

Consultations

Introduction

- 4.1 As part of this study to assess the local needs of Harborough District Council we have undertaken a detailed consultation programme involving internal departments of the Council, Council Members, Parish Councillors and external agencies. Methods used were briefly outlined in section 2, Undertaking the Study. We have also undertaken open public resident consultations through various methods including:
- drop in sessions
 - questionnaires
 - telephone consultations.
- 4.2 The information gained from these consultations has been used to help understand :
- the key issues/problems facing different departments and agencies
 - needs and requirements of local residents
 - attitudes and expectation of open space within the district
 - what is right about existing provision.
- 4.3 The key findings are discussed below, and specific comments regarding specific types of open space are referenced within sections 5-13.

Internal consultations

- 4.4 Many internal officers have been consulted with regards to the current provision and potential need of open spaces and sport and recreation.
- 4.5 The following points summarise the main issues, which emerged from consultations with internal officers.

Quantity

- the current provision of both indoor and outdoor sports and recreation facilities appears to be sufficient to meet current local needs.
- the provision of a new synthetic turf pitch (STP) and a replacement swimming pool and new sports centre in Lutterworth, due to open in mid-2004, will help facilitate hockey development and meet local needs on the western side of the district. The only potential difficulties in the future maybe with regards to playing pitches in Market Harborough as the main recreation ground at Northampton Road is near capacity in terms of usage of pitches and it is expected an increase in demand will arise in the next 5-10 years.
- the district has a wealth of 'green corridor' provision both within the urban and rural areas. Market Harborough itself has the Millennium Mile, Riverside walkway and cycleway and the national Sustrans network (e.g. Route 6 – Derby to Oxford. This includes the Brampton Valley Way from Market Harborough into Northamptonshire). In the rural areas, there are many long distance footpath routes and local walks in and around parishes that help promote and link the key open spaces in these local areas.

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- there is a shortage of provision with regards to teenage provision (12-16 year age range) such as Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA's), teenage shelters and skateboard ramps etc
- the district has some major open space sites that attract visitors on a district wide basis as well as providing local open spaces to the immediate areas surrounding the sites. These sites include:
 - Foxton Locks – currently undergoing restoration and improvements with the help of Leicestershire City Council and the British Waterways Board
 - Lutterworth Country Park – a 16 acre site on the edge of the town arising from acquired land from a developer and with a major plantings scheme to enhance its appearance and user satisfaction
 - there is a current waiting list for allotments suggesting a need for some future increased provision.

Quality

- there is no real problem with the quality of existing facilities now that the old Lutterworth pool is being replaced with Lutterworth Sports Centre
- Some water logging problems with regards to the main playing field site within Market Harborough (Northampton Rd Recreation Ground). Addressing these drainage problems will enable a subsequent increase in usage to be sustainable and meet any potential increase in future demand on the site
- Welland Park acts as a flagship facility for the district as the major and most used open space within Market Harborough. However it still receives its fair share of genuine problems of vandalism and graffiti.

Accessibility

- public transport routes have changed considerably over recent years and now concentrate on the major linear routes in and out of Market Harborough and Lutterworth (i.e. A6, A47 etc). Anyone living more than a reasonable walking distance off these routes would require other forms of transport access.
- having said this, the area is fairly affluent with high car ownership levels and therefore a subsequent heavy reliance upon the car is common. Therefore usage is not really affected by transport issues for the majority of people. Due to the rural nature of the area, there is an increased expectancy for people to travel further to facilities than maybe the case in a more urbanised district.

Usage

- from a usage survey the main indoor sport and recreation centre at Northampton Road, it was established that 23% of users come from Northamptonshire and a further 11% from other areas outside the district of Harborough – a total of 34%. Therefore there is a real issue with regards to cross-border provision, particularly with the main town of Market Harborough located on the southern boundary of the district. Although 40% travel less than 2 miles to this centre, 36% travel between 5-10 miles which also suggests there a lot of users come from surrounding districts.
- small open spaces within housing areas tend to cause problems in terms of users v local residents. Solutions may involve 'no-ball' game signs but then there is a need to provide another area for ball games within housing estates. Relatively, this is more of a problem in Broughton Astley where there are lots of small open spaces as opposed to Market Harborough. The Council needs to consider the amalgamation of required open spaces needs from many new housing developments to provide possibly larger but fewer more useful and usable open spaces.
- there has been recent areas of population growth particularly with the development of new housing estates in Market Harborough. This subsequently places increasing pressure on the main open spaces within the town such as Welland Park. Further housing pressure will result in new housing estates being located within easy access of the park as a local open space and this needs to be taken into account when considering using any funding for increasing the quantity, but more importantly, the quality and sustainability of such existing and vitally important open space provision.

Revenue funding and maintenance

- 4.6 The increasing amount of various types of open spaces, many of which are provided and funded through new housing developments will have an increasing impact on revenue requirements particularly in the long term. Many new open spaces are under 15 year revenue maintenance agreements but there is concern as to what will happen after the 15 year period.
- 4.7 Proactive measures have worked such as Park Ranger roles in major open spaces and should be encouraged in the future.

Section 106

- 4.8 There is a fundamental need to establish new internal guidance with regards to:
- i) providing suitable justification for obtaining appropriate Section 106 contributions for on-site and off-site developments no matter what size of development
 - ii) establishing priorities with regards to expenditure of Section 106 monies and other funding sources on open spaces e.g. quality of provision, types of open space, which specific sites, which areas etc

Members Consultations – Quantity, Quality and Accessibility

- 4.9 Two sessions were held with Council Members over the course of the project. The first with Market Harborough councillors considered the issues facing Market

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Harborough, and the second looked at provision across the district as a whole, with all Councillors. These workshop sessions provided a valuable insight into issues regularly raised by residents.

4.10 The main topics of discussion centred on the following

- positive and negative aspects of existing open space
- methods of improving existing open space
- catchment areas of each type of open space
- key factors of a 'quality' open space.

4.11 The main issues discussed at these sessions, with specific reference to the characteristics contained within PPG17, are highlighted overleaf:

Quantity

- many people feel that some outlying rural areas are becoming overdeveloped leading to the loss of open space
- new developments within some urban areas have not adequately provided children's play areas as had originally been promised
- there are insufficient outdoor sports facilities to meet the demands of local residents

Quality

- the majority of complaints regarding quality across the district involve the amount of dog fouling and litter
- maintenance of many open space sites is currently considered poor
- insufficient rural policing results in vandalism and teenagers using facilities not intended for them – this is considered detrimental to the quality of the site

Accessibility

- signage, especially in the main towns is considered poor
- a number of complaints have been received about the accessibility of facilities, particularly from residents of Lutterworth and Broughton Astley
- transport to larger sites should be considered to improve opportunities for people to use sites outside their immediate neighbourhood
- better links are needed to open countryside.

Opportunities and methods for improving open space

4.12 There were a number of suggestions for how the problems encountered within open spaces could be resolved:

- improved transport links in rural areas
- ensure there is adequate provision for maintenance

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- reduce dog fouling by providing more dog walking areas and bins along with preventative measures such as better education
- increased focus on provision for older youths e.g. teenage shelters, skate parks
- provision of equipment in certain open spaces would enhance their value e.g. seats, benches
- reduction in the number of new housing developments across the district
- more and better signposting to open spaces
- creation of a master plan of footpaths and cycleways to link open spaces together

General comments

- acknowledgment that there is an urban vs. rural issue. Generally people in the urban areas expect more provision to be in close proximity to their homes, whereas people in rural areas are more willing to travel to some types of open space e.g. country parks, natural and semi natural spaces. Although this emerged clearly during members consultation, there appeared to be no clear division within Parish Consultations
- large areas of open space are more highly valued, although it is important to have localised facilities so that people do not have to travel to certain types of open space e.g. amenity green space, children's play areas . There should be a balance between larger facilities with numerous amenities and, smaller, local facilities
- the ideal open space should be one that meets a wide range of needs providing opportunities for both young and old alike to enjoy. Welland Park is viewed as a site of good practice because it separates sports facilities, play areas and other facilities so different tastes can be catered for.

Parish Councils

4.13 Parish Councillors were consulted via a postal questionnaire and their input has proved to be invaluable. Parish Councillors were asked to provide details of open space within their parish as well as to comment on the following issues with regards to the provision of existing open space within their parish and the district as a whole:

- positive and negative aspects of existing open space, in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility
- methods of improving existing open space
- catchment areas for each open space typology

4.14 There was a whole raft of issues raised by each parish many of which are parish specific, however there are a number of general themes which are highlighted below:

Quantity

- there is concern over loss of green spaces in a number of parishes due to planned housing developments

Quality

- dog fouling and litter are a common problem across a number of parishes
- green spaces in certain village centres are overwhelmed by parked cars
- vandalism of some sites by youths with nothing better to do is ruining the quality of open spaces across the district

Accessibility

- disabled access poor at a number of sites
- a number of key sites are not currently accessible to the public
- a number of recreation grounds are poorly located making them unsafe for young children to use unsupervised.

Opportunities and methods for improving open space

- increased access to a number of privately owned sites would be beneficial, in particular school playing fields
- more litter and dog fouling bins
- improved and more targeted maintenance
- better playground equipment and an emphasis on provision for older youths
- more thought given to vegetation planted in open spaces
- improved wheelchair access at key sites.

Resident Consultations – Quality, Quantity and Accessibility

- 4.15 PMP undertook consultations with residents to determine views, attitudes and expectations on open spaces throughout the District. Five open consultation sessions were held in Broughton Astley, Fleckney, Lutterworth, Market Harborough and Thurnby and Bushby.
- 4.16 Discussions centred on two key areas, namely:
- positive and negative aspects of existing open space
 - methods of improving existing open space
- 4.17 Key issues and ideas emerging from these consultations have been divided into sections linking in with the characteristics of open space identified in PPG17 and are as follows:

Quantity

- there are limited opportunities particularly for teenagers and older people – this was particularly evident in Broughton Astley
- the opportunities for both children and teenagers are particularly limited in rural areas

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- there is an overall lack of open space within rural areas
- there is a demand for play areas even in small villages and hamlets
- there are insufficient public areas for sport
- there is a particular deficiency of sports pitches in rural areas, especially football pitches for juniors and mini football.
- allotments are considered important as recreational facilities for older citizens and there is a concern over the possible loss of some sites
- although small plots of open space are a valued amenity, there is a need for larger parks such as Welland Park
- there is a lack of formal open space facilities
- should developments continue at their current rate more open spaces should be provided to compensate
- more encouragement should be given to farmers to set aside land as open space.

Quality

- open space is well valued overall - there is a need to protect and improve the existing stock
- improved maintenance of some sites is required to increase usage
- dog fouling is a problem in many areas – there is a need for a specific dog walking areas
- litter is a problem across the district
- concern over the safety of some play areas
- open spaces would benefit from better monitoring/policing
- equipment / facilities in the open space is important and makes the space more valuable and likely to be used
- more thought should be given to the vegetation and planting in open spaces
- more consideration should be given to supporting wildlife.

Accessibility

- there are many existing open spaces that are not accessible e.g. school playing fields – this is often the only open space available in rural villages
- transport is a big problem in rural areas, a definite need for better transport links across the district
- promotion of open spaces could be improved
- signposting of key sites would be beneficial

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- an acknowledgment that people travel outside the district to use open space in neighbouring districts and similarly people from outside use Harborough's open spaces
- parking at some larger sites is insufficient at times.

General

4.18 Other valued comments raised from resident consultations included:

- provision of specific facilities within open spaces for teenagers and OAP's is important
- some parishes have tried to campaign for better teenage provision but the opposition of local residents has often thwarted such developments
- local farmers should be encouraged to diversify and create publicly valued open space
- many parish councils have problems in maintaining their open spaces. Smaller parishes would like help from the District Council to create and maintain open space – although help is often available parishes do not know how to access it – more information to clerks is therefore needed
- the district would benefit from the opening up of education sites for community use
- dog fouling problems could be reduced if people were educated about the fundamental issues associated with this problem.

Opportunities and methods for improving open space

4.19 Through the consultations with residents of the district, varying opportunities and methods of addressing the negative aspects and current problems with the provision of open space were encouraged in order to determine how the public would want to see the problems addressed. These include :

- increased education for the public on open space in terms of :
 - providing signage and information boards on open space sites therefore promoting availability and hopefully increasing usage
 - ensuring that people see the benefits of open space
 - encouraging people to respect open space
- provision of specific wildlife areas for the public to use and become more educated with wildlife
- provision of designated cycle tracks
- provision of specific dog walking areas like the one within Welland Park
- additional litter collection bins and dog fouling bins
- develop forests and woodland through further tree planting
- increased dialogue between the Council and local groups to enable the improvement of open spaces.

External agencies and organisations

4.20 There are many varying external agencies and organisations that impact on the provision and quality of open space within the district. These agencies were therefore consulted and include the Countryside Agency, English Nature, British Waterways and local agencies such as the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The key issues emerging from consultations with responding agencies are outlined below:

Influencing open space and funding

4.21 Many agencies interlink in liaison with national, regional and local initiatives and on local action plans.

4.22 The Countryside Agency are involved with the provision of open space through influencing policies and funding specific projects within urban areas e.g. Doorstep Greens which provides funding for community groups to create accessible useable green space close to where they live.

4.23 Many agencies get involved in funding partnerships and involving the community is a key issue to the success of improving and providing new open spaces.

4.24 The availability of revenue funding is becoming an increasingly critical issue in maintaining and providing good quality areas of open space which are accessible to the public.

4.25 There are 14 Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the district a number of which are privately owned, with varying levels of accessibility. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust own two of these sites and manage four; Launde Big Wood, Launde Park Wood, Great Merrible Wood and Tilton Railway Crossing.

4.26 The Trust's quality standard reads: 'Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust's Nature Reserves must have safe public access and adequate information.' The Trust acknowledges that these sites are fairly inaccessible but despite this are considered to be well used.

4.27 The Trust is keen to acquire/manage further nature reserves should suitable prospects arise.

Key issues / problems

4.28 There is an apparent lack of open space sites in the district of Harborough. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust believe there is an urgent need for more quality open space sites.

4.29 On a positive note English Nature points out that there are a number of new Local Nature Reserves planned for within the Harborough district area. As discussed in an earlier section the Harborough District Community Strategy cites that one of its aims is to increase the number of Local Nature Reserves from 1 to 5 by 2010.

4.30 The quality of the few large open space sites that exist is considered good and they are well managed.

4.31 Apart from Welland Park the accessibility to most open spaces is poor necessitating vehicle use. The four nature reserves owned by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust are remote and only accessible for mobile able-bodied people who have access to a vehicle.

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- 4.32 The Countryside Agency believe the rural nature of the district means there is good potential for open space provision, in particular the linkage of sites through a network of green corridors consisting of cycleways and footpaths.

Good examples

- 4.33 Through the consultations both verbally and through questionnaires many good examples of open space sites were discussed. These will be highlighted in the specific open space type sections that follow, and in the summaries relating to quality and accessibility.

Summary

- 4.34 Consultations both internally within the District Council and externally through parish councils, agencies and residents of the district have extracted both similar key issues and some varying issues with regards to open space provision within the district.
- 4.35 The main issue emerging is the lack of provision for children and young people particularly teenagers within the district, and the perceived inaccessibility of some sites by residents.
- 4.36 The management and design of open space should include the community as this provides a sense of ownership and will assist in overcoming and shortcomings in the quality of open space sites.
- 4.37 Quality of sites is important to all consulted, and dog fouling and litter are thought to be a particular problem within the district.