
LEISURE



LEISURE POLICIES

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9. LEISURE

INTRODUCTION

- 9.1 Positive use of leisure time is an integral part of everyday life. There is a growing awareness of the importance of sports and recreational facilities of all kinds in our towns and cities, and increasing the use of the countryside for these purposes. Local authorities have a responsibility to ensure, through the preparation of development plans, that adequate land and water resources are allocated both for organised sport and for informal recreation. Leisure facilities also have a role in attracting tourists. This must be considered in any new development of leisure facilities.
- 9.2 “Leisure” encompasses tourism, sporting and recreational activity. Tourism is considered to include not just those staying overnight or day visitors but other forms of visits, such as business conferences. Tourists and day trippers can contribute significantly to the Plan Area’s economy. Tourists spend more money per day than day visitors, with business and overseas tourists the highest spending categories of tourist. In addition, shopping for leisure, that is not including regular household and/or food shopping, is seen as an important activity contributing to tourism.

LEISURE AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

- 9.3 There should be enough space within every community to provide sufficient opportunity for human physical activity and enjoyment. The development of an adequate range of indoor and outdoor leisure facilities to permit community activity and development, the playing of sport and the enjoyment of a wide spectrum of entertainment should be encouraged.
- 9.4 Planning authorities should ensure that leisure facilities are available and accessible to as many residents as possible, including disadvantaged groups. Developments with a specific community role should be in, or adjacent to, their catchment areas. Leisure development with a wider catchment should be in locations readily accessible by public transport and by safe and convenient walking and cycling routes. Casual or formal open space can act as a buffer between housing and agriculture.
- 9.5 Provision should be made in new housing and other developments for appropriate amounts of public open space. Within larger new developments this provision may need to include a range of different types of open space and indoor community and leisure facilities.
- 9.6 Standards for the provision of open playing space should be defined in Local Plans. The National Playing Fields Association suggests a standard of 2.43 hectares per 1000 population which is split between children’s play space and provision for youth and adult play. To calculate the number of sports pitches required within this allowance, it is recommended that the methodology suggested in the National Playing Pitch Strategy (produced by the Sports Council, N.P.F.A. and the Central Council for Physical Recreation) is used. In addition to playing space, a standard for the provision of amenity open space and green space to serve the informal recreational needs of the residents of new development should be defined. Also the means by which developer contributions will be achieved, should be set in accordance with Strategy Policy 12. The provision of local facilities such as small parks and green space within 400 metres of the development should aim to reduce trip length and car use.

- 9.7 Where provision is made for land extensive leisure uses which do not include substantial built development, only small-scale built development limited to the operational requirements of the activity will be permitted where such provision does not compromise the openness of the Countryside or the urban fringe.
- 9.8 By supplementing existing attractions, the development of new leisure facilities will be a prime element in attracting more visitors to the Plan Area. Provision should cater for both local visitors and tourists. Such development should complement the existing areas catering for quiet enjoyment and serve to relieve pressure on Charnwood Forest and Rutland Water areas. To ensure that the environmental impact of such development is minimised it should be in a location which is capable of being served by public transport and compatible with the surrounding area.
- 9.9 The National Forest, beyond the boundary of the Charnwood Forest, will provide many opportunities for new and/or innovative leisure developments. These should reflect the Forest context, as set out in Strategy Policy 14.
- 9.10 The vitality and viability of town and district centres depends on retaining and developing a wide range of attractions and amenities. In particular, leisure and entertainment facilities extend the hours of use of these centres and support a 'night time economy'. Multiplex cinemas of any size should be directed towards town centres. Leicester City has a major role in providing leisure facilities, including large scale spectator facilities which have strong links with sporting, cultural and tourism activities.
- 9.11 The need for a major multi-purpose arena has been identified. This should be located in central Leicestershire and be served by a choice of transport modes to allow convenient access for the Plan Area residents.
- 9.12 Much of the need for major investment in sports facilities could be obviated through more limited expenditure on improving and staffing existing facilities at schools and community colleges. The existence of recreational facilities in educational use should be taken into account when assessing future need.
- 9.13 Leisure development can provide a low cost, practical use for derelict sites that would otherwise be difficult to recycle. The re-use of sites in this way may reduce the take up of greenfield land. Certain sites may be suitable for particular activities such as noisy sports on sites remote from residential development, water sports on water filled sites and air activities on disused airfields.
- 9.14 Leicestershire County Council has approved a Tourism Strategy for Leicestershire that seeks to establish a partnership between the private sector, local authorities and other relevant organisations with a view to developing and promoting a wide range of the highest quality standard tourist facilities and amenities. Sensitive and well planned tourism development can play a key role in assisting economic development and in ensuring environmental considerations are respected. Rutland has also adopted a Tourism Strategy aimed at guiding the development of the local tourism industry.
- 9.15 Needs for new recreation facilities should be identified in Local Plans.
- 9.16 This Policy will also be implemented by the Three Councils giving technical and financial support when possible to voluntary groups, town and parish councils to help them create or improve community recreation facilities. Commercial sector investment in new leisure facilities will also be encouraged in appropriate locations.

- 9.17 Support will be given to the upgrading of existing and development of new, quality tourist attractions and leisure facilities which complement the Plan Area's rich heritage, are sympathetic to the environment and which can alleviate pressure on known, over-used, sensitive sites by:
- a) encouraging the upgrading of existing, and development of new, quality accommodation, conference, exhibition, leisure and tourism facilities;
 - b) supporting the establishment and maintenance of a comprehensive network of tourism signposting and Tourist Information Centres;
 - c) disseminating information to the general public to increase awareness of the opportunities for participation in sport and recreation pursuits; and
 - d) taking appropriate opportunities to develop cultural, historic, architectural or ecological resources for leisure use.
- 9.18 The development of new leisure and tourism facilities will need to establish and maintain an effective transport infrastructure which assists in the attraction of incoming tourists as well as the movement of visitors and residents between attractions and facilities within the Plan Area, for example, through the promotion of Sustrans routes. Discussions should be held with bus, rail and other transport providers in the public and private sector on ways of improving access, by alternatives to the private car, to leisure and tourism facilities, especially at night.

Leisure Policy 1: Leisure and Tourism Development

Provision will be made for suitable formal and informal leisure facilities within new built development.

Provision will also be made for:

- a) sustainable forms of tourism such as walking and cycling;**
- b) proposals which reduce pressure on areas presently experiencing the greatest leisure and tourism demand;**
- c) the improvement and establishment of sports facilities which provide for a local, regional or national need;**
- d) large scale spectator facilities which demonstrate effective management of the peaks of demand and minimise the effect on residential areas;**
- e) development which supports the heritage of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland; and**
- f) opportunities to create employment and achieve investment in the Regeneration Areas.**

PROTECTION OF RECREATION LAND AND BUILDINGS

- 9.19 In applying Leisure Policy 2 account will be taken of:
- a) whether or not suitable alternative provision is to be made close enough to serve the same community without significant increase in travel distances;
 - b) the land or building is no longer in use and there is no demand for its future use;
 - c) the development is to provide compatible or ancillary facilities for existing recreational activities. There will be a strong presumption against the acceptability of any development which compromises the landscape and environmental quality of any other spaces used for public or private recreation.
- 9.20 Occasionally, open space may provide the only opportunity for development which will create community benefits that outweigh the loss of open land. Consideration must be given to the balance of facilities resulting from this process but in principle, the Policy need not interfere with the creation of those vital community assets.
- 9.21 Assessments of recreation need should be undertaken to allow the local authority to make objective decisions on the potential for disposal of any surplus local authority open land. Leicestershire County Council will supply assessments of recreation need to District Councils to assist them in determining applications for planning permission and where appropriate, to give financial and technical support to voluntary groups or relevant local authorities seeking to maintain threatened recreation sites in that use.
- 9.22 A consistent approach by all Three Councils to assessment of the need for continued recreation use of otherwise surplus land will be imperative to ensure the implementation of these policies.

Leisure Policy 2: Protection of Recreation Land and Buildings

It will not be acceptable for land or buildings in recreation use and serving a particular community to be redeveloped for non recreational uses unless:

- a) suitable alternative provision is made close enough to serve the same community;**
- b) the site no longer provides open space or other facilities which are essential for private or public use; or**
- c) the site is not needed to protect the quality of the built environment.**

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

- 9.23 There is a significant and growing use of public rights of way for recreation. The rights of way network is the single most important means by which the public can enjoy the countryside. In the Plan Area the network consists of approximately 2,200 miles of public footpaths, bridleways, roads used as public paths (RUPPs) and byways open to all traffic (BOTATs).
- 9.24 The improvement of the rights of way network is one of the priorities of the Leicestershire Rural Strategy and Action Programme adopted in 1995 and is outlined in more detail in the Rights of Way Strategy published in 1994. Additional resources are being provided by the Countryside Commission to achieve the target of opening and improving the whole network by the year 2004. It is anticipated that this target will be achieved.
- 9.25 In order to maintain the rights of way network it is important that developments which affect public rights of way take due account of them at an early stage. If possible, they should be preserved on their original line. Public rights of way can often become a positive feature of a new development. If this is not feasible, they may be diverted through the appropriate legislation onto an acceptable alternative route. The alternative route should be safe, secure, and convenient for the public to use. Due account should be taken of the needs of the users of the route.
- 9.26 It is also recognised that there has been a significant growth in the demand for leisure cycling. A substantial network of cycle routes has recently been established within the Plan Area which passes both through and between rural and urban areas. This includes part of the National Cycle Network launched by the cycle charity Sustrans in 1994. The route, which forms part of the long distance Dover to Inverness trail and its connecting "branches", provides an opportunity to develop cycle tourism and create important links for cyclists between urban and rural areas.
- 9.27 Rights of way should be promoted as a major leisure resource, protected, maintained and where appropriate extended, to allow the public access to the countryside. This Policy will be implemented by:
- a) keeping the Definitive Map up-to-date;
 - b) promoting the network by through-waymarking, publicising national and regional routes and local walks and rides, and working with Parish Councils and other agencies to encourage public awareness;
 - c) promoting access agreements and other permissive forms of access to provide wider leisure opportunities in the countryside;
 - d) developing routes suitable for use by walkers, horse riders, cyclists and the disabled along disused railway lines and similar other linear corridors to improve access to the countryside;
 - e) publishing a Cycling Plan that includes policies on leisure cycling and work in partnership with Sustrans to help develop and promote the National Cycle Network;
 - f) developing regular dialogue between the farming community, landowners, user groups and the Highway Authorities, on Rights of Way issues;
 - g) developing schemes to manage the network more effectively, including exploring the feasibility of involving farmers and volunteers in this work;

- h) ensuring that planning proposals for new developments safeguard existing rights of way, or make adequate alternative arrangements which maintain links with existing routes where appropriate; and
- i) ensuring that proposals for the restoration of mineral workings or derelict land include a revised network of rights of way which is at least as extensive as that occurring before workings began and that any opportunities for improved access to the countryside are taken.

Leisure Policy 3: Public Rights of Way and Access to the Countryside

Where development proposals affect a public right of way, arrangements should be made to safeguard the existing route. If it is not possible to maintain the existing line of the public right of way a safe and secure alternative route which has regard to the convenience of the public must be provided.

Advantage will be taken to secure appropriate, improved access into the countryside, including opportunities presented by development schemes.

The creation of new routes for leisure cycling, walking and horse-riding will be encouraged.

WATER RECREATION

- 9.28 Although the overall area of water in the Plan Area appears to be very considerable, many water sports do not have adequate opportunities for their activities. There is a particular shortage in central Leicestershire of a sailing lake of any substantial size and no current proposals would allow for the 40 hectares (100 acres) needed for a good quality sailing facility. There is also a severe shortage, throughout the Plan Area, of water available for water-skiing, jet-skiing, power boating and safe open water swimming. Rowing water is restricted but new on-shore facilities are being provided.
- 9.29 As stated in Resource Management Policy 4, water recreation can provide an acceptable after-use for a site of mineral extraction or waste disposal. Water recreation sites can also be purpose built to meet the needs of various sports. Appropriate proposals for the excavation of land by commercial or voluntary interests to create water recreation sites will be encouraged, provided these are sympathetic to the surrounding environment, particularly where they are on land that is not the best and most versatile agricultural land or needed to sustain the local community.
- 9.30 There are nearly 160 kilometres (100 miles) of navigable waterways in the Plan Area, forming an important part of the national network. Most stretches provide important wildlife habitats and some are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. These linear waterways also have considerable potential to provide opportunities for tourism and public transport within the urban area and into the countryside.

9.31 This Policy will be implemented by:

- a) ensuring that any appropriate mineral extraction sites, which could lead to the creation of lakes, are restored in a way which would meet the demand for water recreation;
- b) supporting appropriate proposals for the excavation of land to create new water sports facilities;
- c) supporting the development of the canal network and associated facilities as key recreation, tourism and public transport resources;
- d) encouraging greater public use of waterways and the water side, including improved public access, working with British Waterways, District and Unitary Authorities, and other appropriate agencies to improve the condition of the canal towpaths;
- e) supporting the continued development of facilities at Foxton Locks which will improve the interpretation of the site for visitors, provided that they are in sympathy with its rural location and will not have an adverse impact on the surrounding road network and villages;
- f) ensuring that any waterway developments respect and maintain the biodiversity of the network as wildlife corridors;
- g) continuing the work of restoring the de-watered section of the Ashby Canal;
- h) encouraging the development of the amenity potential of the Grantham Canal and discourage developments which would prejudice the eventual restoration of the Canal for navigation; and
- i) giving, where appropriate, financial and technical help to schemes proposed by voluntary associations.

Leisure Policy 4: Water Recreation

The development of new areas of water for recreational use will be encouraged where they do not cause unacceptable damage to the existing water supply.

The development of related recreation facilities in the vicinity of the waterways network on sites in or adjoining settlements will be encouraged.

Provision for use of the waterways for public transport will be encouraged.

CARAVAN AND CAMPING SITES

9.32 PPG7 'The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development', indicates that rural tourism can make a contribution to the rural economy. However, it should develop in a way that does not detract from the character of the countryside. PPG21 'Tourism' gives advice on holiday and touring caravans

suggesting that local authorities should investigate whether there are adequate facilities for touring and static caravanners. However, these objectives need to be reconciled with the protection and preservation of those environments which tend to attract holidaymakers; as holiday caravans can be particularly intrusive on the open landscape.

- 9.33 It is recognised that there are pressures for the establishment of additional touring caravan and camping sites within the Plan Area. Caravan sites can have a significant detrimental visual impact and it is important that such sites do not destroy the very asset upon which an area's popularity depends. In addition, caravan sites often have serious seasonal impact on traffic volumes on quiet country roads and villages.
- 9.34 When considering locations for caravan and camping sites, the Local Planning Authorities should:
- a) ensure that caravan and camping sites do not visually intrude into open countryside, nor have an adverse effect on the character of an area or settlement;
 - b) ensure that sites are well designed and adequately landscaped and are developed to a high standard;
 - c) apply the general policies for residential development in the countryside when considering proposals for the siting of residential caravan sites;
 - d) encourage additional landscaping where appropriate to assimilate existing sites into the surrounding countryside;
 - e) ensure caravan sites are in accessible locations which are safe, convenient, well related to main road networks whilst protecting the amenity of local residents; and
 - f) ensure that development is restricted to holiday use.

Leisure Policy 5: Caravan and Camping Sites

Provision will be made for static holiday and touring caravans and camping on sites that are not visually intrusive and which have good access to the road system.

NOISY SPORTS

- 9.35 PPG17 'Sport and Recreation' requires that areas should be identified in Local Plans for the provision of noisy sports activities, to ensure that they can take place away from unacceptable sites. There is considerable demand in the Plan Area for facilities which accommodate a range of motorised and other sports that are perceived to be noisy and which therefore have difficulty in finding acceptable sites. It will be important to ensure that sites are readily accessible to potential users.
- 9.36 The term "noisy sport" is used to describe motor, air and gun based sports taking place outside. Since pistol shooting will no longer be lawful in England soon, noisy sports therefore include:
- a) full bore and shotgun shooting;
 - b) small bore shooting

- c) wildfowl and clay pigeon shooting;
 - d) motor racing, motor cross, trials riding, speedway and scrambling;
 - e) karting;
 - f) microlight aircraft flying;
 - g) model aeronautics;
 - h) model boating;
 - i) water skiing, jet skiing and power boating.
- 9.37 The National Forest, beyond the boundary of the Charnwood Forest, will be a recreation resource for the widest range of interest groups and will provide opportunities for many different types of leisure activity. The scale of the Forest, beyond the boundary of the Charnwood Forest, will be such that there will be opportunities for it to absorb sites and trails for both quiet and noisy activities without causing conflict or imposing on the local communities.
- 9.38 An assessment by the Local Planning Authorities of the existing and latent demand for each of the “noisy sports” will be encouraged and supported. Where demand exists, appropriate sites should be identified for such activities where noisy sports may be less unacceptable and safer than unauthorised sites currently in use.

Leisure Policy 6: Noisy Sports

Where existing facilities are inadequate to meet demand, sites for noisy sports will be identified which do not cause an unacceptable disturbance to residential areas or other environmentally sensitive areas.

These areas will be defined, recognising that demand stretches beyond the immediate area of individual Local Plans. The sites should be accessible to their potential users and in areas of low conservation value where the ambient noise level is already high, or on sites with adequate noise shielding.