

Item 13.B

Blaby District Council audit of open space, sport and recreation.

This response is sent on behalf of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum. The LLAF is an independent statutory body, set up as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000, and exists to represent the interests of everyone concerned with access to the countryside and the public rights of way network including footpaths, bridleways and byways, cycleways and areas of open access.

Section 94 of the CROW act makes it a statutory function of the forum to give advice to a range of bodies, including local authorities, on access issues in respect of land use planning matters. The Secretary of State advised that in particular forums were to focus on the impact and options for minimising possible adverse effects of planning policies and development proposals, in respect of future public access to land. Forums are tasked with identifying and expressing support for opportunities to improve public access, or associated infrastructure, which might be delivered through planning policies or new developments.

As Blaby District Council are consulting you on their 'green spaces' we wish to offer what we trust you will feel is constructive comment.

First we would make comment on what should be included as accessible public open space
(n.b. you have Play provision for children and young people in your own list twice)

For our purposes village and community halls and considered to be outside our remit. Parks and public gardens and natural green space and the footpaths etc which allow access to them are our primary concern.

As your remit includes an audit of provision we have included some detail where we know it, even though some of the categories fall outside our own areas of activity. We have spotted a number of omissions but will leave it to local representatives to bring these to your attention as they should be better informed than us.

When looking at organised sporting facilities grass pitches for Rugby, Hockey, Soccer, and Cricket etc. can often provide green space which can be enjoyed for general recreation when not in use for their primary function. Synthetic turf and other all weather pitches, Petanque Pistes, Bowling Greens and Tennis Courts less so, but Golf Courses and School Playing Fields can offer wildlife oases and improve the visual aspect from nearby paths or indeed paths crossing them. Similarly cemeteries and graveyards can provide pleasant environments for taking quiet recreation.

From our experience informal natural and semi natural green spaces serve the needs of more of the population than organised parks and of course cost far less to maintain. To enjoy these there must be an adequate network of paths and cycleways and many paths themselves provide linear open access land especially when fringed by natural growth. Some of the routes within the District should be considered accessible public open space in their own right.

Blaby as a district has one unusual problem in its very shape. There may be adequate provision in the district but if at one of the extremities of this long thin (banana shaped) district it is of little benefit to residents at the other extremity so to serve its purpose it also has to be distributed throughout the district.

We are somewhat surprised at some of the figures you quote by way of audit but some of this will be down to how you interpret any particular open space. The figure of five Parks and Gardens In the district in particular, as without much effort members came up with far more than that but you may be interpreting them as natural open space. We take it that informal open space includes greens etc left within housing developments.

Allotments are not normally open to the public but do provide green space helping the environment and visual aspects.

You do mention the designation of Access Land under the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000), which allows additional public access at specified sites in addition to traditional linear footpaths and bridleways. There is nowhere in Blaby District with the elevation to qualify leaving only common land falling within the scope of this act. Landowners could however be encouraged to dedicate land as open access under the act.

You do make the observation that improving the rights of way network to ensure that there are appropriate linkages between key open space sites and settlements in the district would improve access and promote more

sustainable forms of transport. We very strongly argue that this is possibly the most productive activity available to Blaby. You cannot create new land and the only privately owned land which might become available as amenity land invariably only happens as part of a large development which itself usually means a loss of farmland. The best way to get more benefit from what is already there is to improve access and links and to an extent, public transport.

If we are to encourage more use however we have to overcome lack of awareness and in some cases the fear of the unknown. A sign saying 'public footpath' is no use to people unaware of what is out there. It needs to say where it goes to improve user confidence in exploring larger sites or following trails.

In promoting use of the through routes you talk of involving voluntary and charitable organisations and we would suggest it should include user groups like the Leicestershire Footpaths Association and the Ramblers Association. Even equestrian organisations should be involved but the challenges of keeping a horse means that the wider public will not be likely to get involved in those activities without expert instruction.

You mention key wildlife corridors penetrating the urban areas including those around the Grand Union Canal and Rivers Soar and Sence, but neglect to mention Rothley Brook which runs from Kirby Muxloe and south to north through Glenfield. This is a highly valued wildlife corridor and the R115 bridleway which follows it on the old line of a disused railway is one of the areas we suggest should be considered an accessible public open space in its own right.

(If you have not already done so might we suggest you visit

http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/environment/countryside/environment_management/stepping_stones/stepping_stones_delivery_and_action_plan.htm)

You talk of strategic green sites but none are in the north of the district which we find surprising. The ones you mention (Fosse Meadows (Sharnford), Bouskell Park (Blaby), Glen Hills Nature Reserve (Glen Parva), Crow Mills Way (South Wigston), Osiers Nature Reserve (Braunstone), Jubilee Park (Enderby), Whetstone Way (Whetstone), Whistle Way (Narborough/Enderby) and Countesthorpe Country Park (Countesthorpe) are in some cases smaller than others we are aware of although how you define strategic is not made clear. Kirby Muxloe has a sizeable park and Ellis Park in Glenfield is bigger than some mentioned.

You list the five parks in the district as Bouskell Park Blaby 3.73ha - Franklin Park Braunstone Town 4.46ha - Glenfield Millennium Green 1.36ha - Narborough Recn. Ground 1.22ha and Northfield Park Blaby 3.39ha. There are two other parks in Glenfield alone and the Millennium Green is tiny in comparison with Ellis Park.

We note you list Burbage Common & Woods as in Blaby. It is actually in Hinckley & Bosworth. The neighbouring Aston Firs is in Blaby.

Roy J Denney, Chairman, Planning & Travel Committee
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