

Charnwood Forest Regional Park

Topic Paper 2 : Planning Process

Planning policy and the role of spatial planning

Topic Paper 1 : Origins and Objectives discusses the historic development of planning policy in respect of Charnwood Forest.

The current planning framework for the area consists of the emerging *Local Development Frameworks* for Charnwood Borough, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough and North-West Leicestershire District, together with the County Council's *Minerals and Waste Development Frameworks*. These include, or are proposed to include, policies specific to Charnwood Forest and the Regional Park.

The East Midlands Regional Plan (2009) has been lost through the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies by the Coalition Government. The Government intends to publish a new Decentralism and Localism Bill which will set out significant changes to the way the current spatial planning system operates. It is not clear at present what the exact implications of this will be for the Charnwood Forest Regional Park.

However, the fact remains that the importance of Charnwood Forest has long been recognised in various planning documents and that there is a considerable evidence base in terms of landscape character, ecological and other environmental studies which supports a specific policy approach for the Charnwood Forest area.

The general aims of the planning system are to :

- Translate the vision for an area into a set of priorities, programmes and policies, with public sector resources to deliver them;
- Create a framework for private sector investment that promotes economic, environmental and social well-being for the area consistent with the objectives and vision;
- Co-ordinate public sector components of the vision with other agencies and processes.

In terms of spatial planning the Charnwood Forest Regional Park will be taken forward within the respective Local Development Frameworks (or their successors) of each of the district/borough councils, together with any possible county level documents which changes in planning policy may require. It is essential that spatial planning policies are consistent and complementary across administrative boundaries, heightening the

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importance of robust and transparent regional park governance arrangements to help achieve this.

Each Local Development Framework (LDF) comprises a folder of Local Development Documents (LDDs), which collectively deliver the spatial strategy for the area. A key document within each LDF is the Core Strategy, which sets out the general vision and objectives for delivering the LDF.

It is a key test of Core Strategies that they are 'deliverable', which means ensuring that partners who are essential to the delivery of a plan are signed up to it. In the context of Charnwood Forest, having agreement over the governance arrangements for the Regional Park would demonstrate that the partners are co-ordinated and that the LDF plans are deliverable.

Current planning policies for Charnwood Forest

The County Council's adopted *Minerals Development Framework* and *Waste Development Framework* each contain a specific policy for Charnwood Forest.

POLICY MCS13 The strategy for minerals development within or adjacent to **Charnwood Forest** is to ensure that:

- (i) proposals include measures to protect and enhance the character of the area, including its landscape, ecology, cultural heritage, built heritage and recreational value;
- (ii) the siting, scale and design of the development together with the materials to be used reflect and complement the character of the surrounding landscape and minimise any harm.

The waste development policy WCS12 is similarly worded.

Policy 22 of the adopted *Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy* (2009) covers Charnwood Forest and the proposed Regional Park. The Core Strategy recognises the importance of Charnwood Forest as part of the borough's green infrastructure.

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Policy 22: Charnwood Forest

Within Charnwood Forest, proposals will be supported that:

- Maintain the traditional working landscape of the forest, particularly those which involve rural diversification and sustainable tourism, including green tourism initiatives
- Provide new recreation facilities around the fringes of the area
- Provide access to and from the rural areas into and within the regional park by non vehicular means, provided that they:
 - Retain local character and complement the local landscape
 - Enhance open spaces, including the treatment of built edges
 - Enhance woodland and habitat provision and connectivity
 - Manage and enhance the cultural heritage of the area

North West Leicestershire District Council and Charnwood Borough Council have yet to publish the submission drafts of their LDF Core Strategies.

Growth and Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs)

The Regional Plan required significant amounts of new housing development in all of the three boroughs/districts which cover the Charnwood Forest area. The location of this new development has largely yet to be determined but, particularly in Coalville and Loughborough which lie close to Charnwood Forest, is likely to take the form of Sustainable Urban Extensions of a significant size. It will be important to ensure that this new development reflects the Charnwood Forest character in its design and layout. However, this new development also has the potential to create additional green infrastructure which can complement and enhance the Charnwood Forest.

Evidence bases

The *6Cs Strategic Green Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan* (May 2010), identifies Charnwood Forest as a strategic green infrastructure (GI) asset within the sub-region. The Strategy identifies Sub-Regional GI Corridors, which are significant wildlife habitat corridors or areas which form the backbone of the overall 6Cs GI network and have a crucial role to play in maintaining the network's long-term integrity. Charnwood Forest and The National Forest together form an important east-west corridor within the network. The Strategy is intended to be used in conjunction with local GI studies and strategies to help plan and deliver green infrastructure across the 6Cs sub-region in a co-ordinated manner.

The Hinckley and Bosworth *Green Infrastructure Strategy* was adopted by the borough council in October 2008. This strategy was used to develop

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Policy 20 (Green Infrastructure) of the borough's Core Strategy and will help to inform the production of Local Development Framework documents.

Landscape character assessments exist for the area at national, regional, county and district levels, as well as the specific *Charnwood Forest Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment* (2008). Charnwood Borough Council is currently preparing a landscape character assessment for their area. Those parts of Charnwood Forest which fall within North West Leicestershire District Council's area are covered by the landscape character assessment work undertaken by The National Forest when producing their *Strategy 2004-2014*.

A Historic Landscape Character study has recently been completed for Leicestershire.

Charnwood Borough Council is carrying out a Phase 1 Habitat Survey which should be published in 2011.

Charnwood Forest and The National Forest

The National Forest was originally planned to link the ancient forests of Charnwood and Needwood, and much of Charnwood Forest now falls within the eastern part of The National Forest. The distinct character of the Charnwood Forest landscape is recognised in the Government endorsed National Forest Strategy. Policies in the Strategy to retain landscape character, extend and manage woodland and other wildlife habitats, encourage new public access, promote green tourism and rural diversification, and encourage the restoration of mineral workings to appropriate biodiversity, geodiversity and recreation uses, are entirely compatible with the aims of the Regional Park concept.

Parish Plans and Village Design Statements

At the local level many settlements within the Charnwood Forest area are covered by Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans.

Parish Plans are community-led documents which look at local issues, needs and aspirations, and help to inform service provision in rural areas. Themes addressed generally include highways, transport, housing, planning, environment, education, crime, and access to information and services.

Within the Charnwood Forest area they exist for :

Groby & Field Head

Mountsorrel

Ratby

Woodhouse

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Village Design Statements are prepared with input from local people. They describe the distinctive characteristics of a settlement and provide design guidance to influence its future development. Village Design Statements can be adopted by local planning authorities and become a material consideration when determining planning applications. Within Charnwood Forest they exist for :

Newtown Linford
Quorn
Ratby
Woodhouse
Woodhouse Eaves

Conservation Area Appraisals define the important elements of a Conservation Area's character and appearance, and help with their management, often through a linked Management Plan. Within Charnwood Forest they exist for :

Anstey
Cropston
Mountsorrel
Newtown Linford
Quorn
Ratby
Rothley
Rothley Ridgeway
Swithland
Thurcaston
Woodhouse
Woodhouse Eaves

A Conservation Area Appraisal for Groby is due for completion in November 2010.

Article 4 directions are an additional measure which may be issued by local authorities where specific control over development is required. Their effect is to remove permitted development rights. Within Charnwood Forest the only area affected by an Article 4 direction is the area around The Green in Mountsorrel.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

Many individual trees and woodlands within Charnwood Forest are protected by TPOs, either orders made by Leicestershire County Council between 1949 and 1974, or orders made subsequently by district/borough councils.

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Updated November 2010 : Woodhouse added to list of Parish Plans

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