of the use of sites. Although it is no longer considered appropriate to rely on national open space standards they do have a valuable role in helping interested parties to think about the local level of provision.

Key elements of national open space standards are set out below for information and are referred to within the assessment of public open space of recreational value in 2.3 to 2.9 below.

In order to develop a good understanding of the use of sites and their catchment areas it will be necessary to undertake research on the levels of use of sites and to obtain the post code of users. The Council currently does not have this information and is not in a position to develop it readily. The information would be particularly valuable in making specific decisions about the need to provide additional open space or where it is considered appropriate to dispose of open space and will need to be developed in the future.

The total quantity of public open space of recreational value is now perhaps considered secondary to the size and distribution of open space sites. However, it remains a critical factor to ensuring appropriate provision.

There are a number of national standards which cover different types of open space provision. The combined requirements of these standards provide a useful measure to compare the level of public open space in different areas.

The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) 6 Acre Standard in respect of children's play space and outdoor sports space sets out the following requirements:

- Minimum children's play space 0.8 ha per thousand population.
- Minimum outdoor sports space 1.6 ha per thousand population (including facilities on public open space, within the voluntary and private sectors and educational land where available for public use).

The English Nature (EN) Accessible Natural Green Space (ANG) Standard seeks 2 ha of accessible natural green space per thousand population (but given the hierarchy of EN ANG sites discussed later some of the land which might contribute to this Standard may be some distance from urban areas particularly in an area of relatively small towns and villages such as Charnwood).

The NPFA and EN Standards do not specifically cover parks although equipped play areas, sports space and natural space occurring in a park would contribute to these Standards. In the New Towns allowances in addition to playing fields and play areas in the region of 0.5 ha per thousand population were included in open space requirements to cover parks.

Taking account of the above Standards and comments it might be considered that in the region of 4 ha of open space of recreational value per thousand population should be provided in or immediately adjacent to urban areas. Hierarchies of provision tend to reflect this total level of provision. For example, in Tyneside, given as a good practice example in the PPG17 Guidance, a hierarchy of open space is sought within a target of 3.78 ha per thousand population. 4 ha per thousand population was the level of provision sought in Bracknell New Town, a new town which might be considered to have reasonable but not excessive open space provision. Chesterfield currently has 4.19 ha per thousand population of open space of recreational value within or immediately adjacent to the built areas.

Elements of national open space standards are also helpful in considering hierarchies of provision including the distribution of sites of different sizes and roles.

The London Open Space Hierarchy, given in the Draft London Plan, 2002, highlights the idea of different size parks and open spaces at certain distances from homes, serving different roles.

	Appropriate size.	Indicative catchment area.
• Regional parks and open spaces.	Over 400 ha	8 km
• Metropolitan parks.	60 - 400 ha	3.2 km
• District parks.	20 - 40 ha	1.2 km
• Local parks.	2 - 20 ha	0.4 km *
• Small local parks and open spaces.	0.4 - 2 ha	0.4 km *
• Pocket parks.	Less than 0.4 ha	0.4 km *
• Linear open spaces.		

* Refined to 280 m to take account of barriers to access.

The EN ANG Standard includes the following targets:

- 500 ha site within 10 km of each home.
- 100 ha site within 5 km of each home.
- 20 ha site within 2 km of each home.
- Accessible natural green space less than 300 m from each home.

The NPFA Six Acre Standard includes the following advice on the distribution of equipped play provision (included here to highlight the principle of a hierarchy of sites rather than in respect of equipped play and youth provision):

- Neighbourhood equipped areas for play (NEAP) of minimum 8,400 sq. m. area if the entire buffer area is an integral part of a site, within 600 m straight line distance of each home.
- Local equipped areas for play (LEAP) of minimum 1,600 sq. m. area if the entire buffer area is an integral part of a site, within 240 m straight line distance of each home.
- Local Area for Play (LAP) at 100 m from homes (minimum size without buffer 100 sq. m.).

2.3. QUANTITY OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE.

The level of public open space of recreational value within or immediately adjacent to the built areas in the Borough including greenways is shown in Table 1 overleaf. Schedule 1 at Appendix 1 and Plan 1 at Appendix 4 detail the sites of public open space of recreational value in the Borough. The table also details site ownership. The table, schedule and plan do not include areas below 0.2 ha (except where having equipped play provision), cemeteries and closed churchyards and open space of only visual/landscape/wildlife value.

Areas below 0.2 ha. have been excluded as a matter of course because:

- This removes the need to make often quite arbitrary decisions as to whether individual pieces of green land have recreational value (particularly children's play value).
- Overcomes problems in plotting such areas on large scale maps.

However, this does not imply that it is considered that green space below 0.2 ha does not have recreational value and should not be protected as such.

**TABLE 1.
TOTAL AREA OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE
WITHIN/IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO BUILT AREAS.**

AREA	POPULATION 2001 CENSUS	HA OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE	HA PER 1,000
Primarily built areas with population over 10,000.			
Loughborough. (Including Hathern).	57,627	159.94	2.78
Birstall. (Wanlip and Watermead Parishes and Wards).	11,480	10.16	0.89
Shepshed. (Parish and Wards).	12,882	16.98	1.32
Syston. (Parish and Wards).	11,607	12.08	1.04
Primarily built areas with population above 2,000 and below 10,000.			
Anstey. (Parish and Ward).	5,821	11.31	1.94
Barrow upon Soar. (Parish).	5,083	7.47	1.47
East Goscote. (Parish and Ward).	2,809	7.90	2.81
Mountsorrel. (Parish).	7,694	20.07	2.61
Queniborough. (Parish).	2,257	4.06	1.80
Quorn. (Parish).	4,961	7.41	1.49
Rothley. (Parish and Ward).	3,612	4.94	1.37

**TABLE 1. (Continued).
TOTAL AREA OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE
WITHIN/IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO BUILT AREAS.**

AREA	POPULATION 2001 CENSUS	HA OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE	HA PER 1,000
Primarily built areas with population above 2,000 and below 10,000.			
Sileby. (Parish).	6,872	7.02	1.02
Thurmaston. (Parish and Ward).	8,945	5.93	0.66
Predominately rural areas.			
South west parishes. (Newtown Linford, Swithland, Thurcaston and Cropston, Ulverscroft and Woodhouse).	5,342	6.62	1.24
The Wolds Ward. (Burton on the Wolds, Cotes, Hoton, Prestwold, Walton on the Wolds and Wymeswold).	2,802	4.67	1.66
Wreake Villages Ward. (Cossington, Ratcliffe on the Wreake, Rearsby, Seagrave and Thrussington).	2,836	6.31	2.23
Queniborough Ward. without Queniborough. (Barkby and Barkby Thorpe, Beeby and South Croxton).	671	--	--
TOTAL	153,301	292.87	1.91

(These figures are derived from Schedule 1 given at Appendix 1. The Schedule includes some estimated individual site areas).

The Borough is also served by the following provision which serves more than a local role.

Beacon Hill Country Park.	53.44 ha
Outwoods (including Jubilee Wood).	63.99 ha
Bradgate Park.	335.20 ha
Swithland Wood.	87.90 ha
Watermead Country Park.	152.29 ha
Morley Quarry.	20.50 ha

Table 1 indicates that there is a generally low level of provision of public open space of recreational value within or immediately adjacent to the built areas in the Borough and that in some areas there is very limited provision. Furthermore, Plan 1, Appendix 4 shows that there are some areas of built development including some villages with virtually no or no open space provision.

In considering potential open space deficiencies it will be important to consider the size and types of open spaces which should be provided relative to each area rather than to seek to increase the level of provision without regard to local needs. In some areas it may not be necessary or desirable to bring areas up to an arbitrary level of provision. For example, the level of private sports provision in some localities may reduce the level of public open space of recreational value needed, particularly where there is some public access. Equally, the nature of some areas including the degree of affluence, large gardens and numbers of children may make the provision of very local open space inappropriate.

2.4. REGIONAL AND DISTRICT FACILITIES.

Bradgate Park and the adjacent Swithland Wood provide a significant sized facility of regional importance. The site is within 8 km of the vast majority of homes in the Borough as recommended for regional parks and open spaces in the London Open Space Hierarchy and within 10 km of virtually all homes as recommended for the larger sized spaces in the EN ANG Standard.

The need for regional facilities is beyond the scope of this Strategy. However, it is encouraging to record the presence of this important facility, note its role in an open space hierarchy and note its fulfilment of a key element of national standards.

In addition to the Bradgate Park/Swithland Wood complex residents also have access to Watermead Country Park and the Beacon Hill Country Park/Outwoods complex of open spaces. These facilities ensure that most residents live within 5 km of a 100 ha natural green space as sought by the EN ANG Standard. However, because of the location of the sites many residents are not within 3.2 km of these sites in line with the London Open Space Hierarchy for parks and open spaces in the range 60 – 400 ha.

Residents in Shepshed, the north of Loughborough, Quorn, Barrow upon Soar, Mountsorrel, Sileby, Goscote and Queniborough as well as rural areas to the east of the Borough are more than 3.2 km away from one of these facilities and do not have ready access to them.

It is also notable that none of the built areas of the Borough are served by open spaces within urban areas in the region of 20 - 60 ha which might act as district parks serving a more than local area.

Such facilities would have a landscape setting and have a feeling of spaciousness, they would provide for a wide range of activities including informal recreation pursuits, particularly significant equipped play provision for a range of ages and sports provision and provide access to garden and natural areas. They would be staffed and have toilet and refreshment facilities. They would provide opportunities and facilities not available in more local smaller provision. They would differ from country parks in their accessibility, nature and perceived degree of management and safety.

However, it is debatable whether district park facilities in Charnwood would need to be in the region of 20 - 60 ha. At 60 ha sites may be considered too large relative to their local population and not be sufficiently differentiated for the existing relatively good country park facilities.

The largest parks in the built area are clearly too small to fully fulfil the role of district parks but indicate that provision would not need to be anywhere near in the order of 60 ha. Jubilee Playing Field, Goscote is 6.75 ha and School Lane Recreation Ground, Birstall is 5.94 ha. It is notable that both of these sites are dominated by sports pitches. Charnwood Water at 10.83 ha and Dishley Pool at 9.34 ha give a strong feel for the size of the landscape/informal element of a district park (although these sites are of a different special nature).

A site of the size of Derby Road Playing Field laid out with part landscape provision and part sports provision and with appropriate facilities would probably be proportional to the larger built areas in the Borough. A site the size of Derby Road Playing Field and Dishley Pool combined at 27.93 could be considered too large in relation to the built areas relative to creating a sense of management, presence, activity and safety.

Therefore, it would appear that any district park provided in the Borough should be in the region of 10 to 20 ha with the upper level sought where playing pitches were to be accommodated.

If district parks were to be provided in the Borough each facility would need to serve a sufficient population to create active well used spaces and to warrant separate district and local provision. It is felt that it would be appropriate to consider district park provision in areas with a population above 10,000, that is Loughborough, Birstall, Shepshed and Syston.

In order to reduce the need for residents to travel and ensure that all residents can benefit from access to country parks and district park facilities, where appropriate, it is considered that further country parks/countryside facilities and district park provision in built areas should be sought where opportunities and funding permit.

Greater access/green space provision within the Soar Valley corridor could be sought to create a further district or even regional countryside facility which is more readily accessible to residents in the central built areas of the Borough and the south of Loughborough. The proposed Ecological Park to the south east of Loughborough could form part of a complex of sites along the Grand Union Canal and River Soar corridors.

Consideration has been given in the past to the potential development of Garendon Park, a private parkland to the west of Loughborough, as a public countryside facility if the opportunity arose. This site has the potential to provide ready access to a significant country park for residents in Shepshed and the west and north of Loughborough.

District park provision should be sought in the north and south of Loughborough, Birstall, Shepshed and Syston. Future development may provide opportunities to create district parks in the north and south of Loughborough and in Birstall. In Birstall, district park provision should be sought at the Hallamfields site to provide a district park in the west of the built area and to complement Watermead Country Park to the east.

2.5. LOCAL PARKS AND VILLAGE RECREATION GROUNDS.

The provision of accessible local parks is critical to realising the benefits of parks and open spaces to all members of the community. They provide opportunities for walking and relaxation, family activities, children's play, youth provision and contact with nature as well as having a significant beneficial impact on the nature of residential areas.

Local parks need to be sufficiently large to accommodate:

- Contribution to landscape structure.
- Sufficient level grassed areas for robust ball games and informal recreational use.
- Access to managed natural areas.
- Reasonably equipped play provision for a range of ages.
- Perhaps some youth provision.

An assessment of different local parks in the Borough indicates that the minimum size of a local park which should be sought is 2.5 ha. For example, Jubilee Park, Loughborough (2.6 ha) and Halstead Road Recreation Ground, Mountsorrel (2.77 ha) can be seen to be just sufficiently large, whereas King George's Field, Barrow Upon Soar (2.04 ha) and Fowke Street Playing Field, Rothley (2.38 ha) are a little constrained and Barsby Drive Park, Loughborough (1.80 ha) and Deville Park, Syston (1.54 ha) are clearly of

insufficient size to accommodate the needs which a local park may be expected to accommodate.

Local parks in the region of 5 ha would appear to be sufficiently large to accommodate needs. However, where a site accommodates a significant area of playing pitch space an upper size of 10 ha might be required to ensure balanced provision. For example, School Lane Recreation Ground, Birstall (5.94 ha) and Jubilee Playing Field, East Goscote (6.75 ha) would be sufficiently large if these sites accommodated less pitch provision but would need to be larger if sports pitch use was to continue and more balanced provision was sought.

The distance to a local park of 400 m given in the London Open Space Hierarchy and used elsewhere appears to be reasonable. Based on five minutes walking distance it ensures that provision is not too far from homes. A closer universal distance would require considerably more open space provision and undermine the viability and vitality of sites by spreading use and confusing the local space hierarchy. In some areas it may be appropriate to provide local parks at closer distances where there are barriers to access such as roads, railways and canals and/or where there are clear individual community areas which would benefit from local park provision.

Most homes in the built areas in the Borough are served by local parks/distinct open spaces in excess of 2.5 ha within 400 m. Some of these sites are at the heart of relatively small individual built areas and provide town parks. Queen's Park, Loughborough has a particular role as a town centre park, as opposed to a town park, and serves the business community, the education community, tourists and shoppers as well as the local community.

In view of the need to provide multi-functional sites and in the absence of large district park sites in built areas in the Borough it is very appropriate that most of these local sites are in excess of 2.5 ha. The absence of district park sites highlights the need to ensure that the local sites provide for a range of functions and in particular accommodate children's play, youth facilities and access to natural areas. Provision of local parks with natural areas within 400 m of all homes can make a significant contribution to the English Nature aspiration of natural green space within 300 m of all homes.

In considering access to local parks/distinct local open spaces it should be recognised that all public playing fields also serve as local open space. This has significant implications on the desired nature of these sites and the range of facilities which might be provided.

Some parts of the built areas of the Borough are not within 400 m of a local park/distinct open space of 2.5 ha+, most notably:

- East and south of Shepshed.
- North west of Loughborough between the town centre and later developments to the outskirts.
- North east of Loughborough.
- North west of Nanpantan Road/Forest Road, Loughborough.

- Shelthorpe, Loughborough.
- Most of Quorn.
- East and south of Barrow upon Soar.
- South of Mountsorrel.
- North and south of Sileby.
- North of Birstall.
- East of Syston.
- South of Thurmaston.
- East of East Goscote.

Detailed assessment of the provision of local parks must take account of barriers to access. Areas which appear to be served by a local park on a plan may not have access to a park because of the presence of roads and other barriers.

Village recreation grounds are the rural counterpart of local parks in urban areas and should serve the same roles.

Cropston, Hathern, Seagrave, Rearsby and Woodhouse Eaves have local recreation grounds which are reasonably central and within 400 m of most houses. The facility at Rearsby is quite small but is supported by a further area of playing field to the outskirts of the village. Barkby and Newtown Linford appear to be served by public access to central private playing fields.

Burton on the Wolds, Wymeswold and Cossington have recreational grounds but which are rather away from the village, although there is a central play area and bowling green at Wymeswold.

A number of villages are not served by local recreation grounds:

- Barkby Thorpe.
- Beeby.
- Hoton.
- Ratcliffe on the Wreake.
- Rothley Plain.
- South Croxton.
- Swithland.
- Thrussington.
- Thurcaston.
- Walton on the Wolds.
- Woodhouse.

The adequacy of provision in the villages in the Borough and the need for further provision would have to be particularly considered in relation to the local context and the views of residents.

2.6. GREENWAYS IN BUILT AREAS AND LINKAGE.

There is a developing system of greenways in some built areas incorporating former railway lines, old lanes, canal and riverside areas and purpose built

routes. As a result of this provision some areas have quite good interlinked open space provision. However, most built areas of the Borough do not have greenway provision and open space provision is generally isolated.

Greenways within built areas can make a significant contribution to the English Nature aspiration of accessible natural green space within 300m of all homes.

As is discussed in Section Three the purpose built greenways which have been developed over the last 10 - 20 years are too narrow to enable the development of appropriate landscape provision.

2.7. VERY LOCAL OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE IN BUILT AREAS (OTHER THAN GREENWAYS).

Perhaps the most difficult issue to determine in considering the level and distribution of public open space of recreational value in any built area is the level of very local open space in any locality.

In many developments undertaken across the country in the last 10 to 20 years the application of the NPFA Standard, particularly in relation to small developments, has resulted in housing areas with a proliferation of small grass areas. Equally, public housing areas after the Second World War often incorporated small grass areas. These local open spaces often give rise to nuisance particularly as a result of use for ball games and the installation of equipped play provision.

In many areas it will be appropriate to provide open space areas for play below the level of local parks and nearer to homes than 400 m. The minimum size of a LEAP within the NPFA Standard of 0.16 ha where the entire buffer zone is an integral part of a site perhaps provides one measure as to the minimum size of such sites irrespective of equipped play provision.

Consideration of the provision of local open spaces in the Borough indicates that sites below 0.4 ha in particular can give rise to undue disturbance. It is also considered that sites up to 1 ha can provide valuable facilities in housing areas without confusing the hierarchy of parks and open space provision and allowing for extensive landscape provision to kerb undue use or limit its impact. However, it is recognised that in the absence of accessible larger local parks all more local sites could attract inappropriate use.

There are insufficient examples of very local open spaces of recreational value within the Borough to indicate how far such spaces should be apart. However, given the provision of local parks at 400 m apart it would be logical to seek small very local open spaces at around 200 m from homes as is currently sought in the Local Plan.

Although such spaces might be primarily associated with children's play it is considered that such provision is appropriate to all areas irrespective of the

number of children in an area in that they contribute to the character of areas, walking routes and opportunities for sitting and socialising.

It needs to be recognised that it would be inappropriate to cut off green space provision within housing areas at 0.4 ha. Smaller green areas within housing areas can contribute to the setting and character of areas, screening, the protection of trees, hedgerows and other habitat features, provide space for new trees to grow and provide local throughroutes and should be an integral element of the public realm within housing areas. Such areas will inevitably be used for play and where this is by younger children under 5 and 5 to 8 it may be encouraged or tolerated. If play on smaller areas of green space is considered unsuitable then it should be designed out. However, the potential for greening housing areas should not be lost by a total prohibition of spaces below 0.4 ha because of problems arising from poorly considered spaces in the past. Therefore, it is considered that at the very local level specific green spaces of 0.4 to 1.0 ha should be incorporated within broader provision to ensure green and attractive housing areas.

Overall there is little very local open space below the level of local parks and other similar distinct sites within the Borough. Much of the provision that there is has problems of inappropriate use arising from poorly considered design and layout.

2.8. ACCESSIBLE NATURAL SPACE WITHIN BUILT AREAS.

There has been increased recognition in recent years of the value of everyday contact with nature to well being and quality of life. The contrasting requirements of the different open space Standards highlight the need for a balance between amenity and natural green space within built areas. In this context the term amenity is used to describe a managed landscape of individual trees, shrub beds, regularly mown grass and the like.

English Nature have established a methodology for accessing the level of natural green space. To date, this has not been applied in Charnwood. In the absence of being in a position to undertake a more sophisticated methodology public open space sites of recreational value have been graded between 1 amenity and 5 natural to indicate the nature of individual sites within quick overview visits to sites. These grades are given in the schedule of public open space of recreational value at Appendix 1 together with an approximate assessment of the % of woody landscape elements on a site (trees, scrub and ornamental shrubs). Sites graded 2 and 3 might be of a generally informal nature or could have areas of amenity landscape and areas of natural features. Sites graded 4 will be of a natural nature but with a significant amenity element.

As discussed in 2.4 above residents have access to large natural sites in the rural area. However, although there are a number of key SSSI, SINCS, LNR and community wildlife sites in or adjacent to the built areas in the Borough many homes are not within 2 km of a 20 ha natural site or within 300 m of natural green space as set out in the EN ANG Standard.

In the same way that it is no longer considered appropriate to arbitrarily apply NPFA Standards in respect of play and sports provision it would be inappropriate to now set out to apply a national standard in respect of accessible natural green space without consideration of the local context.

The level of accessible natural green space in a built area will be determined by the total level of public open space and the nature of the space. An increase in the level of natural green space in the built areas will be dependant upon an increase in the overall level of public open space and the nature and management of new and existing open space. In this context, within an integrated approach to green space planning and management it will be important to give appropriate consideration to:

- Seeking a more generally natural landscape within urban areas.
- Seeking multi-functional district and local park sites which incorporate natural areas.
- Seeking the development of greenways in built areas and ensure that the width of greenways allow the development of natural landscape.
- Seeking the protection of habitat areas.
- Creating specific new habitat areas.

2.9. EQUIPPED PLAY PROVISION.

Sites which have equipped play provision are indicated on the schedule of public open space of recreational value at Appendix 1.

Until recently local authorities have generally sought to ensure provision of equipped play provision in line with NPFA Standards. However, the NPFA recommendations have three fundamental weaknesses. Firstly, they do not relate well to other open space standards in respect of the distribution of different types of parks and open spaces. Secondly, they can give rise to a proliferation of equipped play provision which is expensive to maintain. Thirdly, the minimum size of sites recommended by the NPFA are too small to avoid undue nuisance to neighbouring properties.

In the light of the need to develop local open space standards, provide appropriate equipped play provision and ensure the effective use of resources it is timely for Councils to review equipped play provision and establish clear local policies. The current Council policy already differs from NPFA recommendations in that it seeks equipped play areas at 400 m from homes rather than 240 m straight line distance for LEAPs as per NPFA Standard and does not seek formal LAP provision.

Consideration of the concept of NEAPs, LEAPs and LAPs highlights that different levels of provision should perhaps be considered at different sites.

Good levels of provision of equipment and a wide range of interesting equipment attracts children and their accompanying adults to sites and can be a significant activity generator encouraging broader use. It will be essential to provide particularly good equipped play facilities at any sites which might be

developed as district parks. These facilities would need to be well in excess of what would be needed to fulfil the requirements of a NEAP.

It would probably, but not necessarily, be appropriate for all local parks to have equipped play provision. It is considered that LEAP provision would normally be inadequate relative to the role of local parks and that it would also be appropriate to seek greater levels of provision at these sites than might be determined by NPFA Standards. It might also be considered appropriate to provide youth facilities at each local park. Being situated on 2.5 ha+ sites larger play areas and youth provision would be on sites which were fully able to accommodate use of equipment without undue disturbance to neighbours.

Equally, consideration might be given to not normally seeking equipped play provision at distances below 400 m from homes except in dense and deprived areas with substantial numbers of children where there was an identified need for more local provision.

Careful consideration of the location of equipped play provision in a district or local park could go some way to ensuring areas with substantial numbers of children are well served by equipped play provision without resort to additional provision outside of local park sites. The provision of local parks at less than 400 m from homes in some areas as discussed in 2.5. may also allow provision to be located near to areas with children whilst still being situated on larger spaces. It should be recognised that district level parks also function as local parks and open spaces for immediately adjacent areas. This would sometimes necessitate the provision of significant central play facilities within a site and further provision to boundary areas to provide local provision for adjacent communities.

Most houses in the built areas of the Borough are within 400 m straight line distance of an equipped play area. The following areas are not served by equipped play provision at this level:

- Pockets of Loughborough.
- West part of Quorn.
- South part of Mountsorrel.
- North part of Anstey.
- Central north part of Birstall.
- South east part of Thurmaston.
- Far east part of Syston.
- Parts of Queniborough.
- Some villages.

Far more equipped play areas would be needed to fulfil the requirements under the NPFA Standard if provision of LEAPs within 240 m straight line distance was incorporated into a local standard.

Provision of equipped play areas within the Borough provides a small number of examples where equipped play facilities on a park or open space which is central to a built area or community can go a long way to fulfilling needs, for example as at Station Road Recreation Ground, Anstey. There are many

examples where poor open space planning has resulted in equipped play areas being situated on open spaces pushed to the outsides of developments and serving limited areas, and also provision on sites which are too small to accommodate provision and broader play needs adequately. There are also other examples of poorly considered provision including provision on narrow sites as in the linear open spaces in Shepshed and in secluded areas as to the north end of the linear open space east of Babington Road, Barrow upon Soar and at Stapleford Park, Loughborough.

Currently there is very little difference in the level and range of equipped play provision on sites across the Borough. There are no parks with extensive NEAP+ or LEAP+ provision which would act as significant activity generators and the level of provision at individual sites is generally limited.

It will be important for the Council to review existing equipped play provision and set out its intentions in respect of the provision and distribution. In the absence of district parks across the Borough, the absence of local parks in key areas and the varying socio economic make up of the community it will be particularly necessary for the review to consider provision on an area by area and site by site basis. This would inform the implementation of this Strategy, the preparation of individual site master and management plans and briefs in respect of individual development sites.

2.10. PLAYING PITCHES.

An assessment of playing pitches in Charnwood was included in the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Playing Fields Assessment and Strategy, February 2003. The document details playing pitches in the Borough on public open space land, private and voluntary playing fields and school sites where pitches are made available for community use. These sites are listed and shown on the schedule and plan at Appendix 3.

The assessment, to Sport England methodology, identified the following:

- Current significant total surplus of outdoor sports pitches.
- The need to convert some senior football pitches to junior pitches.
- Localised deficiencies of provision in Anstey, Shepshed and Sileby.
- Future predicted demand may result in a requirement for additional pitches.
- Potential 'hot spots' where there is a significant number of mini and junior football teams which may result in facilities in certain areas being unable to cater for future demand.
- Considerable informal use of some sites. (This is indicative of public open spaces dominated by sports pitches with little scope for ball games off the pitches).
- Pitch quality issues in some areas, often with inadequate ancillary provision.
- Need to replace pitches likely to be lost at Derby Road Playing Field, Loughborough.

These findings have a number of implications for strategic green space planning and management:

- Protect existing pitch provision despite current surpluses in provision in order to cater for future demand and the need for teams in 'hot spots' to play outside their immediate area.
- Build in improvements in pitch quality and ancillary provision into development proposals for sites.
- Build in the potential need for additional pitches into proposals for new open space in areas of deficiency or future deficiency (but taking account of the potential to cater for additional needs through the release of sites currently inaccessible to the public and the remarking of under utilised pitches e.g. remarking rugby pitches as football pitches).
- Build in the need to reduce the impact of informal use by reducing the number of pitches on some sites or removing provision from sites if formal and informal pitch use is effecting the value of sites for informal recreation.

Related to this last point is the need to reduce the number of pitches on some sites in order to allow the development of multi-functional spaces which make a greater contribution to landscape structure and biodiversity and cater for the needs of the wider community as discussed in Section 3.

In considering measures to mitigate the potential loss of Derby Road Playing Field it will be important to take account of informal use of the site generally and use of the site as a local open space.

2.11. ALLOTMENT PROVISION.

Allotment provision is a valuable part of the green space system which can make a significant contribution to cross cutting issues including leisure, health, sustainability, biodiversity, community involvement and life long learning. In order for these benefits to be realised it will be essential to ensure, as far as possible, that there is:

- Adequate level of provision of allotments.
- Appropriate distribution.
- Good quality facilities.
- Adoption of good management practice.

Certain key information is critical to assessing the level and distribution of allotments:

- Definitive list of sites.
- Area of each site.
- Take up rates and post codes of users.
- Extent of vacancies.
- Latent demand.

The level of allotment provision in the Borough is shown in Table 2 overleaf. Schedule 2 at Appendix 3 provides a list of the individual allotment sites and details their size and ownership. An overview of the nature and quality of allotment sites is given in Section Three. The Council currently does not have the further information detailed above although it is undertaking a study of allotment provision in Loughborough.

**TABLE 2.
ALLOTMENT PROVISION.**

AREA	POPULATION 2001 CENSUS	HA OF ALLOTMENTS	HA PER 1,000
Areas as per Table 1.			
Loughborough. (Including Hathern).	57,627	14.62	0.25
Birstall.	11,480	2.86	0.25
Shepshed.	12,882	5.60	0.44
Syston.	11,607	2.05	0.18
Anstey.	5,821	1.55	0.27
Barrow upon Soar.	5,083	1.92	0.38
East Goscote.	2,809	-	-
Mountsorrel.	7,694	0.51	0.07
Queniborough.	2,257	-	-
Quorn.	4,961	3.41	0.69
Rothley.	3,612	2.22	0.62
Sileby.	6,872	1.64	0.24
Thurmaston.	8,945	-	-
South west parishes.	5,342	0.83	0.16
The Wolds Ward.	2,802	0.74	0.26
Wreake Villages Ward.	2,836	0.17	0.06
Queniborough Ward. <u>without</u> Queniborough.	671	-	-
TOTAL	153,301	38.12	0.25

(These figures are derived from Schedule 2 given at Appendix 3. The Schedule includes some estimated individual site areas and some caveats as to which land might be considered to be allotment provision).

There is not a recognised national quantitative standard for allotments. Many Councils have adopted a standard of 0.2 ha of allotment land per thousand population. This standard originated in an influential Government report in the 1960's (Thorpe Report) which recommended a minimum provision of allotments of 0.2 ha per thousand population and additional provision where there was demand. Few local authorities have a distance standard in respect of allotments. Some seek provision at 400 m, that is provision at a local level. By contrast the Bristol Allotment Strategy seeks provision within 1.2 km of any residential location that is provision at a district level. This distance is the distance used by the Government when considering whether there is alternative provision when it is proposed to build on allotment land. The Council does not have a local standard for allotments or seek provision in respect of developments.

A survey of allotment provision in England in 1996 by the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners and Anglia Polytechnic University (The English Allotments Survey) indicated average provision of allotments at 0.21 ha per thousand population with c. 15% vacant plots and waiting lists of the equivalent of c. 4% of plot availability. At this time provision in Leicestershire was around 50% greater than national average provision.

The overall level of provision of allotments in the Borough may indicate a reasonable level of provision. However, in the absence of any assessment of demand and latent demand it is impossible to say whether the level of provision is sufficient, excessive or inadequate. There is now a developing interest in vegetable growing and with changes to the make up of the population, household size and garden sizes it will be important to develop a local standard for allotments applicable to the early 21st century.

The level of use of allotments can be significantly affected by the accessibility and distribution of provision, the quality of sites, the level of facilities at sites including toilet provision and awareness.

Some built areas in the Borough have no allotment provision within or immediately adjacent to them, notably:

- East Goscote.
- Queniborough.
- West part of Syston.
- Many of the villages.

Furthermore, there are many areas where allotment provision is located to one side of a built area and/or some distance away from most houses. Some sites are quite inaccessible and others are derelict or quite overgrown.

In considering the level of provision and the size of individual sites it needs to be recognised that it is reasonable, as in all land uses, that sites should contribute to landscape structure and wildlife and that sufficient space is required for adequate path provision and community facilities.

It will be important for the Council to review allotment provision and set out a policy in respect of provision, distribution and management. This would inform the implementation of this Strategy, future policy in respect of existing sites and the need (if any) to provide further sites. Assessments of allotment provision should take account of latent demand.

Allotment sites are often located in areas where there is a deficiency of open space. If it is considered that allotment land is surplus to need it will be important to consider whether the land should be made available for open space use before considering development.

2.12. BROADER GREEN SPACE PROVISION.

Public open space of recreational value and allotment provision in the built areas of the Borough lies within a matrix of other green spaces including cemeteries, closed churchyards, school grounds, private playing fields and golf courses and buffer areas and other green land including landscape provision within road corridors, housing areas and industrial and commercial areas.

Some of this further green space provides opportunities for public access to open space, notably cemeteries and closed churchyards. Land which does not have public access can contribute to opportunities for contact with nature, where, for example, footpaths and greenways pass allotments, retained habitat features in housing areas and school grounds and private playing fields with natural landscape provision or where public open space abuts these areas.

As discussed in 2.10 above some school grounds and private playing fields contribute to the overall playing pitch needs in the Borough. Private playing fields and golf courses provide for specific recreational needs.

The other forms of green space in built areas also contribute to the character of areas and can contribute to the landscape structure, biodiversity and other environmental functions. As discussed in 2.14 below other forms of green space could provide opportunities to bring about public open space provision in areas of deficiency.

The Council is currently in the process of mapping all green space provision in the Borough within an agreed typology and producing associated schedules. This work will inform planning processes generally, strategic green space planning and management and the implementation of this Strategy. Plans and schedules of all green space provision in the Borough will be attached to this Strategy when they are complete.

2.13. UNDERLYING CAUSES OF WEAKNESSES IN THE QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE.

The provision of public open space of recreational value and indeed of other green space provision in the Borough is a reflection of the history of the

development of built areas. A concern is that many of the weaknesses identified have arisen in developments undertaken over the last 10 - 20 years and that there may also have been a failure to use the development process to resolve pre existing weaknesses over this time. Weaknesses arising in relation to developments include:

- Failure to provide distinct local open space of sufficient size to serve the needs of new and existing communities in some developments.
- Provision of greenways which are too narrow to enable the development of appropriate landscape provision.

In common with other Councils these issues within the planning and development control processes have been a reflection of the lack of a strategic approach to parks and open space provision within the Council.

2.14. RESOLVING DEFICIENCIES IN THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE.

The resolution of deficiencies in public open space of recreational value is difficult and dependent upon opportunities. It will be important for the Council to have a defined list of deficiencies in open space provision so that opportunities to resolve deficiencies can be taken if they arise.

Means of resolving deficiencies in open space provision may include:

- Careful consideration of open space provision in respect of new developments particularly in terms of location and master planning in respect of adjacent developments.
- Use of school land where surplus to educational need or through agreement.
- Use of private sports space where surplus to sports needs.
- Use of surplus allotment land.
- Land swops.
- Opportunities to reorganise space which may arise if there is any significant redevelopment of housing areas in the future.
- Development of sites at the edge of built areas.

2.15. STRATEGIC NEEDS IN RESPECT OF THE QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF GREEN SPACES.

The review of the quantity and distribution of green spaces has drawn out the following key strategic needs:

- Development of clear policies in respect of all types of green space including the adoption of a local standard for public open space of recreational value.
- Recognition of the role of Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood as a regional facility.
- Protection and appropriate management of Watermead Country Park and the Beacon Hill Country Park/Outwoods complex as country park facilities.

- Investigation of the potential for the development of further countryside facilities to serve built areas of the Borough which do not have good access to the existing country parks.
- Consideration of the potential and desirability of developing district parks to the north and south of Loughborough and in Birstall, Shepshed and Syston.
- Identification of deficiencies in local parks provision.
- Resolution of deficiencies in the provision of local parks and village recreation grounds where opportunities exist or arise.
- Development of a system of greenways in built areas as opportunities arise.
- Ensure the provision of open space to cater for children's play needs within housing areas which does not give rise to nuisance and which is set within a broader framework of green space provision relative to visual needs and biodiversity.
- Ensure a balance of amenity and natural public open space thus ensuring opportunities for everyday contact with nature.
- Establishment of a clear policy on equipped play provision perhaps with significant provision in any district park established, good levels of provision for all ages in local parks and village recreation grounds and provision outside of parks only where particularly appropriate.
- Fulfilment of the findings of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Playing Fields Assessment and Strategy including maintenance of the existing level of pitches, improvement to pitches and ancillary provision and accommodation of further pitches on new open space in areas of deficiency.
- Provision of further playing pitches on new open space sites in order to reduce the number of pitches on certain sites where parks and open spaces are dominated by pitches and where pitch use effects the value of sites for informal recreation.
- Mitigation of the potential loss of Derby Road Playing Field, Loughborough including in respect of pitch provision and informal recreational use.
- Review of allotment provision and development of a policy in respect of the provision, distribution and management of allotments.
- Proactive approach to resolving deficiencies in open space provision.
- Preparation of briefs for green space provision arising out of development.

3.0. NATURE AND QUALITY OF GREEN SPACES.

3.1. NEED FOR A VISION FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF GREEN SPACE.

The realisation of the benefits of green spaces is as much or more dependant upon the accessibility and quality of green space provision as on the quantity and distribution of provision. As with any product or service the measure of quality should be fitness for purpose. In this context the quality of green spaces should be measured against how well they contribute to landscape structure, biodiversity and other environmental issues, whether they fulfil the informal and formal recreational needs of all members of the community and whether the community feel green spaces are pleasant and safe places to be and feel encouraged to use them.

The quality of green space provision is often confused with standards of maintenance. High levels of cleanliness and appropriate maintenance of grass and other elements are very important to the quality of parks and open spaces. However, whether a site could be considered to be of a good quality is dependant upon a far broader range of issues. These will include accessibility, how welcoming sites are, contribution to landscape structure and biodiversity, spatial quality, access to water areas and opportunities to experience wildlife, provision of facilities relative to needs, path provision relative to circulation and throughroute needs, sensitive incorporation of facilities, safe by design issues and the nature of individual components.

In order to ensure the development of appropriate provision over time and in order to ensure the effective use of resources and opportunities it will be essential that there is a strong vision for different types of green space in the Borough. These have been developed and are set out below.

The preparation of the different elements of the vision has involved:

- Consideration of national and local policies and guidance.
- The findings of qualitative evaluations of green spaces within the Borough undertaken to inform this Strategy detailed in 1.6.
- Observations from the consultation document and Citizen's Panel research detailed in 1.6.
- Officer discussion.

3.2. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES.

The following attributes will be sought where appropriate in respect of all green space provision:

- Balanced provision which is attractive, contributes to the landscape structure, biodiversity and other environmental functions and fulfilling safe by design considerations.
- Bolder and generally more natural provision with concentrated use of ornamental elements where appropriate in selected parks and towns and village centres.
- Good access and signage.

- Distinct or functional entrances, as appropriate, in good condition.
- Appropriate information and signage within sites.
- Good spatial quality – arising from balance and layout of woody and non woody elements, sensitive incorporation of facilities and freedom from detractors.
- Appropriate balance between amenity landscape and natural elements including water.
- Landscape, buildings and infrastructure relative to the site and relating well in visual terms, in keeping with and contributing to local character.
- Individual components of appropriate nature and in good condition.
- Appropriate range of facilities.
- Natural surveillance.
- Absence of areas of poor visibility.
- Absence of trapment points.
- Provision of lighting.
- Fabric of sites in good condition.
- Good standards of maintenance.
- Good levels of cleanliness.
- Conservation and management of the landscape and habitats.
- Conservation and management of buildings and structural features.
- Access for disabled people (and wider community).
- Use of sustainable materials and environmentally sensitive products.
- Freedom from problems and issues of concern which would undermine the community's use and enjoyment of sites.

3.3. CHARACTER OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF GREEN SPACE.

The following characteristics will be sought in respect of different types of green space.

Distinct public open space of recreational value (excluding greenways).

- Structure of bold groups of indigenous trees with the use of non indigenous trees limited to very specific situations.
- Woodland, buffer, scrub, hedgerow and hedge and amenity shrub planting relative to the desired nature of a site and particularly the degree of structure, screening and openness sought and the natural/amenity balance sought.
- Careful consideration of design issues in respect of natural woody planting in parks and recreation grounds to give a sense of naturalness without creating undue enclosure and a sense of lack of maintenance.
- Recognition of the multi functional role of most open space sites including the incorporation of natural elements in parks, recreation ground and playing field sites and the accommodation of informal recreation needs on local open spaces where possible even where sites have been identified as being primarily for wildlife.

Greenways in built areas.

- Bold, well structured natural tree, shrub and hedgerow planting to boundaries with natural margins.
- Open central areas with wide paths and wide mown grass areas.
- Good visibility along routes and at entrances.
- Appropriate provision of furniture and information.

Cemeteries.

- Landscape of indigenous mature trees, informally and widely spaced across mown grass giving a light canopy through which the sun can permeate together with open areas or indigenous trees to boundary areas with formal sub division using indigenous trees to give a series of individual areas.
- Broad well maintained paths providing for access, throughroutes, circulation and linkage to adjacent areas.
- Visually strong and appropriate entrances.
- Freedom from ornamental plantings and other visual clutter.
- Appropriate provision of seats and litter bins of a single congruous type.
- Crisp path edging and high standards of path sweeping and autumn leaf/brash removal.
- Only appropriate, quality, congruous signage.
- Only safe memorials.

Allotments.

- Good underlying spatial quality and freedom from visual detractors.
- Indigenous formal and informal hedgerows as appropriate with indigenous trees and natural margins, or other broader indigenous structure plantings, to boundary areas and internal indigenous structure plantings where appropriate.
- Provision and sensitive management of other habitat features (scrub, hedgerow margins, ponds, ditches, grassland etc).
- Freedom from undue safe by design issues.
- Good access.
- Good security.
- Well maintained haulage ways and paths.
- Adequate water provision.
- Freedom from neglected plots.
- Good quality land.
- Toilet provision.

School/college grounds.

- Indigenous formal or informal hedgerows as appropriate with indigenous trees and natural margins, or other broader indigenous structure planting, to boundary areas and internal indigenous structure planting where appropriate, together giving good spatial quality.

- Differential mowing between pitch areas and structure planting areas including meadow cut and annual winter cut regimes.
- Provision and sensitive management of other habitat features (ponds, ditches etc).
- Amenity or naturalistic landscape within the vicinity of buildings and car parking areas depending on individual circumstances.

Private sports grounds.

- As per school/college grounds but taking into account broader issues including the nature and incorporation of buildings and facilities.

Landscape provision on major highway routes in built areas.

- Bold, well structured natural tree, shrub and hedgerow planting.
- Extensive swathes of natural grass but with appropriate amenity grass in respect of giving a good sense of maintenance and highways safety.

Nature of landscape provision within local road corridors and housing areas.

- Good consideration of design issues including in respect of structure, visual character, flow, safe by design considerations and defining the role of individual areas e.g. throughroutes, play space for young children, larger recreational space etc.
- Development of a bold structure of locally indigenous trees.
- Use of hedgerows, bold groups of indigenous shrubs and differential mowing where appropriate to link parks and open spaces, greenways and major highway areas through to housing and industrial/business areas.
- Use of only bold groups of amenity shrubs and only where indigenous material would be inappropriate.
- Incorporation of small amenity shrub areas within private land if they are considered appropriate.
- Exclusion of incongruous elements including rose beds and bedding areas.

Buffer areas.

- Well structured woodland of only locally indigenous species providing good screening, biodiversity and access.

Because of relatively good standards of maintenance and cleanliness (although not universal) it might be considered that the Borough has reasonable quality green spaces. However, when evaluated in the context of the need for integrated landscape provision and the provision of multi-functional open spaces which contribute to social, economic and environmental cross cutting issues the quality of provision has been found to be poor. Key issues in respect of different types of green space are outlined in 3.4 to 3.12 below. The assessment has not covered the country parks and other sites in the rural area which in this respect are outside of the scope of the study.

3.4. NATURE AND QUALITY OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF RECREATIONAL VALUE (EXCLUDING GREENWAYS AND RURAL SITES).

There are some sites with designed or inherent good spatial quality and attractiveness including Queen's Park, Charnwood Water and Dishley Pool. However, many sites have weak/poor spatial quality and attractiveness. Weaknesses arise from an absence of boundary tree and hedgerow plantings, inappropriate tree planting within designed landscapes and other sites of inherent good spatial quality, poor incorporation of facilities and incongruous buildings. A small number of sites have been undermined by the poor incorporation of naturalistic plantings.

Most sites make a reasonable to good contribution to the landscape structure. However, there are sites where additional tree planting could be considered to increase the contribution of sites to the landscape structure without detriment to other roles.

Some sites have valuable wildlife areas and provide opportunities for people to experience wildlife. Other sites such as Queen's Park have an appropriate strong amenity character. However, overall, sites were found to be too amenity in character and that, even taking account of sports pitch and informal recreational needs, sites could benefit from a more natural approach. That is not to say that any site should be naturalised but that there is wide scope for greater use of indigenous trees (rather than ornamental species), boundary hedgerows, buffer and scrub areas and differential mowing. On some sites a reduction in the number of pitches could be considered to allow a stronger and more natural landscape to be developed.

Entrances to sites are generally indistinct and of indifferent, sometimes poor, condition. Generally access is poor. Access problems include:

- Road barriers.
- Absence of entrances restricting immediate access from parts of catchment areas.
- Entrances with barriers, uneven surfaces and absence of surfaces.
- Poor footpath provision in relation to circulation and throughroute needs.
- Some barriers to the use of paths including slopes, steps and narrow paths.
- Some restrictions on access to buildings.

Signage to sites is very limited and there is also very limited information provision on sites. Site management responsibility is often not clear. Issues in this respect include:

- Absence of site entrance boards.
- Boards and information referring to old Borough Council department names.
- Use of boards which might imply Charnwood Wildlife responsibility rather than the sites being the responsibility of the Cultural and Leisure Services.

Generally, public open spaces of recreational value in the Borough have a safe feel. Normally there is good visibility and an absence of trapment points.

Some sites have good natural surveillance and generally there is the provision of lighting where appropriate. Sites are also generally clean, have good standards of grass cutting and reasonable basic shrub bed etc. maintenance.

There is a notable absence of dereliction and vandalism that have inflicted parks and open spaces in many areas across the Country and there are some good and reasonable quality buildings. However, there are localised problems in respect of visibility, potential trapment, litter, dumped rubbish, graffiti and dog fouling and some poor quality buildings. Sites tend to have a wide range of mixed fence types and much fencing is of inappropriate type and in indifferent or poor condition.

Woodlands in parks and open spaces are generally well structured and there are some good examples of wetland and meadow habitats. However, some components have a poor fulfilment of relevant quality criteria. With notable exceptions, tree plantings are insufficiently bold, are comprised of incongruous mixes and include trees of inappropriate/incongruous colour, scale and form. Shrub plantings are almost invariably too small in scale and/or have too small group size, are poorly related to site flows, include areas with inappropriate pruning and sometimes contain unintended material. Many hedges are of uneven frame and have gaps and some have inappropriate sprayed out bases.

Generally, there is indifferent to poor provision of seats on sites and provision is often comprised of a range of different styles and is occasionally in poor condition. Many seats are poorly located. Equally, there is indifferent to poor provision of litter and dog waste bins. Again, a range of styles is used on sites and occasionally there are bins in poor condition or which have been damaged. There is little coordination in different types of furniture on sites including in respect of seats, litter bins, bollards, entrances and guard rails.

Some of the children's equipped play areas in the Borough have a reasonable level and range of provision with reasonable play value. However, children's equipped play provision on many sites is limited. Most sites are clean and have a reasonable general appearance and have safety surfacing and fencing. However, there are areas of poor appearance including where items of equipment have been removed and not replaced, sites and parts of sites without fencing and sites and parts of sites without safety surfacing. Outdoor sports facilities were found to be of reasonable and occasionally good quality. A common weakness across the Borough is an absence of sufficiently level areas for informal ball games within sites. Many sites have no or limited car parking and car park surfacing is often poor.

3.5. NATURE AND QUALITY OF GREENWAYS IN BUILT AREAS.

In Loughborough and Shepshed some key greenways are provided by former railway lines and old lanes. These routes provide greenways of good width which are natural and contribute in some way to the landscape structure. However, these greenways are far too enclosed from both a safe by design and biodiversity perspective, they do not have regular path edge mowing,

provision of seats, litter bins and information is limited and there is a lack of large tree species in places despite opportunities for inclusion. The central paths of these greenways vary in quality from good tarmac to reasonable stone to poor quality stone surfaces. Although generally level or of a gentle slope the paths are quite steep in places. Some link points have enclosed entrances and/or poor quality paths. Fencing is generally poor and there are high levels of litter and dumped rubbish.

Most other greenways in built areas are purpose designed routes. There are occasional sections of purpose designed routes that reasonably fulfil all the criteria which might be considered appropriate as set out above and most routes are clean and have level, firm, relatively wide paths. However, there are significant weaknesses in the purpose designed greenways including:

- Generally too narrow to develop corridors of an appropriate nature.
- Many sections which narrow considerably in places, have sharp changes in direction and have sharp angled fence lines along their length - all giving rise to visibility issues.
- Occurrence of woody vegetation along the rare sections of corridor with natural landscape which restricts views along the length of routes, at corners and at entrances.
- Absence of regular mowing to path edges in natural areas.
- Areas with erratic and often over planted amenity/semi natural landscape, including poorly grouped indigenous and non indigenous trees, small scale shrub plantings which are poorly related to site flows, isolated areas of indigenous shrubs and severely trimmed isolated hedges, giving poor visual character and spatial quality and having safe by design issues.
- Areas with provision limited to amenity grass, hedges and occasional individual or small groups of trees even where further tree planting could be considered appropriate.
- Use of large species trees in inappropriate situations.
- Absence of paths and narrow or sloping paths.
- Occasional cleaning issues including dumped rubbish from neighbouring properties.
- Poor provision of seats, litter bins and information.
- Absence of lighting.

Hopefully new purpose designed greenways in built areas will reflect a clearer vision as to what should be the nature of these corridors and good detailed design will ensure appropriate provision. However, from a management perspective there is now a legacy of unsatisfactory routes which need to be redeveloped over time. Depending on the individual circumstances redevelopment options may include:

- Retention or development of natural corridors where width permits but with detailed consideration of safe by design issues and the use of regular mowing to path edges.
- Provision of relatively simple landscape provision with well maintained amenity grass and bold groups of indigenous trees relating to site flows and giving good spatial quality, perhaps with regularly maintained hedges where appropriate.

- As above but with open swathes of coppiced indigenous shrubs on boundary areas in relation to tree planting and site flows, perhaps with a little differential mowing to hedge bases and in association with tree and shrub plantings.
- Strong landscape of bold groups of indigenous trees and good scale shrub planting relating well to site flows with significant areas of well maintained amenity grass.

The inclusion of large tree species within the existing corridors, and in future provision, will need to be given careful consideration. Inappropriately located trees will need to be removed and care taken to avoid the reoccurrence of this issue. Consideration could be given to a phased programme of planting, removal and replanting of trees where good tree cover is required but where the proximity of houses and fences and other structures limits species choice.

Redevelopment proposals for all greenways in built areas need to consider the provision of lighting, paths, seating, litter bins and information.

The Blackbrook corridor in Loughborough is a particular greenway for which, because of the presence of the flood defence banks, a specific vision and proposals would need to be adopted. However, overview visits indicate that many of the principles set out above for greenways should still be applicable. In this respect there should be potential for the development of bold groups of indigenous trees, the sensitive use of boundary hedgerows and open scrub and the development of considered differential mowing, to give an attractive corridor which feels safe and which contributes to landscape structure and biodiversity.

Equally, quite specific consideration should be given to the nature of the Grand Union Canal corridor where it passes through built areas. The overview visits indicate a particular need to ensure that an amenity landscape is not inappropriately developed along the corridor in these areas.

3.6. NATURE AND QUALITY OF CEMETERIES.

Although there are some plantings of bold groups of indigenous trees within cemeteries, the structure of most cemetery sites is dominated by plantings of conifers and non indigenous deciduous trees. These plantings generally lack boldness. There are boundary and internal areas where there is scope for further tree planting which has not been realised.

Cemeteries are bounded in places by appropriate congruous railings and indigenous hedges but are also bounded in places by conifer hedges and inappropriate and incongruous fencing.

There is a need to consider developing and changing the tree planting arrangements in cemeteries over time to bring about strong informal and formal plantings of indigenous trees within the vision together with appropriate fencing and strong indigenous hedges where appropriate.

The nature of cemetery sites is further undermined by ornamental plantings and other visual clutter and inadequate standards of grass cutting, path edging and path sweeping.

Most cemetery sites have good systems of broad paths and strong and appropriate entrances. However, paths in cemeteries are often in poor condition and path provision at some sites does not allow for full circulation.

Furniture, signage and memorials within cemeteries have not been assessed.

3.7. NATURE AND QUALITY OF ALLOTMENTS.

Most allotment sites in the Borough have reasonable spatial quality with quite extensive and strong formal and informal hedgerows and some boundary trees. However, some boundaries are comprised of incongruous and inappropriate fencing, conifer hedges or weak indigenous hedges, boundary tree provision is generally quite limited and there is visual clutter, to a lesser or greater extent, on all sites.

Although there are some uncultivated plots on many sites and some sites with extensive uncultivated areas there appears to be no specific habitat areas on allotment sites and hedgerow margins are limited.

Access to many sites is limited by the location of sites, the nature of entrance areas and limited parking provision. Although some sites have quite reasonable hard or grassed haulage ways some sites have poor haulage ways and path provision between plots is generally poor.

Vacant plots on some sites appear to be maintained by mowing but vacant plots on other sites are overgrown.

The quality of land, water supply and toilet provision at allotment sites is not known.

3.8. NATURE AND QUALITY OF SCHOOL/COLLEGE GROUNDS.

Many school and college sites have strong or reasonably strong formal or informal hedgerows with indigenous trees to boundary areas. Some sites have further natural indigenous woody plantings. Although usually limited, hedges and woody planting areas have some margins. However, there are only limited natural grass areas on school and college sites.

There remains considerable scope to establish further hedgerows, indigenous tree plantings and naturalised grass areas on school and college ground sites, particularly where provision is currently limited but also on sites where some provision has already been established.

Landscape provision in the vicinity of school and college buildings tends to be of a small scale amenity nature particularly around main entrances. Provision is characterised by too mixed plantings of non indigenous trees and small

incongruous shrub and rose plantings with small scale group size, often in need of renovation and/or replanting. There is a need to develop stronger planting around school and college buildings which is integrated with landscape provision over the wider grounds.

3.9. NATURE AND QUALITY OF PRIVATE SPORTS GROUNDS.

As with school and college sites many private sports ground sites have quite strong formal and informal hedgerows with indigenous trees to boundary areas but equally provide scope for further hedge/tree planting. Some sites have conifer hedges which should be replaced with indigenous hedges and other indigenous woody plantings.

The provision of indigenous woody plantings and natural grass areas within private sports ground sites is very limited, presumably because of the desire to make use of sites for sports provision. There is little scope for further provision.

Many private sports grounds have incongruous and/or poor quality buildings which are poorly incorporated into sites. They are also characterised by poor quality and incongruous fencing, extensive visual clutter and extensive debris.

3.10. NATURE AND QUALITY OF LANDSCAPE PROVISION ALONG MAJOR HIGHWAY ROUTES IN BUILT AREAS.

Major highway routes passing through built areas in the Borough are primarily concentrated in Loughborough, the exceptions being Loughborough Road, Birstall and Newark Road, Thurmaston.

Some of the major highway routes in Loughborough have wide corridors and good levels of landscape provision (New Ashby Road, Epinal Way and Derby Road), although others have minimal landscape provision.

The highway corridors in Loughborough with good levels of landscape provision have a good sense of maintenance and are notably clean. Within some parts of these corridors there is a reasonable landscape structure of mature and semi mature trees, hedges and scrub and some natural grass. However, the landscape in these corridors is dominated by poorly grouped and often incongruous amenity trees, poorly integrated beds of shrubs, roses and bedding and far too extensive use of amenity grass. Each of these corridors has the potential to be redeveloped within the vision set out above.

Much of the landscape provision in the Newark Road corridor, Thurmaston is comprised of bold hedgerows and tree plantings and natural grass. However, the corridor lacks unity because of the use of inappropriate small species of trees in places and limited tree planting and formal trimming of hedges on adjacent open spaces.

3.11. NATURE AND QUALITY OF LANDSCAPE PROVISION WITHIN LOCAL ROAD CORRIDORS AND HOUSING AREAS.

Given the range of different types of housing areas within the Borough it would be inappropriate to try to provide an overall assessment of landscape provision in housing areas in this document. However, the following observations arising from the overview visits should be recorded:

- There is an apparent lack of detailed design consideration even in recently developed areas.
- The tree stock is dominated by poorly grouped and often incongruous amenity trees.
- Opportunities to develop linkage between parks and open spaces, greenways and major highways and housing areas through the use of hedgerows, bold groups of indigenous shrubs and differential mowing have not been taken in both new developments and existing situations.
- Shrub planting is generally of too small scale and poorly integrated.
- There are incongruous rose beds within housing areas.

3.12. NATURE AND QUALITY OF BUFFER AREAS.

Common practice across the Country is to establish quite closely planted indigenous trees and shrubs across narrow buffer areas. This practice gives relatively quick screening which usually blends in with the local countryside. However, areas planted in this way require quite considered management in the long term.

Many housing areas to the edge of built areas in the Borough have buffer areas. These vary in character considerably and include:

- Areas of closely planted drawn trees with little shrub or field layer, sometimes with non indigenous species and sometimes with unofficial access.
- Areas with tall boundary hedgerows to the outside with individual trees in mown grass, sometimes with non indigenous species and having access.
- Areas of closely planted indigenous trees and shrubs, sometimes with tall boundary hedgerows to the outside and without access.

Where areas are sufficiently wide and fully planted, irrespective of the nature of the planting, there is potential to develop well structured woodland of locally indigenous species with good diversity and public access and which does not cause undue problems to neighbouring properties. However, to achieve this considerable input into management will be required in respect of thinning and tree removal generally, removal of non indigenous species, planting of shrubs, development of field layers, improvements to access and consideration of safe by design issues. In the absence of management to achieve these aims wide areas of closely planted drawn trees will in any event need to be managed intensely to prevent the loss of low level screening, problems in respect of adjacent housing and eventual wholesale collapse.

Narrow buffer plantings will require work to rectify deficiencies in planting mixes including thinning of close planted mixes dominated by tree species,

the addition of shrubs, the removal of non indigenous material and the planting up of open areas where considered appropriate. Furthermore, these areas will also require considerable ongoing management including thinning of tree species, coppicing, laying or coppicing of hedgerows, the management of natural and regularly mown grass and the removal of invasive species. The management of each area will need to take account of whether access is desirable or undesirable.

A significant issue in the management of narrow buffer areas will be tall tree species. If all trees are allowed to grow to full maturity areas established as narrow buffer areas will eventually be comprised of a band of tall trees with thin scrub giving poor low level screening, rather than a woodland effect giving good screening as might be envisaged. Equally, if tall trees are allowed to grow to full maturity this will invariably give rise to problems in relation to neighbouring properties, particularly as gardens are generally short. Where particular height is not required for landscape or screening purposes tall tree species could be removed or managed by periodic coppicing and singling throughout an area within management programmes. Elsewhere it may be acceptable to allow tall species to grow on in the outer part of the buffer areas but not throughout them.

3.13. CONSULTATION ON THE VISION/CUSTOMER RESEARCH.

The Parks, Open Spaces and Wildlife consultation document included a list of core values in respect of the nature of public open spaces of recreational value. The November 2003 Citizen's Panel research sought insight into the public's views on some aspects of the nature and quality of parks and open spaces. However, there has been no specific consultation with interested parties or the public on the vision to date.

The Citizen's Panel research found that 71.8 % of respondents felt that parks and open spaces were of the right quality/type and 81.9 % of respondents were satisfied with the park/open space they visit. This leaves open which open spaces respondents had in mind, the issue of users choosing to visit particular sites, whether they were satisfied with quality or type and in respect of quality whether users were considering maintenance standards or the underlying nature of sites.

Although not giving insight into the community's views on the character and nature of sites the research reinforced national findings in respect of a number of key issues users of parks and open space consider to be important.

- Trees, plantings, natural elements and water (but only expressed in the most general of terms).
- Cleanliness.
- Security (including staffing).
- Equipped play provision.
- Seating.
- Facilities.
- Information provision.

This Draft Strategy provides an opportunity to consult interested parties and informed members of the public on the vision for the different types of green space. The proposed public meeting will also provide an opportunity to canvas views on the vision. Postal market research does not provide a satisfactory means of consulting the public on this issue.

3.14. UNDERLYING CAUSES OF WEAKNESSES IN THE QUALITY OF PROVISION.

In working towards appropriate green space provision it will be important to understand the reasons for the weaknesses in the quality of provision identified. Discussions with and between officers of the Borough Council and insight from the qualitative evaluations indicate that there have been a number of underlying causes of the weaknesses:

- History of provision - the nature of open spaces reflecting different approaches to open space provision over time.
- Absence of corporate vision - inhibiting appropriate change in provision over time and undermining the appropriateness of new provision.
- Absence of management plans - essential to bringing about appropriate change over time.
- Failure to consider where individual sites might fit in an open space hierarchy and failure to take account of all of the roles of each site when considering management and development needs.
- Less than satisfactory provision arising from the planning process - so that even some quite recent provision has inherent weaknesses.
- Absence of major capital investment and associated ad hoc development.
- Absence of appropriate professional inputs - notably landscape design and ecology in public open space management and development.
- Absence of appropriate advice and influence by the Borough Council in respect of non Borough Council sites, particularly in relation to some private sports pitch sites.

Underlying these specific issues has been the lack of a strategic approach to green space management and development.

3.15. STRATEGIC NEEDS IN RESPECT OF THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF GREEN SPACES.

The review of the nature and quality of green space has drawn out the following key strategic needs:

- Adoption of a clear vision for the green space system and different types of green space.
- Preparation of master or management plans for all sites and areas to ensure all development and management work is undertaken within the vision.
- Preparation of briefs for green space arising out of developments.
- Ensure all green space development work is undertaken within the vision.
- Resolve weaknesses in the nature of sites as opportunities arise.

- Fulfil strategic landscape management needs on sites over and above maintenance needs.
- Maintain good standards of landscape maintenance and cleanliness.
- Provision of advice and support to all organisations and groups responsible for green space management.

4.0. KEY MANAGEMENT ISSUES.

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4.1. GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICE.

The final report of The Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, Green Spaces, Better Places, DTLR, 2002, highlights perceived good management practice in respect of the overall management and development of public green space, reinforcing the recommendations of other national reports and documents:

- Green space provision should be at the heart of policy development and action in respect of cross cutting issues.
- Development of vision in respect of parks and open space provision.
- Preparation of strategies.
- Strong master plans for sites, creative design and appropriate design processes.
- Management plans for each site informed by an understanding of the design intentions.
- Management informed by good information and understanding of community needs.
- Partnership working.
- Community involvement.
- Development of community use and use of open space as an educational resource.
- Adequate capital funding, use of external funding and effective use of funding.
- Adequate revenue funding.
- Whole life costing.
- Good use of the planning system.
- Procurement of landscape management and maintenance services based on management plans for each site, defined standards and added value, and implementation of landscape maintenance needs with minimum supervision.
- Staff presence on sites.
- Tackling of daily nuisances.
- Appropriate skills and training.
- Monitoring and review.

Government publications on broader public realm management including Living Places, Cleaner, Safer, Greener, ODPM, 2003, have also placed emphasis on integrated maintenance of public spaces including streets and green spaces, cleansing and grounds maintenance and tackling issues such as abandoned cars, fly tipping, graffiti and the like.

4.2. OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICE.

If the Council is to bring about improvements in green space provision in the Borough over time it will be important for it to consider each of these aspects of good management practice as a means of reviewing and improving performance.

Some aspects of management practice in recent years have been good, notably inputs into biodiversity and community involvement in wildlife management and the implementation of good maintenance standards in parks and open spaces, highway areas and housing areas. However, when considered against good management practice performance can be seen to have been poor.

The Council has been conscious of the need to improve performance in this aspect of its responsibilities for some time, most notably since the preparation of the unpublished Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy in 2002 and preliminary inputs into a Best Value review which highlighted the need for a more strategic, structured and proactive approach in respect of parks and open spaces management.

The following summarises the Council's current position in relation to the good management practice issues:

- Developing linkage between the provision and management of green spaces and corporate policy including specific recognition of the importance of green spaces in the Council's Corporate Plan 2003-2007.
- Renewed emphasis in the Landscape, Trees and Wildlife Team in Planning Services on strategic green space planning and vision.
- Development of a Parks, Open Spaces and Wildlife Development Team in Cultural and Leisure Services (three strong from April 2004) to drive forward improvements in public open space of recreational value, concentrating on management plans, briefs, external funding, partnership working and community involvement rather than operational issues.
- Removal of the client agent role for highways, housing and industrial landscape, buffer areas and the cemetery from Cultural and Leisure Services.
- Procurement of landscape management and maintenance from the Council's Contract and Public Services Unit through service level agreements with minimal input into monitoring and supervision by client departments.
- The development of a stronger sense of vision and strategy as exemplified by the preparation of this document.
- Improved outcomes in respect of green space provision and off site contributions in relation to some developments.
- Master plans being developed in respect of four existing key sites.
- Management plan preparation limited to a small number of sites and areas with wildlife value, and where relating to wildlife areas in public parks and open spaces plans prepared in the absence of a vision, master plan or management plan for a whole site.
- Development of inputs into management information including work on schedules of sites within a typology, some initial parks and open spaces customer research, initial piece of research on allotments and inputs into the Playing Field Assessment.
- Need for far more detailed information on the levels of use of public open space sites of recreational value, cross referenced to age, gender, race and disability, and people's views and expectations.

- Some allocation of Council capital funding but related to equipped play provision.
- Retention of revenue funding.
- Some external funding.
- Growing but limited partnership working.
- Past community involvement in wildlife projects and self management of sports facilities. Limited community involvement in the management of parks and open spaces of recreational value generally.
- Some but limited inputs into developing community use and people presence.
- Some but limited staff presence (but in many ways a reflection of the size and nature of sites).

4.3. SKILLS AND PERFORMANCE.

It is clear from practice in other local authority areas that the key to bringing about improvements in green spaces in general and public open space of recreational value in particular is the adoption of a development approach with development officers specifically employed to maximise external funding, partnership working, community involvement and the development of use and presence on sites. The development of a small team of officers in Cultural and Leisure Services focused on improvements to parks and open spaces should bring about improved provision in this key area over time.

It will be critical that this team has good leadership and is staffed by individuals with the skills and enthusiasm to realise the potential of a development approach. It will be essential that the development team has the following skills and knowledge:

- Input into and influence of corporate policy, cross cutting strategies, associated service area plans and the Local Plan.
- Development of a clear vision on parks and open space provision and a vision for individual sites within the context of corporate policies and a broader vision for the landscape and countryside.
- Preparation of development and management plans for individual parks and open spaces.
- Development of funding packages including maximisation of external funding.
- Achieving the best outcomes in respect of green space provision from built development applications.
- Market research.
- Working with community organisations and volunteers.
- Contract letting and management in respect of landscape development works.
- Project management.
- Woodland management, habitat management, amenity land management and sports facility management.
- Preparation of information and interpretation materials.
- Development of service level agreements.

- Development of performance standards and landscape management prescriptions.
- Land adoption and agreements.

As external funding develops specialist skills could be brought in to supplement the input and skills of staff in the development team. Some funding may be required for specialist external inputs at the beginning of some projects particularly in respect of the development of feasibility studies, masterplans, management plans and funding bids.

It will also be essential that the Landscape, Trees and Wildlife Team in Planning Services are able to bring forward appropriate policies and guidance and are able to make appropriate inputs into proposals particularly in relation to green space provision in developments and major green space development and improvement proposals, including in respect of proposals being developed by the development team in Cultural and Leisure Services. Some landscape/green space planning work may need to be undertaken by external groups and this would require funding.

It will also be important that Contract and Public Services has appropriate skills relative to the management needs of multi-functional open spaces through service level agreements. The following skills will be essential:

- Amenity land management.
- Woodland management.
- Habitat management.
- Arboriculture.
- Outdoor sports facility management.
- Play area inspection and maintenance.
- Development of appropriate work programmes from performance standards and management plans.
- Variation of programmes to deal with issues and concerns.
- Liaison with the public.

An audit will need to be undertaken of staff skills in relation to all of the above requirements and the skills needed should be taken into account when appointing staff.

4.4. REVENUE FUNDING.

Improvements in parks and open space provision and development of new open spaces will give rise to increased revenue funding needs relative to the management requirements of sites. Annual efficiency savings may make some contribution to this need if they are retained within budgets. It may be possible for the Woodland Grant Scheme and similar schemes to contribute to the costs of management if entered into. However, all parks and open space developments will need to take account of the revenue implications. Partnership working and community involvement could contribute to reducing the cost implications of works (although this should not be the *raison d'être* for partnership and community involvement).

Proposals for capital works should take account of whole life costings. If low cost methods and materials are used in schemes, works could give rise to significant further capital and revenue requirements in quite a short period of time.

The potential shift from an amenity landscape dominated parks and open space system to more balanced natural provision could give rise to a reduction in maintenance costs in certain areas, particularly in respect of the major highways in Loughborough. However, although it is often put forward that the naturalisation of parks and open spaces reduces maintenance costs this is not always true. Particular costs that need to be taken into account in the management of natural land in built areas include:

- Quite frequent litter collection and cleansing.
- Specific measures to give a sense of management of natural areas including regular mowing along path edges and signage.
- High cost of maintaining small areas of natural land due to the need to use pedestrian machinery and other hand work.
- Development costs over the first 10 - 20 years of new woodland and scrub plantings.

Furthermore, any cost savings arising from the development of more natural parks and open space provision would need to be redirected into the other half of the amenity/natural landscape equation – more intense management of other components where appropriate including grass, grass edges and the maintenance of ornamental features.

4.5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BOROUGH COUNCIL AND THE TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS.

Responses from some Town and Parish Councils to the Parks, Open Spaces and Wildlife consultation paper expressed concern that the Borough Council was seeking to usurp the role of the Town and Parish Councils in the management of parks and recreation grounds outside Loughborough. This is not the case.

This document reflects the Council's need to develop a strategic perspective on green space provision in relation to its role as the planning authority and in relation to associated requirements under Government guidance and good practice. Given the key importance of green space provision, the document also reflects the Council's concern to seek appropriate green space provision throughout the Borough.

The Council recognises the valuable role of the Town and Parish Councils in managing parks and recreation grounds outside of Loughborough and their strong links with their respective communities. It is felt that the Borough Council could provide support to the Town and Parish Councils in the form of information on government policies and external funding, advice on technical issues and assistance in the preparation of master plans, management plans and external funding bids as required. This would be through the Landscape,

Trees and Wildlife Team in Planning Services and the new Parks, Open Spaces and Wildlife Development Team in Cultural and Leisure Services.

This is a separate issue from grounds maintenance services provided by the Council's former 'Parks Department' or grounds maintenance service which is now incorporated into the Council's Contract and Public Services unit.

4.6. MONITORING AND REVIEW.

In order to monitor and review improvements in green space provision and management in the Borough it will be necessary to set in place appropriate measures and procedures. The following measures might be considered:

- Access to particular size parks and open spaces, natural open space, children's equipped play provision and allotments in comparison with local standards.
- Extent of greenways in built areas.
- Number of outdoor sports facilities.
- Number of sites with management/development plans.
- Assessment of the nature and quality of sites over time.
- Levels of community involvement.
- Levels of use – including in respect of age, socio economic group, ethnicity and disability.
- Number and size of events.
- Level of capital funding including the extent of external funding.

5.0. STRATEGY.

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5.1. AIMS.

Overall aim.

The Council is committed to maximising the social, economic and environmental benefits of green space provision and ensuring that green spaces contribute to the vision for the Borough. It will seek to bring about improved green space provision over time.

Key characteristics of provision.

In respect of the range and distribution of green space provision, the Council will seek, over time, an interlinked system of public and private green spaces in built areas relative to the broad roles of green space provision incorporating an appropriate hierarchy of parks and open spaces and appropriate open space provision to serve villages.

The following public open space of recreational value will be sought within built areas where land availability, funding and opportunities permit:

- District park provision in the region of 10 to 20 ha in the north and south of Loughborough, Birstall, Shepshed and Syston.
- Provision of local parks in the region of 2.5 to 10 ha within 400 m of all homes and closer to homes in particular circumstances.
- Provision of local open spaces in housing areas in the region of 0.4 to 1 ha within broader provision to ensure green and attractive housing areas.
- Provision of village recreation grounds where appropriate.
- Accommodation and creation of habitat areas to ensure balanced amenity/natural provision and daily contact with nature.
- Accommodation of equipped play provision in accordance with a local standard.
- Accommodation of playing pitch needs.
- Accommodation of allotment needs.

The Council will also seek the protection of existing country parks and countryside facilities and the development of further countryside facilities to ensure ready access, where appropriate and where opportunities permit, to all residents.

In respect of the nature of green space provision, the Council will seek provision in accordance with the underlying principles and vision for different types of green space given in 3.2 and 3.3 as far as opportunities permit.

5.2. STRATEGY.

In order to bring about improvements in green space provision over time the Council will:

- Develop appropriate policies and guidance including in respect of green space provision in housing areas, equipped play provision and allotment provision.
- Undertake further assessments of green space provision including:
 - Further qualitative evaluations.
 - Examination of the catchment areas of public open space and allotment sites based on market research.
 - Assess the level of accessible natural green space.
 - Appraise equipped play provision.
 - Appraise allotment provision.
 - Consideration of the broader environmental role of sites (for example in respect of specific contribution to the character of urban areas and environmental mitigation).
 - Consideration of the value of sites.
 - Consideration of the relationships between the extent and distribution of provision, the quality of provision and social deprivation.
 - Identification of deficiencies in local parks, village recreation grounds, local open space and allotment provision and consideration of how these might be resolved.
 - Consideration of whether any specific area of land could be considered to be surplus to green space needs.
 - Investigation of the potential of the development of further countryside facilities to serve the built areas of the Borough which do not have good access to the existing country parks.
- Develop an appropriate information base.
- Consider the potential and desirability of developing district parks to the north and south of Loughborough and in Birstall, Shepshed and Syston.
- Prepare briefs for green space provision arising out of developments.
- Prepare masterplans and management plans.
- Work to resolve weaknesses in the nature of sites.
- Work to resolve deficiencies in provision.
- Work to develop community use and site presence.
- Develop external funding.
- Develop partnership working.
- Develop community involvement.
- Fulfil strategic landscape management needs on sites over and above maintenance needs.
- Maintain good standards of maintenance and cleanliness.
- Tackle daily nuisances.
- Ensure all green space development work and management is undertaken within the vision.
- Provide advice and support to all organisations and groups responsible for green space management.
- Establish appropriate monitoring and review procedures.

Requirements under this Strategy will be incorporated into the Council's Corporate Plan and annual service plans and specific action plans will be prepared in relation to need.

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