

Strategic context

3.1 This strategic review sets in context the analysis within this local needs assessment by reviewing:

- the current situation regarding the provision of open space nationally
- the range of national, regional, and local strategic documents and organisations that may have a direct or possibly indirect influence and/or impact upon the provision of open space and leisure facilities within Harborough.

The National Situation

3.2 Research undertaken by the government in producing its paper 'Improving Urban Parks, play areas and green spaces' confirms the exceptional importance of urban green space to the future of towns and cities.

3.3 Urban green space plays a significant role in the day-to-day life of urban dwellers by :

- i) virtue of its existence – simply knowing it's there and its contribution to the landscape and wildlife
- ii) providing local free use for recreation and enjoyment
- iii) providing focal points in bringing communities together

3.4 Despite the enormous benefits that open spaces can bring, there are real concerns about the current state of provision in the UK.

3.5 In this country, total visits to parks is around 2.5 billion per annum which is more than all the other leisure services put together with only around £600 million spent on their upkeep. Around £400 million is spent nationally subsidising less than 100 million visits to local authority sport and leisure centres.¹

3.6 Whilst there are still some examples of good and innovative practice throughout the country, many parks, open spaces and play areas have suffered from decades of neglect and decline, a lack of investment, poor maintenance and a failure to adjust to changing social demands.

3.7 It appears that there is a correlation between quality of open spaces and areas of deprivation. The more depressed the area the poorer the local park and open spaces.

3.8 The severity of the national situation was highlighted in the recent Public Park Assessment produced by the Urban Parks Forum, which highlighted that:

- park revenue budgets have declined by around 20% over the last 20 years- this equates to a revenue expenditure deficit of around £126 million per year

¹ 'Taken to Task' – Leisure Manager (September 2002)

- the total cumulative under spend over the last 20 years is in the region of £1.3 billion resulting in a serious decline in the infrastructure and condition of parks and open spaces
 - only 18% of parks stocks were reported to be in good condition, 69% fair and 13% poor
 - good parks stocks are improving whilst poor stocks are declining
 - only 44% of local authorities have a dedicated parks strategy
 - 37% of local authorities reported that the overall condition of their open space portfolio is 'in decline'.
- 3.9 Parks, open spaces, play areas and countryside areas are now seen as a key element in an urban renaissance.
- 3.10 Recent political developments suggest that the case for better stewardship of parks and open spaces is now being recognised.
- 3.11 In 1999, The House of Commons Environment Sub Committee undertook an inquiry into Town and Country Parks. The Select Committee's report makes a number of recommendations to Government and local authorities, including:
- the establishment of an Urban Parks and Greenspace Agency
 - the establishment of a new 'Green Tax' to provide substantial funds for parks investment
 - new research to chart the increase/decrease in cost and quantity of green space provision
 - making parks safer should be a priority under Crime and Disorder Strategies
 - all local authorities should have an **open spaces strategy** or master plan.

Green Spaces, Better Places – DTLR – The Final Report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce (2002)

Improving urban parks, play areas and green spaces – DTLR, 2002

- 3.12 The vital importance of parks and other urban green spaces in enhancing the urban environment and the quality of city life has been recognised in both the Urban Taskforce report and the Urban White Paper. The research was commissioned by the DTLR in April 2001, and was conducted by the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield.
- 3.13 Urban Green Space is defined as land that consists predominantly of unsealed, permeable, soft surfaces such as soil, grass, shrubs and trees. It is the umbrella term for all such areas whether or not they are publicly accessible or publicly managed.

3.14 The key findings of this report are:

- research confirms the importance of urban green spaces - it is estimated that, in England, over 33 million people make over 2.5 billion visits to urban green spaces each year
- the five main barriers deterring people from using urban green spaces are:
 - lack of, or poor condition of, facilities (including play facilities for children)
 - other users (including anti-social behaviour)
 - concerns about dogs and mess
 - safety and other psychological issues (eg feelings of vulnerability and inertia)
 - environmental quality issues such as litter, graffiti and vandalism
- in addition, access issues are of concern to the elderly and particularly to people with disabilities
- most of the barriers are resource issues which relate to the location, accessibility or environmental quality of urban green spaces and could therefore be overcome if planners, designers and managers of these spaces could address them satisfactorily
- the most frequently mentioned characteristics of the ideal urban green space were vegetation, play opportunities, comforts, good access, sport and events
- there is no clear link between levels of spending and the extent of good or innovative practice.

Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener – ODPM, October 2002

3.15 Over the past five years, action across the country has led to many new parks and green spaces. For example, there are now 245 new millennium greens and major new parks that have been created as part of regeneration programmes.

3.16 Many parks and green spaces have been given a new lease of life by networks of 'friends' and local groups and by local businesses, working together on projects to improve them. For example, more than 500 green spaces have been supported by the New Opportunities Fund's Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Programme, and Groundwork, through the Barclays Site Savers scheme has transformed more than 600 derelict or underused sites into community spaces and play areas. The Heritage Lottery Funds Urban Parks Programme has provided new investment to more than 200 historic parks and gardens.

3.17 The Government agrees that parks and green spaces need more visible champions and clearer structures for co-ordinating policy and action better, and at all levels. These changes could significantly raise their profile and achieve better outcomes, which would also be promoted by the added focus that a national body could bring.

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- 3.18 The Government also believes that strong local leadership is essential for improving parks and green spaces. There is a growing belief that because parks are not mandatory they are often at a disadvantage compared with other council services. This has led to concerns that parks services have been taken for granted, and have lost local support and priority, skills and investment. Improving the parity of parks and green spaces with other local authority services will require a shared vision, integrated approaches and strategic planning at the local level.
- 3.19 Green spaces are predominantly owned, managed and maintained by local authorities. However, local people, businesses and the voluntary sector are increasingly taking action to improve the quality of the spaces and places where they live. Effective partnership working and engagement of local people have been proven to achieve results that better meet users' needs, and increase the sense of local ownership. Partnership also makes more effective use of resources, facilitates the sharing of expertise and skills and can help to meet a range of community priorities.
- 3.20 Total resources available to urban parks and green spaces have increased significantly over the past five years. Central Government revenue funding to local authorities for parks and green space services is provided as part of the 'environment protection and cultural services block' (EPCS). In addition to direct central funding, a range of new funding opportunities are complementing local expenditure.
- 3.21 Central government provides significant funding through regeneration and renewal programmes. At a regional level, the Regional Development Agencies support improvements to urban green spaces through their target to deliver urban renaissance and excellence in design. A big contribution is also being made to improve the quality of urban parks and green spaces by Lottery programmes, in particular the Heritage Lottery Fund and the New Opportunities Fund.
- 3.22 Kent County Council, Kent Police and the Chief Constable of Kent have set up an innovative Rural Partnership aimed at building community confidence and reassurance by reducing crime and fear of crime, deterring anti-social behaviour, improving residents' access to local authority services and fostering social inclusion.
- 3.23 Twelve pilot areas each have a rural community warden who works alongside a rural police constable. The role of the warden is to support the local rural community with a conspicuous uniformed presence based in the locality. The partnership is promoting community solidarity and is preventing and reducing crime and fear of crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Voluntary Quality of Life and Cross-Cutting Indicators (April 2001 – March 2002)

- 3.24 The Audit Commission consulted on a set of voluntary Quality of Life indicators for local authorities during autumn 2000. The exercise was prompted by the new powers given to local authorities in the Local Government Act 2000 to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their area.
- 3.25 All the proposed indicators are designed to paint a picture of the quality of life in the local area and to challenge all partners locally to address the issues within their community strategies.

- 3.26 Open spaces provide a major factor in the quality of people's lives and this was demonstrated with 5 of the 32 Quality of Life Factors having a direct link with the provision of open spaces. These factors were :
- area of parks and green spaces per 1,000 head of population (includes urban parks and open spaces plus other 'public open areas')
 - percentage of rivers and canals rated as good or fair quality
 - area of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population (ha) - Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are for both people and wildlife and give people opportunities to study, learn and enjoy nature.
 - the area of land designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - provide wonderful opportunities for people to enjoy wildlife and landscape.
 - kilometres of dedicated cycle routes per 100km of principal and other local authority roads.

Claiming Your Share: A Guide to External Funding for Parks and Green Space Community Groups

- 3.27 The document provides guidance to a host of groups and organisations who wish to apply for funding to improve parks and open spaces. There is an acknowledgment that park budgets for local authorities have been reduced over the years and that community groups have the best chance of securing funding to improve green spaces.
- 3.28 The document highlights the difference between revenue and capital funding, the different types of funding available and provides guidance on how to make a funding application. A list of funding and grant-giving bodies is also provided and these are divided into a number of thematic categories according to the types of project they provide money for. These groups are:
- Education
 - Environment and Regeneration
 - Heritage
 - Horticulture
 - Non-Specific
 - Social Inclusion
 - Sport and Recreation

Sustainable Futures: Building for the Future – A Funding Opportunity

- 3.29 The Government plans for building sustainable communities, launched through the 'Sustainable Futures: Building for the Future' document in early February 2003 included funding for parks and open spaces totalling £201 million.
- 3.30 This is in response to the identified need to create and maintain places in which people want to live with parks and open spaces being a key consideration as they form a focal point of community life.
- 3.31 The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has set up CABE Space to promote the role of parks and open spaces in the UK. A number of reports

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have been commissioned, and the unit provides advice on strategic issues in relation to parks management, as well as improving the public profile of the service.

- 3.32 It is hoped that there will be funding for over 5,000 projects with a large proportion of the money being available for environmental regeneration schemes. In fact £89 million has been allocated for a 'liveability' fund supporting Local Authorities to improve public spaces across the country.
- 3.33 Further funding is in addition to other existing major funding opportunities such as NOF Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Programme (£96 million committed by the end of 2002) and Heritage Lottery Fund Urban Parks Programme (£255 million committed by the end of 2002).
- 3.34 This local assessment of open space and sport and recreation provision in Harborough will help to strategically identify priorities, in terms of areas and specific sites where funding may assist in enhancing existing green spaces.

Regional and local strategic documents

County context

Love Leicestershire: Leicestershire Cultural Strategy Partnership

- 3.35 The DCMS encouraged local authorities to produce a Cultural Strategy by the end of 2002. The DCMS required such strategies to consider a diverse range of cultural activities that fall within the Council's area of work, including arts, sports, heritage, children's play, parks, tourism and countryside recreation. The various local authorities of Leicestershire along with the voluntary and private sectors worked in partnership to produce a strategy with four underpinning themes. These are:
- strengthening of communities
 - celebrating Leicestershire
 - improving lifestyles and health
 - building a creative economy
- 3.36 The strategy highlights the need for all communities to have access to relevant forms of cultural provision. Consultation revealed there should be more opportunities for young people, as well as ensuring the elderly have access to cultural activities. There is also a need for cultural activities to be more inclusive targeting those groups previously isolated.
- 3.37 A key theme of the Strategy is the idea of creating a county to be proud of. At the heart of the theme entitled 'Celebrating Leicestershire' is the preservation and development of Leicestershire's cultural assets, of which open spaces are seen as a key element. The strategic aims include:
- conserve, enhance and promote Leicestershire's unique landscape, ecology and built heritage
 - promote and protect Leicestershire's parks, gardens, open spaces, playing fields and rural assets to residents and visitors alike
 - involve local people in identifying and preserving what is special and important.
- 3.38 In addition, a number of strategic aims with specific references to open spaces are highlighted:
- develop more community use of allotments – including young people's schemes and providing habitats for wildlife
 - provide more opportunities for young people's leisure interests
 - develop more community and cultural use of public spaces.
- 3.39 The Strategy recognises the close links between culture, health and well-being and the role that sport and outdoor recreation has to play in supporting a good quality of life. It must therefore be ensured that everybody can access relevant facilities. The strategic aims set out to help improve lifestyles and health and contain a number of specific references to open space. They are:
- to develop opportunities for local people to benefit from and help conserve the natural environment and green spaces, including playing fields
 - to encourage access for all to leisure facilities and their outreach programmes

- to improve rights of way and access in rural areas for cycling, riding and walking
- to encourage greater access to children's leisure facilities and activities

3.40 The consultation findings highlighted a number of cultural areas the residents of Leicestershire would like to see enhanced, the one direct reference to open spaces was the call for an improvement in the natural environment, country parks and allotments.

Leicestershire and Rutland Sports and Recreation Forum, Facilities Planning Model Assessments, November 2002

3.41 The assessment uses the Facilities Planning Model (FPM) in order to identify the extent to which the current provision of sports halls and swimming pools meet the needs of the current population.

3.42 Key findings for Harborough were:

- core public supply of sports halls is inadequate for the needs of the district's residents
- the two main facilities import considerable demand from outside of the district because of their location
- if education facilities are considered sports hall provision is adequate
- the district is therefore dependent upon education facilities and their continued availability
- with regard to swimming pools and taking into account the new Lutterworth Sports Centre which opens in 2004, there is sufficient supply to meet the levels of demand.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland; Playing Fields Assessment and Strategy February 2003

3.43 The Playing Fields Assessment and Strategy was undertaken in early 2003 using the methodology [now superseded] set out in *The Playing Pitch Strategy 1991* and covered the geographical area of Charnwood Borough, Melton Borough, Rutland County, parts of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough, Oadby and Wigston Borough, Braunstone SAZ in addition to Harborough District.

3.44 Playing pitches are an important aspect of any Open Space Strategy so the findings of such a report require due consideration. Although the document was very broad in terms of its geographical coverage, there were a number of Harborough-specific observations made and strategic priorities recommended. The document will be discussed in more detail in section 10.

Local context

Harborough District Local Plan

- 3.45 The Harborough District Local Plan was adopted in 2001 and covers the whole district. This open space needs assessment will contribute to the production of new policies and recommendations, and to the development of further SPDs. The main functions of the local plan are to:
- set out detailed policies and specific proposals for the development and use of land
 - provide a detailed framework for development control
 - provide local communities with the opportunity to participate in the planning process
 - allocate land for specific purposes in general conformity with the structure plan.
- 3.46 The local plan outlines a number of recommendations and policies relevant to open space, indicating that where possible, the Council will support initiatives to preserve and protect open space, and will deny planning permission for developments where there may be negative effects on green corridors, sites of ecological or geological interest, wetlands, marshes, ponds, lakes, waterways or disused railways.
- 3.47 Standards produced by The National Playing Fields Association are used in order to quantify levels of provision within the district, and a number of areas are identified as having overall deficiencies. The plan states that the NPFA standard is appropriate for use as a result of the dispersed nature of recreation provision in the district and the desire to provide pitches which serve the main catchment concentrations of existing and proposed development.
- 3.48 In addition, the plan states that playing fields are normally protected from development because of their recreational value. The loss of these pitches and fields will be resisted where it would result in a net loss of facilities or where this loss would be considered detrimental to the character of the area.
- 3.49 The plan also considers allotments, indicating that although there appear to be sufficient allotments within the district at present to meet the demand, any proposals to develop existing allotments should make provision to replace allotments in use within the preceding five years and to satisfy future demands.
- 3.50 It is also recognised that a number of cemetery sites within the district are nearing capacity and new sites will therefore be required. Policy LR23 therefore takes into account the existing cemeteries and states the criteria which any potential development is required to meet to gain planning permission.
- 3.51 In addition to policies of protection and improvement of existing natural space, the plan also deals with indoor and outdoor sport and recreation facilities. The plan indicates that the Council will grant planning permission to expand the range of indoor recreation where a number of criteria are met including the proximity of the development to the settlement, provision of adequate landscaping and vehicle access

and the potential adverse effect of the scheme on other developments. The plan also recognises the contribution that private facilities make to the provision of sport and recreation facilities within the district.

3.52 A number of themes relating to policies regarding open space were raised in the local plan issues papers. These included:

- a recommendation by Sport England that policies should be produced in line with PPG17 and commuted sums should be calculated
- the need for facilities for young people
- the requirement for additional facilities for Broughton Astley
- potential to redevelop allotments as many remain unused – a number of these sites could be used to provide alternative leisure provision
- British Waterways would like to see the inclusion of a policy relating to the protection and promotion of the canal and towpath network as sport and recreation opportunities
- there is a perception that the area is poorly served with regard to large scale parks / nature reserves and country parks
- policies should include the protection of existing open spaces
- developers should all make contributions to the provision of open space within the district.

3.53 In addition to the general themes raised, a number of residents and organisations made comments specific to different areas or types of open space facility.

Local Plan Review 2006 –2016

3.54 The current Local Plan adopted in 2001 runs until 2006. Harborough District Council has begun the process of reviewing the Local Plan realising the need to keep the proposals and plans contained within it as up to date and relevant as possible. In reviewing the Plan, the end date of the existing Local Plan is being rolled forward to 2016.

3.55 The first stage in the Local Plan Review was the production of a series of Issues Papers on key topics. Residents were consulted through these Issues Papers in September and October 2003. A whole range of topics were discussed in these Issue Papers many which touched upon the provision of open space. Comments relating to specific types of open space will be referred to in the appropriate sections of the study.

Harborough District Community Strategy, Harborough District Local Strategic Partnership

3.56 The Strategy is an overall plan for improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of local communities within the district of Harborough. At the heart of the Strategy is the Harborough District 2010 Vision, a long-term vision of how the District may look in 2010. This hopes to see:

- the diversity of natural habitats and wildlife encouraged and enhanced which would see the number of Local Nature Reserves increased from 1 to 5

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- local people benefiting from a wide range of leisure and sporting activities that add to their quality of life and wellbeing
- an increasing number of people enjoying arts and cultural activities
- people having direct use of facilities within their own locality or good access to them elsewhere
- more citizens contributing to community life through individual or group action.

Cultural Strategy On Street Survey - September 2002

- 3.57 The purpose of the study was to identify the use of, and attitudes towards, the provision of cultural facilities and activities within Harborough.
- 3.58 The Strategy was informed by 474 face-to-face interviews with local residents. These were conducted in the centres of Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Broughton Astley.
- 3.59 The vast majority of respondents (89%) either agreed or strongly agreed that:
- “Cultural activities increase the quality of life for individuals and the community and can help bring communities together.”
- 3.60 The survey found that the residents of Market Harborough are more likely to visit parks and open spaces, with 62% indicating they had done so in the last month. This compared with 54% of respondents from Broughton Astley and 50% of respondents from Lutterworth.
- 3.61 The two main factors influencing how often respondents participate in cultural activities is awareness of what is available (55%) and the distance of such facilities (41%).
- 3.62 Virtually all respondents considered the provision of parks and open spaces in Harborough to be adequate. Opinion was more divided on the provision of existing sports and leisure facilities. For example, 39% of residents consider that existing sports centres in Harborough are inadequate.
- 3.63 When it came to rating the provision, 65% of respondents rated the provision of parks and open spaces as good or very good and a similar percentage also rated public footpaths as good or very good.
- 3.64 The most common suggestions for improving cultural provision in Harborough were:
- a need for better accessible information in order to increase awareness
 - provision of more activities free of charge or at a discounted rate
 - improve the range of activities available
 - improve the accessibility of facilities and activities
- 3.65 In terms of future developments 35% of respondents would like to see an improvement in the provision of swimming and leisure facilities. This opinion was more pronounced from those respondents in Lutterworth and Broughton Astley. The

Strategy suggests sports and leisure provision is adequate in Market Harborough but provision in the other areas requires further investigation.

Harborough DC Health and Community Development (Quality of Life) – Leisure, Audit Commission Inspection Report, August 2003

- 3.66 The report states that the leisure services provided by the Leisure and Community Development Section of Harborough District Council are 'good' and have 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 3.67 The aim of the leisure service is summarised as:
- 'the provision of a wide range of leisure services to meet community needs and which enhance health, environment, community safety and quality of life.'
- 3.68 The service includes 124 parks, open spaces and amenity green space, 5 allotment sites, 18 play areas, Harborough museum, Market Harborough Leisure Centre and Lutterworth Pool. It has a number of key targets:
- contribute to developing and maintaining a positive living environment
 - ensure that services are inclusive and accessible to all sections of the community
 - encourage, promote and provide opportunities for healthier lifestyles
 - promoting community development through social interaction and participation
 - open Lutterworth Sports Centre
 - develop Lutterworth Country Park.
- 3.69 The report acknowledges that the service provides a wide range of facilities and opportunities centred on the leisure centre and swimming pool. There are also events and activities in local communities aimed at all ages and abilities such as 'Harborough in Bloom' as well as a strong focus on youth activities in rural areas.
- 3.70 The report does however argue that leisure facilities do not target particular groups. It suggests more consultation is required to ensure a 'balanced programme' is achieved that meets the needs of the district as a whole.
- 3.71 Play areas, community allotments and parks and open spaces for parishes and housing sites are well distributed across Harborough. Although placed strategically throughout the district, leisure centre sites are not conducive to regular use by the rural community. Opportunities for participation in sport at a purpose built venue are limited in the north of the district.

Making a Difference: Sport and Recreation Plan for the Harborough District April 2004-April 2007

- 3.72 At the time of writing (May 2004) Harborough District Council were in the process of writing a Sports and Recreation Plan and only a draft copy was available.

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- 3.73 The Plan briefly outlines what Harborough District Council's Leisure Services hope to achieve and implement over the next three years. The plan is divided into 5 work areas which all have their own aims but which interlink with each other. These are:
- Community Development- through partnerships develop activities which improve quality of life and promote social inclusion to enable people to feel more involved as active members of the community
 - Development Pathways- provide pathways to encourage children and young people to progress their talent and enthusiasm for sport to an appropriate level of their choice
 - Facilities- to increase and broaden the number and types of people using sports facilities, in particular those operated by the Council
 - School Sport- through working in partnership develop programmes and activities which ensure that a range of out of school hours opportunities are available to clubs and the wider community, whilst also raising the standard of PE in schools
 - Club/Coach Development- develop and support sports clubs to offer quality sporting opportunities to encourage young people to participate in sport, offering a pathway for them to progress, whilst developing their skills and knowledge.
- 3.74 Each work area has a number of key actions/tasks they hope to achieve over the three-year period. Specific references to facility provision are:
- to undertake a district audit of sporting facilities
 - identify levels of sports provision and areas of under/over provision
 - produce a Harborough Leisure Map highlighting the districts leisure facilities
 - promote usage of leisure sites across the district

Harborough District Council Survey of Young People: 2004

- 3.75 The Council has recently completed a survey undertaken by De Montford University, considering the needs of young people. This study was undertaken using a series of focus groups across the district, enabling qualitative analysis of common themes. A number of issues relevant to open space emerged including:
- infrequent and inappropriate public transport – young people are unable to reach social and sports events easily, particularly in the evenings
 - the demand for facilities for teenagers – somewhere appropriate where they are able to meet and socialise – many young people feel that they have nothing to do during the evening.

Harborough District Council Youth Transport Survey (2004)

3.76 The findings of this survey primarily supported the findings of the Survey of Young People. This questionnaire was administered in the form of questionnaires, and over 1700 questionnaires were returned.

3.77 The main issues identified from the responses to the questionnaire relating to open space were:

- although many depend on public transport to access leisure facilities in the evenings and weekends, services are not available at convenient or appropriate times
- potential improvements suggested to the public transport network included:
 - more frequent buses
 - later buses
 - buses to more places
 - increased services on Sundays and to special events
 - fare reductions for young people.

Suggested Environmental and Wildlife Improvements Document

3.78 A local group produced this document campaigning for the introduction of 'low impact' changes to a number of outdoor amenity spaces in order to encourage wildlife to use them. Such changes include the addition of bird boxes, creation of ponds and planting of vegetation that would encourage wildlife.

3.79 The document identifies 12 sites which it believes could be developed as wildlife friendly areas. The sites in question are mainly owned by Harborough District Council and as a result any changes would have to be by means of a partnership approach.

3.80 The sites include:

- Hammond Arboretum
- Trees by Logan Street recreation ground
- Small copse near Tungstone Factory
- St Mary in Arden Church
- Old County Council tree nursery

External Agencies

3.81 There are a number of external agencies that impact on the provision of open space within the district of Harborough.

British Waterways – Strategy and Plans

3.82 British Waterways has the vision of a sustainable and integrated network of waterways throughout Britain, to provide maximum benefit to society both now and in the future.

3.83 British Waterways also recognises the wider role of the waterways and believes that waterways can deliver economic, social and environment/heritage benefits.

3.84 In April 2003 it published its new planning policy document '*Waterways and Development Plans*'. The publication shows how local authorities, in partnership with

British Waterways, can maximise the benefits of waterspaces through the planning system.

3.85 The plan responds to Waterways for Tomorrow (June 2000) in which the Government wished to support the development of waterways through the planning system to increase the economic, environmental and social benefits offered by waterways.

3.86 Inland waterways are also controlled by the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) whose aim is :

”to facilitate the management, maintenance and development of the inland waterways for navigation as an economic, environmental, recreational and social resource“.

3.87 As part of their response to the Issues Papers for the local plan, British Waterways indicated that it believes that Harborough District is one of the more fortunate districts in terms of leisure and recreational development and seeks to ensure the current facilities are retained and seen as an asset to the area.

3.88 This belief is reflected by the presence of Foxton Locks within the district, which is a nationally recognised site, and the Incline Plane Barge lift on the Grand Union Canal. The commitment to developing provision in the area is further evident through the recent renovations of the Union Wharf canal basin in Market Harborough.

The Waterways Trust

3.89 The Waterways Trust was established in March 1999 and is a central force in the regeneration of waterways. It has a vision of a network that is “revitalized, valued, supported and enjoyed by all sections of the community.

3.90 Aims and objectives of the trust include:

- heighten awareness and enjoyment of the waterways
- facilitate sustainable regeneration
- promote broader understanding of the value of the waterways
- become a major fundraiser and grant body.

3.91 The key priorities of these agencies will be considered when looking at the provision of green corridors within Harborough.

English Nature

3.92 English Nature is a government agency concerned with wildlife and geology and is a key partner of the countryside agency, which aims to achieve improved understanding of the relationship between access and nature conservation. English Nature is responsible for selecting and designating SSSI's. There are currently 14 SSSIs (see Section 6.2) located within Harborough District Council.

3.93 English Nature attempts to :

- facilitate and encourage access to National Nature Reserves

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- support initiatives aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of open cohabitats
 - monitor the affects of access on wildlife sites across the country
 - stress the value of local sites and recommend that local authorities develop partnerships for the provision of local sites and SSSI's.
- 3.94 Key position statements of English Nature include:
- access to the countryside and urban greenspace – there is a need for access close to where people live
 - respect for nature – access needs to be carefully arranged so that no problems for nature conservation are posed
 - access should be considered in light of policies of sustainable development and biodiversity
 - local sites are important for quality of life both in rural and urban areas.
- 3.95 The concept of standards for the provision of accessible natural greenspace in towns and cities arose from a body of work in the early 1990s that sought to recognise the importance of nature in the urban context. English Nature subsequently adopted the idea, publishing Research Report No 153 'Accessible natural green space in towns and cities – a review of appropriate size and distance criteria' in 1995.
- 3.96 In the context of a new interest in the value of green space, English Nature was concerned to find that its accessible natural green space standards seemed to be little used. In 2001 a project was therefore commenced to look again at the standards model in order to determine whether its validity could still be supported.
- 3.97 The review found that recent work broadly endorsed the scientific basis of the Research Report No 153, though many aspects of the work that green space plays in an urban context are thinly covered. However, the value of green space in supporting biodiversity and human recreation was found to be well supported and the structure of the standard itself withstood this scrutiny.
- 3.98 The key recommendations of the review include:
- that **English Nature** should provide additional support to the model by providing practical guidance, implementing an outreach strategy to raise the profile of the model
 - that **local authorities** should develop green space strategies as a means of ensuring balanced green space planning, and should set locally appropriated green space standards
 - that **central government** should work towards the development of a single framework for integrated green space planning.
- 3.99 The English Nature Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) requires:
- that no person should live more than 300m from their nearest area of natural greenspace of at least 2ha in size

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- provision of at least 1ha of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population
- that there should be at least one accessible 20ha site within 2km from home
- that there should be one accessible 100ha site within 5km
- that there should be one 500ha site within 20 km.

3.100 The standards were justified in the following ways:

- everyday contact with nature is important for well-being and quality of life
- everyone should be able to enjoy this contact, in safety, without having to make any special effort or journey to do so
- natural greenspace in towns and cities can play an important role in helping safeguard our national treasure of wildlife and geological features
- accessible natural greenspaces give everyone an excellent chance to learn about nature and help to protect it in practical ways
- adequate provision of vegetated areas helps to ensure that urban areas continue to function ecologically.

The Environment Agency

3.101 The Environment Agency are the leading public body for protecting and improving the environment in England and Wales. Their remit covers air, land and water.

3.102 The main pressures on the midlands are identified by the Environment Agency as being:

- the growing demand for new homes and places to work
- increasing calls on essential water resources
- pressures from flooding, land contamination, and volumes of waste.

Forestry Commission

3.103 The Forestry Commission is the Government Department responsible for forestry throughout Britain. The mission of the department is to protect and expand Britain's forests and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment with key aims including :

- developing opportunities for woodland recreation
- increasing public understanding and community participation in forestry.

3.104 Forest Enterprise is an executive agency of the Forestry Commission responsible for the management of the forests, with one of its main aims being to increase opportunities for public recreation.

Wildlife Trust

3.105 The Wildlife Trust is the leading conservation charity dedicated exclusively to wildlife. It advises local authorities, community groups and landowners on nature conservation issues and has a major input into decision making on planning matters and other issues.

The Civic Trust

3.106 The Civic Trust aims to promote improvements in the quality of urban life. It is a charity devoted to “enhancing the quality of life in Britain's cities, towns and villages: the places where people live, work, shop and relax”.

3.107 The trust has commented that there is insufficient reference within PPG17 to urban ecology and the heritage aspects of landscape which are essential to the survival of the overall ecosystem and the maintenance of biodiversity.

3.108 The Civic Trust is in favour of encouraging local disadvantaged groups to engage in the running of their green spaces, but recognising that this would require large numbers of outreach workers.

3.109 The Trust, on behalf of a large steering group, carries out management of the Green Flag Awards and supports the motivational effect that this is having as local authorities aim to improve their green spaces to enable them to obtain the green flag.

National Children's Bureau – Children's Play Council

3.110 A review of children's play was undertaken between October 2002 and April 2003. This review takes into account the needs and aspirations and “play” of children between the ages of 0 and 16. The report identified four principles of successful projects:

- they are centered on children and young people – it was suggested that the most successful play spaces focus on a neighbourhood rather than catering for a whole town
- they have an attractive location with high quality play opportunities
- they fit in well with local circumstances
- they give both children and young people and parents a sense of security.

3.111 In addition, the report promotes the use of school facilities out of hours, as this offers additional play opportunities and space for young people. Young people were questioned as to the type of facility that they would like to see, and it was concluded that young people appreciated both sites that were not staffed by adults and sites where adult helpers were present.

3.112 Suggestions for facilities included:

- adventure playgrounds
- play centres
- youth cafes
- bike tracks

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- skateparks
- informal shelter and youth shelters.

3.113 The report discusses the appropriate size of provision for young people and children, and consultation questioned the benefits of providing a small number of large-scale sites in comparison to a larger number of smaller local sites. Findings indicated that young people prefer a larger number of smaller facilities that are closer to their home where they are able to meet with friends on an informal basis.

Summary

- 3.114 There is real concern regarding the state of parks and open spaces within the country particularly with the lack of investment.
- 3.115 The provision of open spaces supports wider governmental objectives such as social and community cohesion, urban renaissance and promoting a healthy and enjoyable life.
- 3.116 Any development of open spaces either new or enhancement of existing areas should take into account the bio-diversity and nature conservation opportunities and develop an increasing environmental awareness.
- 3.117 Many organisations are willing to work in partnership together in managing and developing existing open spaces and share similar aims and objectives e.g. protecting, enhancing and maximising usage and nature conservation value of open spaces.
- 3.118 There appears to be a general consensus that involving the community in managing and designing open space sites creates a sense of ownership and will assist in the maintaining the quality and maximising the usage of open space sites.
- 3.119 Local strategic documents and research highlight the importance of open space within Harborough, and support improvements, maintenance and creation of additional open space where it is perceived to be required. It is highlighted that it is important to ensure that people of all ages are able to access and appreciate the open spaces within the district.
- 3.120 In summary, this review of strategic documents highlights the importance of maintaining and improving open space sites within the district and this local needs study and the resulting strategy will contribute to achieving the wider aims of a number of local and national agencies.