

localplans@charnwood.gov.uk

Core Strategy Policy CS15 'Open Space, Sport and Recreation'

Formal sports provision is laid down by various guidelines and depends on the size of a development and the existing nearby facilities. Informal and semi natural open space is also needed and paths make an important contribution to people's opportunities to enjoy informal recreation and take exercise. Paths linked villages to other communities, to other paths and roads, to the mill or the pub, to shops or to the fields they worked but nowadays leisure walking is widespread and we are increasingly encouraged to use this free facility both for exercise and a means to get out into the countryside for our general health and wellbeing. Walking is inexpensive but a major health benefit.

Any development must take note of existing paths through, beside or near to the site and consider adequate and attractive access points to use them. Cycleways should also be introduced whenever practical and in more rural areas, bridleways. When we talk of existing paths they are not necessarily recorded rights of way. There are many historic rights of way not recorded yet and numerous informal desire paths which should also be accommodated. Even where any development cannot provide access to the wider path network due to different ownerships, the design and location of open spaces should be such that any future link is not precluded

The planning and design process is always well served by pre-application discussions with officers of the authority but also user groups, and the Leicestershire Local Access Forum brings many of these together and is always happy to comment constructively which can down the road, avoid objections to the final plan. As an independent statutory body, set up as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000, we 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. Access includes the provision of satisfactory means of travel to, from and through locations. We are therefore concerned with local travel by public transport.

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. Ministers have advised that in particular forums were asked 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 and identifying and expressing support for opportunities to improve public access, or associated infrastructure, which might be delivered through planning policies or new development.

Paths if to be walked for pleasure should not be contained within high fences, nor should they be alongside a hedge which is bound to grow out over the path. Any proposed building near a path should not be of such mass as to be oppressive. Paths in urban areas should not have dog legs where people can be out of sight as that encourages wrong-doing.

Paths should wherever possible be in green corridors making them more attractive but also assisting the migration of wild species. These should link open spaces to the wider countryside where possible. Public open space that is attractive and safe to use can help facilitate more active lifestyles. Green infrastructure is an essential part of any modern development including paths and parks, playing fields and woodland. It should have environmental benefits and facilitate walking and cycling. Trees and shrubs also help remove CO2 and particulates from the air improving public health.

We are generally supportive of this draft document which addresses most of our concerns but would expect planning officers to adhere to these guidelines fairly robustly. Ultimately we are looking for well connected walking and cycling routes linking a number of multi-functional open spaces encouraging people to walk rather than drive.

John Howells, Chairman Leicestershire Local Access Forum
Roy Denney, Chairman Planning & Travel Committee