

CHAPTER 10

Quality of life

Introduction and overview

10.1 Chapter 2 illustrated how transport is only a means to an end, and not an end in itself. This chapter illustrates the many other ways in which the transport investment detailed in earlier chapters also helps to improve the quality of life for Leicestershire people. The issues we have particularly considered are related to the Government's Sustainable Communities agenda and are as follows:

- Community safety, personal security and crime
- Landscape and biodiversity
- Quality of public spaces and better streetscapes
- Healthy communities
- Sustainable and prosperous communities
- Noise
- Climate change and greenhouse gases.

Community safety, personal security and crime

10.2 Much of our work in improving pedestrian and cycle links, bus stops and road crossings contributes to better personal security for those using these facilities. The importance of such measures is reflected in the consultation on our rights of way improvement plan carried out through the County Council's Citizens' Panel in spring 2004. This revealed that the perception of personal safety was a significant element in inhibiting walking, particularly for women, and that nearly 20% of respondents were concerned by safety, although this varied according to time of day or year.

10.3 Complementary to these are our community safety lighting schemes, specifically designed to help reduce crime and the fear of crime. We work in partnership with the District Community Safety Partnerships to identify potential schemes and to prioritise them based on crime statistics. Where possible and appropriate, community safety lighting schemes are incorporated into bus improvement schemes, particularly to improve illumination at bus stops and on walking routes to and from them. Our extensive programme of structural replacement of street lighting columns includes upgrading the lighting to the latest standards, giving a general improvement in reducing crime and the fear of crime.



10.4 Most of our new highways infrastructure is provided in association with new development and it is essential to ensure that this is properly designed for community safety. One of the guiding principles in our newly revised guide for developers and local planning authorities, 'Highways, Transportation and Development', is designing out crime. This aspect of the guide has been developed in partnership with the Leicestershire Police Force Architectural Liaison

Officer and is intended to help produce development layouts that provide for the safe and free movement of all road users, not just motor vehicles. It is intended to create an environment which both feels safe and reduces the fear of crime, in summary:

- Road layouts which meet the needs of all users and restrain vehicle dominance
- Creating an environment that is safe for all road users and in which people are encouraged to walk, cycle and use public transport, and feel safe doing so
- Helping to create a high quality environment.

10.5 One of the main priorities in the Leicestershire Community Strategy is to support the work of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Community Safety Programme Board in improving cross-agency working to reduce crime and disorder.

Landscape and biodiversity

10.6 The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy provides guidance on issues which are outside the planning control process but which affect the appearance and character of the landscape. The strategy has been adopted by Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council and the seven district councils within Leicestershire. This guidance is taken fully into consideration in the design of transport schemes in the County. The strategy identifies eighteen different character areas and provides guidelines for each area.

10.7 Environmental Action for a Better Leicestershire (ENABLE) is a countywide partnership of organisations, groups and individuals, committed to protecting and enhancing the environment. ENABLE is raising awareness of environmental good practice by ensuring environment and biodiversity considerations are considered in the development of strategies and action plans in the Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan. These in turn are reflected in our practices for highway management, as illustrated in the paragraphs below.

10.8 In most cases we use native seeds and plants as part of our own highway schemes, particularly in rural locations. 'Highways, Transportation and Development' gives advice to developers and includes a listing of appropriate planting for different locations.

10.9 Our maintenance, spraying and cutting of roadside verges and hedges is geared to enhancing biodiversity where possible and where this does not compromise road safety. In particular, we carefully time rural grass cutting to this end. We also make specific provision for wildlife in new road schemes. As an example, our recently completed Rearsby Bypass has continuous badger netting on both sides, and newt barriers; both are intended to prevent these creatures straying onto the road. Three badger tunnels are provided at appropriate points along the line of the road.

10.10 An outline Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Provisional LTP2 has been completed and includes an assessment of the impact of LTP2 on landscape and biodiversity. The nature of most proposals contained in LTP2 means that few significant effects on the environment have been identified. We have already completed an environmental assessment of the Earl Shilton Bypass major scheme and will in due course do the same for the Loughborough Town Centre transport scheme.



10.11 It is important to recognise the value that biodiversity and wildlife play in the lives of local people, and much of that engagement is often experienced when using rights of way. The Government's Liveability Agenda highlights the importance of natural green space and features for local people and the Planning for Sustainable Communities document talks about the Green Infrastructure at regional level which we should recognise as important to Leicestershire. Our rights of way consultation has allowed us to understand the importance of wildlife value to people in Leicestershire. Improvement of the quality of the natural environment to maintain a high level of visual attractiveness, interest and wildlife value will increase visitor use. This will also be increased by encouraging programmes of local guided walks, cycle rides and activities that link local people and visitors to interesting sites around the County.

Quality of public spaces and better streetscapes

10.12 Our urban centres and county towns make a significant contribution to the local economy by generating wealth, providing jobs and providing services for local businesses and communities. The quality of the environment and the attractiveness of these centres are vital to their ability to attract businesses and visitors.



10.13 We have invested in a number of schemes designed to produce a more attractive streetscape, for example in Hinckley town centre where Regent Street has been transformed by a £1.5m pedestrian scheme. Liaison with the Hinckley town centre manager has enabled us to learn lessons about the control of public space, including creating space for 'café culture' and the display of 'A' boards. The Regent Street project, carried out jointly with the Borough Council, has been praised nationally for its contribution to the quality of public space and, through that, to regeneration. The scheme has been identified as an example of best practice by Babcie, who requested photographs to include in the design guide they are preparing for several West Midlands local authorities.

10.14 Most of our county towns have received similar treatment, and we have just completed a scheme to improve the environment in Biggin Street in the centre of Loughborough. We have also been working in partnership with the District Councils to develop a further programme of projects aimed at improving the public realm, including the streetscapes and open spaces within our town centres. We have secured over £300,000 from the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership for projects in Ashby, Loughborough and Hinckley. This will form part of £500,000 being invested by the Public Realm Improvement Programme over the coming year in improving the attractiveness of town centres.

10.15 This programme includes the Markets Improvement and Parish Green projects in Loughborough, the Ashby Town Centre project and the Hinckley Town Centre project. We are in the process of submitting a further application for funding to the LSEP for a two year Market Towns Programme. If successful, this will ensure that the next phases of these projects can be supported as well as future ones.

10.16 Within such schemes, it is important not only to provide infrastructure to high standards but also to ensure its effective maintenance thereafter. In the Hinckley Regent Street project we have drawn up a specific maintenance plan, shared with the Borough Council, to ensure that future maintenance can follow clear guidelines.

10.17 The quality of public spaces can be significantly affected by pollution from traffic. One of the high priorities in Leicestershire's Medium Term Corporate Strategy is tackling congestion and improving air quality, and the Local Area Agreement includes outcomes to improve the cleanliness and attractiveness of village and town centres. It is clear that implementation of the LTP measures to tackle congestion will have a positive effect on the air pollution and general environment in towns and villages.

10.18 Speed reduction schemes and other highway improvements can be used to help improve the streetscape but there is equally the risk that such schemes can be intrusive and make its appearance worse. To guard against this we undertake extensive public consultation on all such schemes and design to produce the minimum visual impact consistent with achieving the required results. We also take every opportunity with these schemes to adopt Home Zone principles in the design.

10.19 Inappropriate signing can be an issue in sensitive locations, urban and rural, and we review this regularly with the intention of minimising clutter consistent with achieving the requirement effects from the signs. In one recent example, we have marked a series of bends as part of a road safety scheme on a rural 'B' road but with chevron signs to the minimum extent necessary to provide clear marking.

Healthy communities

10.20 Our work helps to promote healthy communities in many ways. Physical activity is a primary example, and is one of six joint public health priorities agreed with the primary care trusts through the Community Strategy. All our work on making walking and cycling safer and easier contributes to this, and particularly our work with schools to develop school travel plans which encourage walking and cycling to school, highlighted in the Medium Term Corporate Strategy as one of the ways by which we aim to improve children's health. The Community Plans for Oadby and Wigston, North West Leicestershire, Charnwood and Blaby District Councils all support such initiatives.



10.21 This is allied with our cycle training which can give children confidence to cycle safely. The Cleaner and Greener outcome block of the Local Area Agreement contains an outcome to 'Improve co-ordination and promotion of healthy walking activity across the county' and reports that six of the district community strategies support 'greater participation in sport and physical activity such as cycling and walking'. A specific indicator and targets have been set in that block for increased cycling, particularly in Loughborough and Central Leicestershire.

10.22 The East Midlands Regional Assembly's public health strategy for the East Midlands, 'Investment for Health' (2003), aims to improve the health of East Midlands residents by reducing health inequalities year on year. We are contributing to this aim in several ways, most obviously by the promotion of physical exercise inherent in our measures to encourage walking and cycling, both by providing 'hard' facilities and in many of our Smarter Choices measures detailed in Chapter 4. Our bus strategy and accessibility strategy will also help by prioritising access to healthcare facilities and providing socially necessary bus, concessionary and community travel to older and disabled people, with the attendant benefits to mental health.

10.23 Our work on promoting workplace travel plans also contributes to the aim of encouraging walking and cycling, and there is a commitment in the LAA, as part of the drive to increase awareness of and response to the problems of climate change, to work towards 90% of schools and half of all major employers having travel plans by 2011. Workplace travel plans are explicitly supported in Charnwood and Blaby District Councils' Community Plans.

10.24 Accessing doctors' surgeries and clinics can be a problem for people without access to a car or with mobility difficulties. We have recognised this for many years and have developed countywide coverage of community transport schemes to provide transport to clinics and other facilities for people with disabilities. More recently we have introduced joint planning of these services with the health authorities on a trial basis, so as to provide the best possible overall service. The flexibility provided by our hourly bus services network helps many other people to reach clinics by bus. Our new accessibility planning has a specific focus on access to health facilities and our action plans will aim to improve access further.

10.25 Improving road safety also contributes significantly to healthier communities. It does so not only directly, by reducing the number of people killed or injured in road accidents, but also indirectly by creating street environments in which people feel more confident in walking or cycling.

Sustainable and prosperous communities

10.26 There are strong links between transport and the wider policies in the local, structure and regional plans designed to help secure sustainable and prosperous communities; these are described further in Chapter 2. There are a number of ways in which transport can contribute specifically.

10.27 The first is by ensuring that the traffic and transport needs of new development can be properly accommodated. We manage this through our development control advice to district councils, both in the preparation of local plans and local development frameworks and in responding to specific development proposals. There are many examples across Leicestershire where new development has helped the prosperity of adjoining areas without the burden of additional traffic becoming unmanageable. Examples include the progressive improvements to the road network around Junction 21 of the M1 motorway, funded by the various office, warehouse and retail developments there, and the Epinal Way extension in Loughborough, which has allowed a large new housing development to be successfully accommodated.

10.28 Traffic congestion is a major threat to prosperity, since no local economy can function well if access is difficult. All the work on tackling congestion described in Chapter 4 can therefore contribute to helping the economies of the towns across Leicestershire. Particularly critical in this respect is our work with Leicester City Council on tackling congestion on key routes into the city: a prosperous city centre is of vital importance for both city and county.

10.29 Transport investment can be a key element in planning for regeneration. We have worked over the years in most of the county's towns to help secure this, and there is support for our town centre regeneration work in the MTCS and Local Area Agreement, which contain commitments to vital and thriving county towns and village centres. A good example is Coalville, where the A511 Bypass was coupled with investment in the town centre as one of many measures to help combat the adverse effects of mining decline. More recently, the improvement of Regent Street in Hinckley has been designed specifically to help improve the town centre retail economy, and our proposed major scheme in Loughborough will have a similar effect, allowing the shopping core of the town to be integrated across both sides of the present A6 road.

10.30 We are active in rural as well as urban areas. The Leicestershire Rural Strategy provides a strategic framework for the work of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership. It outlines the priorities for rural Leicestershire and highlights the main issues these areas will face in the coming years. The vision includes:

- Providing appropriate access for all people to a range of services and facilities, and the opportunity to develop both existing and new facilities
- Strengthening the prosperity and competitiveness of the rural economy for the benefit of the local community, particularly marginalised groups and individuals
- Protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

10.31 LTP2 will help to deliver this vision, particularly through our work in improving rural accessibility. The hourly bus services network and complementary transport services for the most rural areas will help to ensure good access for all and avoid rural Leicestershire becoming a place where only those with high levels of car ownership can live.

10.32 The Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy, covering one of the four growth areas identified in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan (February 2003), includes proposals for accelerated growth in Northamptonshire, focused in and adjacent to Northampton, and in Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough. The Northamptonshire part of the Strategy was incorporated into the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands published in March 2005. Through our work and involvement, particularly on transport and spatial planning matters, policy measures will be put forward to help address any adverse impacts of the implementation of the strategy on southern Leicestershire.

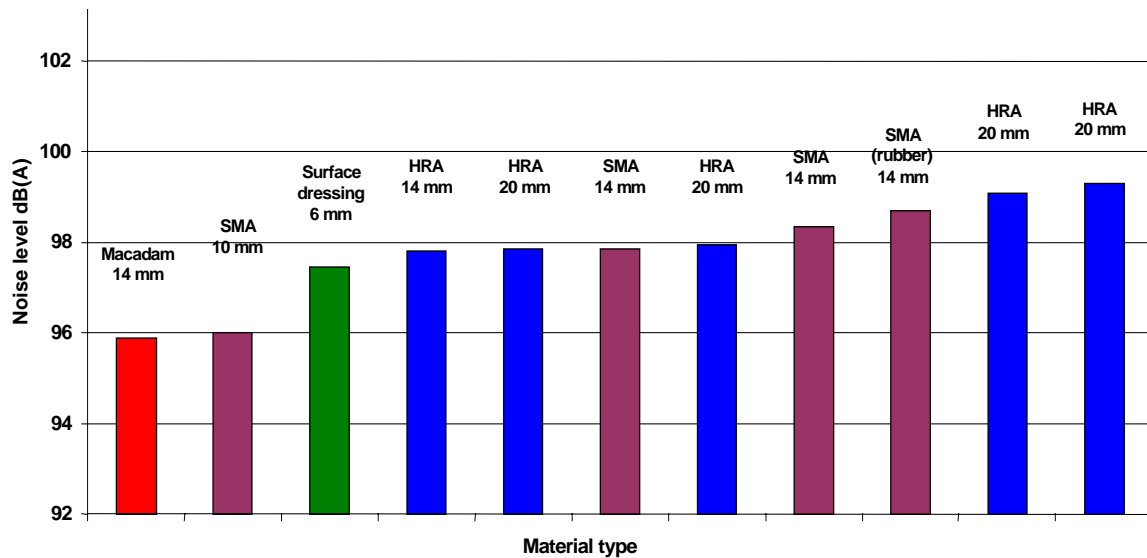
Noise

10.33 A key outcome from our carriageway maintenance schemes is the environmental benefit gained from resurfacing roads with noise reducing materials. The process has been assisted by our joint research with TRL which included the measurement of tyre noise across a range of surface types using TITRON – a purpose built vehicle containing an advanced system for monitoring the noise emitted from tyres as they run over the road surface. This research culminated in the publication of TRL report PPR 023. Figure 10.1 is an extract from the report and shows how tyre noise varies for different surface types. We can now use this evidence to choose the most appropriate surfacing materials taking account of traffic noise as well as the other more conventional requirements of the materials.

10.34 Amongst many noise issues across the county, a particular problem is with the high volumes of fast traffic using Narborough Road South on the southern approaches to Leicester. We plan to take further steps to reduce noise here early in the LTP period and are considering innovative methods to control traffic speed.

10.35 Traffic noise can also be combated by other means. Speed reduction schemes, for example, not only improve road safety but also decrease noise. Similarly, as detailed in Chapter 8, our work on lorry routes, which has now produced a comprehensive countywide network, has taken noisy HGVs out of many Leicestershire communities by concentrating goods vehicles on the most suitable routes.

Figure 10.1 Tyre noise of different surface materials at 80 kph



Climate change and greenhouse gases

10.36 Since the industrial revolution the burning of fossil fuels for energy generation and transportation has powered our development. Man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are accumulating in the atmosphere and affecting our climate. The Government has set a target that CO₂ emissions should reduce by 20% from 1990 levels by 2010. Given the trends noted above, this target will be a very challenging one to meet, but Leicestershire's strategy is designed to make as effective a contribution as possible. The Leicestershire Together Community Strategy has a commitment to a safe, clean and green environment, and contains specific outcomes on waste and recycling, climate change and biodiversity, as well as outcomes on a cleaner environment.

10.37 Transport's contribution to levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is affected by the total volume of traffic, the speeds and congestion on the road network, and the fuel efficiency of road vehicles. The total volume of road traffic on non-trunk roads in Leicestershire is an LTP2 target described in Chapter 12.

10.38 The emissions that have already accumulated in the atmosphere will continue to cause climate change. Road transport contributes 43% of the total carbon dioxide in the county. Approximately 50% of the traffic in Leicestershire is on trunk roads so around 22% of carbon dioxide emissions in the county are from traffic on local roads. Again, the target for total traffic volumes responds to this challenge. Key to meeting this will be our success in persuading motorists to consider other means of travel, such as cycling, walking and public transport, and to moderate car use generally. This is central to our Smarter Choices agenda.

10.39 As roads become congested, the number of vehicles present can increase by around five times compared with free flowing conditions. The result is a dramatic increase in total emissions, particularly from slow moving buses and goods vehicles. The number of hours in a day that a road is congested is a key factor in overall emission levels. The ENABLE partnership has put forward a number of measures to reduce the rate and impact of climate change in Leicestershire. These are included in the climate change strategy produced by Environmental Action for a Better Leicestershire, and LTP2 will help to deliver this through:

- Raising awareness of the environmental impacts of transport and promoting the use of alternatives to the car
- Supporting the use of travel plans by businesses, organisations and schools
- Investing substantially in improving the bus service alternative
- Developing networks of safe cycling and pedestrian routes for travel between centres.

10.40 We can contribute directly to reducing CO₂ emissions through the County Council's own energy use, which is of course considerable. We have implemented many energy-saving measures across the County Council, with transport-related ones including:

- New street-lighting installations planned through a combination of appropriate spacing and lantern efficiency to obtain the required illumination with minimum energy; and all old high-energy bulbs replaced countywide
- A pricing mechanism which favours fuel-efficient diesel cars in the County Council's lease car fleet.

Conclusion

10.41 The analysis above shows how quality of life issues emerge constantly through the policies and work programmes of LTP2. Of particular importance is the way that these issues are integrated not just at the planning and policy stage but right through our implementation process down to, for example, the detailed design of transport improvement schemes and the way the works are carried out. Through the LTP2 period we will continually review this integration of policy and process, to ensure that in carrying out our programmes we maintain the standards set out in policy.