

Ashby de la Zouch Town Council,  
Legion House,  
South Street,  
Ashby de la Zouch,  
LE65 1BQ

## Neighbourhood Plan

The Leicestershire Local Access Forum has advised numerous authorities on their plans and members have studied the draft plan you are consulting on at present. The LLAFF 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.

We would first make some general observations.

When looking at open spaces, 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. Allotments, 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 relaxation and as such open space as such needs to be viewed in all its entirety.

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 Ashby should be considered accessible public open space in their own right. Green spaces of whatever designation also help to provide wildlife corridors improving the general biodiversity in the area.

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. 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.

By and large we find your plan as regards the matters within our remit excellent but we would make a few small specific observations.

On page 52, e) Promoting Walking and Cycling

We feel the clause “There is some evidence that more people are increasingly taking up cycling and walking for leisure and other purposes” undersells the situation and would offer you an alternate wording for this piece.

*Cycling and walking provide great potential to reduce reliance on the car for trips. The Plan area is relatively compact and has a reasonable network of footpaths, footways and cycle ways and consultations have shown these are highly prized and cherished by residents, who wish to see them protected and, wherever possible, enhanced. People are increasingly taking up walking and riding cycles and horses for leisure and other purposes. The bridleway network is disjointed and wherever possible and there are suitable surfaces we would suggest that cycleways should be made available for horse use.*

Similarly and on the same page under COMMUNITY ACTION T1 we would suggest an expanded form of words.

*In line with the County council’s ROWIP (rights of way improvement plan) the Town Council will actively seek to work with the County Council, District Council and other relevant agencies to encourage opportunities to secure improvements in the present network of footpaths and cycleways, including through developer contributions*

On page 54 under g) Public Transport we are pleased to see the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of present arrangements and wonder whether this section could be beefed up. Regarding bus services, the provision is largely confined to the Burton, Swadlincote, Ashby, Coalville, Leicester direction, plus town services. The link to the south-west has just been cut by terminating Service 7 at Measham, where it was previously at least a link to Atherstone and Nuneaton. The service to Loughborough just survives, but must be under threat. In the past Ashby was on a Birmingham - Tamworth - Ashby - Nottingham regular service, but this routing is now totally impossible. With the increase in use of EMA and the associated business parks, and the expansion of Tamworth, we would have thought there would be commercial potential in this link.

Other than these minor suggestions we consider your plan a commendable piece of work and are happy to support its adoption.

Terry Kirby, Chairman,  
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