



4.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

This Masterplan was prepared using the results of public consultation undertaken over the last 5 years by consultants, the Friends and others for their various studies. It was important not to duplicate previous work or risk 'consultation fatigue' and apathy among park users. All the proposals of this report draw on that input and recognise the priorities of both the local community and the Council.

In addition, Parklife has been undertaking supplementary consultation since December 2007, to ratify earlier findings. This is summarised here, with more detail in Appendix B.

As further public consultation takes place and detailed designs are prepared, this report will need updating. It is not intended to be final or inflexible. It can be reviewed annually as the work is implemented, to ensure that the best possible outcomes are achieved.

4.1 Previous Consultation

During the consultation exercises for the South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan 2003, people mentioned time and time again the need for improved public spaces. It became clear that people were concerned about a number of 'wasted opportunities' in the town and its surroundings for creating a distinctive sense of place. These wasted opportunities included:

- Underdeveloped green spaces and parks
- Scantily developed open space corridors and linkages
- Poorly defined entrances and gateways

The South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan 2003 has been reviewed in 2008. Its vision is for:

..a vibrant, safe, attractive, accessible and successful town centre with a distinct and sustainable role and a range of business, educational and community facilities and opportunities for local people. A town centre which makes the most of its countryside and canalside setting and architectural strengths.
South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan 2008

The proposals of this report draw on the results of consultation undertaken for the South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan 2008 review.

4.2 Consultation for this Report

To ratify the results of consultation undertaken in 1996 for the original Masterplan, Parklife issued approximately 100 similar questionnaires (compiled using a CABE/Greenspace template) to local residents, businesses, user groups and schools. The sample results, whilst not large enough to provide firm statistical data, nonetheless are useful for showing that local opinion generally has not changed. The



results also provide useful anecdotal evidence for improving the park (refer to Appendix B). For example, 90% of respondents support the extension of the pavilion into a youth and community centre. They show that even after modest improvements to the park over recent years, visitor patterns and community aspirations for improving the park have not changed significantly since 1996. For example:

- Despite increased car ownership since 1996, 88% of visitors still walk or cycle to the park (86% in 1996);
- 89% of respondents come from within 1km (a 15-min walk) compared with 90% in 1996;
- 61% still rate the range of park facilities 'poor'.

The results also echo findings of previous consultation by others, such as:

- The park remains a mainly local facility serving a 1km radius catchment area;
- The need to improve the facilities of the park, especially for young people;
- Loitering teenagers while not necessarily posing a threat, make people feel unsafe in the park.

Parklife interviewed leaders of park user groups such as football clubs, the bowls club and youth club, together with individuals in the park, such as regular users and groups of teenagers (see Appendix B). Time has been spent canvassing the area, talking to local residents and shop owners regarding Blaby Road Park gaining their thoughts and opinions. The park Friends group, formed since the initial masterplan was written, was also consulted. Their views, while not necessarily representative of all park users, have been incorporated into the proposals.

Parklife and OWBC are continuing to contact and liaise with as many key community members as possible to gain input into the project, and to allow them to update their key stakeholder groups.

Having formulated a contacts database, we are now able to contact people with ongoing updates.

4.3 Ongoing Consultation

It is clear from the public consultation exercises to date that there is a great deal of enthusiasm among local people for upgrading Blaby Road Park and its management. This positive energy will be nurtured and encouraged not just for this report but throughout the life of the park, in accordance with current government guidance on park management (ref: *How to Create Quality Parks and Open Spaces* CLG 2007 www.cleanersafergreener.gov.uk):

- Provision of information
- Building leadership
- Involvement in decision-making
- Enabling ownership.

The Borough Council publication "Letterbox", which is delivered to every household, will describe the proposals and invite feedback. Advertising posters will be displayed at all park entrances and in the Library and Council Offices. All feedback will be analysed and incorporated into design drawings as they are developed in detail.



OWBC will establish a steering group with a project champion to implement the project including seeking funding and incorporating feedback from consultation.

Perhaps unusually, the community will be encouraged to participate actively in the delivery and subsequent management of these proposals (refer to section 7).

4.4 Ongoing Role of the 'Friends'

The small Friends group has been instrumental in shaping the proposals of this report. The group will be encouraged to work increasingly as a community representative to assist the Council with implementing this Masterplan. The Friends group may be tasked to:-

- o Increase membership numbers and thus the validity of the group, by:
 - undertaking marketing to attract local colleges and businesses to join the Friends group. This is important if the management of the park and town are to be integrated;
 - running a programme of activities / events in the park throughout the year with good media coverage. Clearly the existing small group will need Council support for the above;
 - attracting young members (currently none) by providing indoor and outdoor facilities and events specifically for young people and students. This will

boost the credibility of the group and eligibility for external funding.

- o Apply for external funding for park improvements, assisted by the Council.
- o Assist with the detailed design of each of the proposals of this masterplan, to ensure that community needs are met. This involvement can be quoted in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement required for its LDF;
- o Initiate surveillance of the park by users, through a Park Watch initiative;
- o Monitor expenditure on the park including revenue-generating facilities (e.g. events, sports courts, etc) reporting to the Council.
- o Assist the Council with achieving a Green Flag Award for the park within 2 years of the improvements.

4.5 Engaging with Young People

Throughout the consultation for this and previous studies, one of the major themes concerned the lack of youth facilities and activities in South Wigston. People cited the lack of informal places to hang out, both inside (cafes / bars etc) and outdoors (sports areas / shelters etc), as well as the lack of activity programmes in the area. Talking to local youngsters for this study (refer to Appendix B), Parklife found that while the outdoor facilities are popular, there is a need for indoor facilities for young people locally. This need may



increase as more students come to the area, looking for activities for their time off.

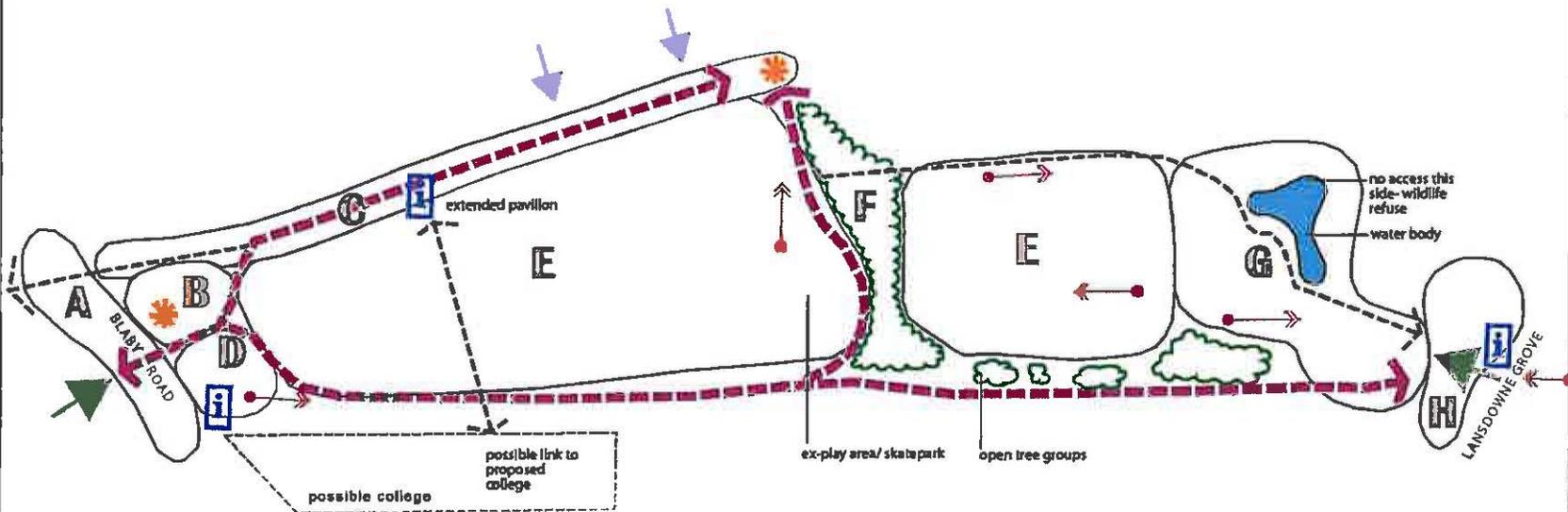
It will be crucial to engage young people when taking the proposals of this masterplan forward, so that they may help to shape the detailed design of new facilities. Further proposals for engaging young people are described in section x. Parklife specialises in engaging local people during the

delivery of park improvement projects. Teenagers and their dads will be seen on the construction site with spades and tools.

FIGURE 4



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KEY

- Principle path with multiple use
- Secondary paths
- Focal play/sculptural features
- Main park entrances with special design treatments (see text)
- Secondary entrances
- Strategic information/ education points inside park (see text)
- Vistas to draw visitors through park

Functional areas:

- A. Inviting entrance space
- B. Small scale social space
- C. Corridor
- D. Sitting slopes and interpretation
- E. Activity areas
- F. Open woodland
- G. Rural meadow and lake
- H. Enhanced park entrance area

Date	Init.	Rev.	Description

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Project Title:
BLABY ROAD PARK

Phase:
FOR INFORMATION

Drawing Title:
DESIGN CONCEPT

Drawn	Checked	Date	Auto
PM		13.12.07	NTB
Job No.	Drawing No.	Revision	

FIGURE 5



Blaby Road Park Masterplan



5.0 DESIGN CONCEPT

During consultation local people, the Friends group and the project steering group all agreed that the PRINCIPLES for the development of the park (illustrated in the Concept Plan Fig 4) from the 1996 Masterplan are still applicable today. They needed updating in the light of:

- new planning policy;
- new developments locally;
- the 2003 South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan and its review in 2008;
- the 2003 preliminary audit of open space; and
- the removal of the factory extension proposal
- the proposed relocation of South Leicestershire college next to the park.

5.1 Principles agreed with Steering Group

The principles set out below have been formulated to address the issues and opportunities described in the previous pages. They are used as a framework upon which to base the detailed proposals on the following pages. The principles are as follows:

- ① Upgrade existing play and sports facilities in the park to help address the shortfalls in good quality, accessible open space in this part of the Borough;
- ② Transform the former utilitarian recreation ground into a vibrant urban park that adds value to the town centre, in accordance with the South Wigston Masterplan 2008. There should be a comprehensive range of well-

managed facilities, events, educational and healthy living pursuits.

- ③ Renovate and extend the pavilion as the 'hub' of the park, adding equipped space for a wider age group including children and young people.
- ④ Provide facilities to enjoy the natural environment, historic environment, culture and attractions.
- ⑤ Exploit opportunities for the enjoyment and appreciation of South Wigston on foot, ensuring that the park connects with the proposed traffic-free walking routes between local green spaces.
- ⑥ Enhance the overall sense of arrival in the park by creating enticing entry points. This should include transforming Blaby Road frontage into a vibrant civic space complementing the new college and shopping street, and drawing more visitors into the park.
- ⑦ Implement a management plan for the park including visitor management, shared uses and events, with Green Flag aspirations.
- ⑧ Increase the overall ecological value of the park, in accordance with planning policy and capitalising on the proximity of countryside habitats.



5.2 Proposals (Figures 4 and 5)

"Cities need hidden spaces and exposed spaces, rough spaces and smooth spaces, loud spaces and silent spaces – spaces where people remember, experience, contest, appropriate, get scared, make things, lose things, and generally become themselves."

What are we scared of? CABE Space 2005

The Design Concept (Figure 4) has evolved from the appraisal of the park outlined in Section 2 and by interpreting the results of the public consultation process. The concept forms the basis of the Masterplan proposals.

Using the character areas described in Section 2, a series of spaces have been developed, each having a different function. These spaces will provide park users with a range of experiences and activities that will be clearly legible. There will be interesting transitions from large to small scale spaces, elements of surprise such as striking views that are chanced upon during a walk; seasonal displays of colour and interesting focal points such as water features, etc. In this way, the user experience is enriched and the former recreation ground is transformed into a high quality park.

The functional areas will be relatively self-contained, enabling improvement works to be phased throughout the park. This will allow cost programming, structure planting and infrastructure works such as drainage to be undertaken in an ordered fashion with minimal disruption to the park users. These areas are illustrated on the Design Concept Plan and are described below.

Wibby Road Park Masterplan

(i.) All-Weather Pitch

The addition of an all-weather pitch has been suggested as a way to address local pitch loss by South Leicestershire College. The large fenced enclosure would introduce precisely the kind of intrusive element that this report seeks to remove from the park (Section 2.2). It would not be appropriate either to the character of the landscape or the objectives of this masterplan (section 5.1). It would contravene objective SO3 of the emerging Core Strategy to "...preserve local aesthetic character".

Shared use of the existing park pitches together with the 2007 refurbished all-weather pitch at Guthlaxton College (10 minutes walk) will more than meet the modest sports demand of South Leicestershire College. Shared use of the Guthlaxton facility has been confirmed feasible by its managing staff (consulted for this report). Shared use of park pitches has been confirmed as feasible by the Council's grounds maintenance supervisor.

Rather than duplicate Guthlaxton's sports facilities, it is recommended to upgrade the quality of the park's wider facilities for sport and recreation. This reflects the need to address the shortfall of EQUIPPED open space containing facilities for public use, identified in the open space audit (Baker Associates 2003).



(ii.) Blaby Road Frontage (Area A)



Blaby Road entrance space – Existing



Blaby Road entrance – proposed social play space

As the main access area for the park, the Blaby Road entrance currently does little to invite the passer-by into the park, and yet it is the busiest, most visible park frontage. If the current park railing could be removed, it would extend the character of the

park northward into Blaby Road. If the space was more open and integrated with the contemporary architecture and materials of the proposed college, the park would become more prominent in the streetscape, capturing more passers-by. CABE advises that drawing more visitors through a park is the best way to improve the sense of personal safety.

Hence it is proposed to unite the design treatment of the park frontage with Blaby Road and the new college, through special design treatments, an open boundary, tree planting and street furniture and lighting. The duplicated path running parallel to the street will be returned to green space together with the car park, for the reasons described in the access analysis (Section 2). Planting treatments and raised seating pyramids will screen traffic and alleviate noise, making the park frontage more sociable, in accordance with the South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan 2008. The youth shelter will be re-sited to the youth area (skatepark).

Area A has the largest concentration of pedestrian movement in the park and is close to the park entrance and town centre – important factors in its favour for its popular, safe use and surveillance. It is also an enclosed, sheltered, small scale space containing the finest trees in the park, factors which make it more conducive for passive recreation (e.g. wandering, resting, sitting, meeting, watching).



Possible sign style at park entrance

(iii.) Social play space (Area B)

As the space that every visitor has to pass through, Area B is proposed as the focus of social interaction, social mixing and social inclusion in Blaby Road, serving the college and the South Wigston shopping area. The secret to creating 'people places' like this is to find the busiest spot, engage the community, design for all and design with safety and security in mind without stripping the environment of character, pleasure and risk.

Blaby Road Park Masterplan

Community engagement will rekindle interest in the park frontage as a key public realm project, promoting shared responsibility and inclusivity - without fear of groups of teenage students and without segregating park users by age. The increased sense of ownership that this brings also brings self-policing and reduced anti-social behaviour (and will ensure the long-term enjoyment of the park).

Stone pyramids of sitting steps will surround a central play space for older people, with large equipment for bouncing, spinning and water play. The angular pyramid shapes of this social sun-trap will complement the new architecture of the proposed college, each with a raised bed of flowering plants at its apex. The angular shapes of the steps will also offer play value for children. This sociable, multi-function discussion space can also be used as an outdoor lecture theatre. The design is but a sketch at present and will be refined in response to consultation.

(iv.) Corridor, Pavilion and Sports Court (Area C)

Area C (Figure 4) has been identified in Section 2 as a "leafy corridor" with high levels of use for access to the sports pavilion, the park beyond and to residential areas beyond the park. The area contains some mature trees and hedgerows, which could be supplemented to improve their impact.

It is proposed to extend the corridor effect as indicated in the Design Concept plan (Figure 4) along the eastern park boundary towards some focal feature (e.g. sculpture, to end the vista) and to formalise the existing use of Area C as a key through-route.



Figure 5 shows how it is proposed to address the visual intrusion of the unsightly pavilion building and bowling green fence in this area. Subject to funding, the pavilion will be extended northward into the bowling green with a full height, glazed bowling club room, served by a kitchen bar. This larger, brighter room will greatly increase the attractiveness of the club to visiting players and potential new members. A raised spectator deck over an underground irrigation tank overlooking the bowls green will provide outdoor seating space. The tank will be fed by rainwater harvested from the roof, greatly reducing the use of mains water.

The pavilion extension will free the existing bowls club room for conversion into a youth club, served by the same kitchen (duly upgraded). Bowlers will be able to access the toilets through the kitchen, but private access to their room will be retained. A path from the kitchen traversing the park will connect directly to the college. This important new link will connect college students with the youth club (and changing rooms) and vice versa, allowing the two to integrate. Youth club members will have direct access to college sports facilities while college students will be welcome to use the park's outdoor sports pitches.

The existing hard sports court will be relocated about 3m westward, possibly re-orientated to play east-west and re-fenced to 4m height. Together with a coniferous screen, this will resolve the ball nuisance for bowlers. Reached directly from the changing rooms and youth room, the court will enjoy much greater use.



"Fight for authenticity and integrity...Value the common place. Our cultural landscapes are our ordinary history and everyday nature intertwined...Let the character of the people and the place express itself... Don't fossilise places."
Sue Clifford, Common Ground , Start with the Park CABE 2005

(v.) Sociable space and events area (Area D)

Area D has similar characteristics to Area B above. Its small scale, high through-flow of pedestrians and good view to the park beyond, together with other factors, makes it ideal as the sociable area of the park as a place where people can meet, watch others and rest after shopping in the adjacent town centre. The area will be a sunny, sheltered sitting space, with views south to the park, animated by high numbers of pedestrians (especially students) with a strong sense of place.

Area D contains the incongruous public toilet building, which should be relocated, as it stands next to the proposed college's 'Tree of Learning' sculpture. Subject to further detailed design, a new raised shelter or pergola incorporating (and screening) the toilet could be provided nearby with interpretation and education facilities celebrating local heritage. The South Wigston railway and industrial heritage story, displays of park wildlife, community notices, games and park information and an open-sided "stage" for ongoing community involvement and events could be considered. The shelter could add an attractive focus to the park frontage, complementing the architecture of the new college.

Sun-bathing/sitting lawns will be tilted up to face south using inclined stone walls. These walls will bear discrete 'no dogs' signs and their height will deter dogs. Habitual dog walkers will learn to keep dogs off these fine lawns. The walls will also bear subtle interpretation panels compiled by local students and telling the story of the conservation area.

(vi.) Activity Area (Areas E)

The larger of the two areas (labelled "E" in Figure 4) is proposed as the centre of organised sport/active recreation. The area already contains a range of sports and play facilities (described previously) and it is therefore sensible from a management and design point of view to consolidate any future new facilities in this area. To address cricket table damage two options for pitch markings are shown in Figure 5, which are subject to further consultation.

The remaining Area E is an existing football pitch in occasional use and should therefore be retained to meet future demand. Its use will increase once the new college is completed. The two pitches and cricket pitch have ample daytime capacity to support current levels of both public and college use. Any fluctuations in capacity can be met by the newly renovated all-weather pitch at nearby Guthlaxton college and by other pitches in the locality. It is not recommended to floodlight the grass pitches due to light pollution into neighbouring residential areas from the large lights that would be needed. As explained in s5.2i there is insufficient demand to justify converting pitches into all-weather use, nor would this be appropriate for the open park landscape or the open access



across the current pitches that park users enjoy. The treatment of the marginal areas around the pitches' periphery is proposed to change as described below.

(vii.) Woodland (Area F)

This area is sited as shown in Figure 5 for optimum visual screen and wind shelter value. There is a need to screen the unsightly Jacobs factory building in views across the park and to subdivide the park into functional areas as described above. New woodlands were supported in the survey (54%) for the original masterplan.

The woodland would also draw more wildlife into the park from the countryside to the south. It would be properly managed to create a diverse structure, a range of species, and largely clear of understorey shrubs to retain clear views and a sense of personal safety. The woodland floor could support long grass and wildflowers typical of woodland flora, with a few isolated hedgerow shrubs in limited areas for wildlife cover.

(viii.) Rural Meadow and Lake (Area G)

This featureless grassed corner could be greatly enhanced with little cost or effort and offers the ideal opportunity for habitat creation in the form of a wildflower meadow and associated water body to complement the nearby canal.

Wildflower meadows and wetland habitats are disappearing in Britain under agricultural intensification at an alarming rate. In contrast to the canal, there is an opportunity in the park to recreate these endangered habitats in a controlled way

where they can be protected, overlooked, properly managed and used as an educational (as well as recreational) resource. For example, pond-dipping is used by schools for curriculum teaching while angling is Britain's most popular sport - children can practice on the pond before being old enough to fish on the canal.

Water is the single greatest leisure attractor. Located in an underused corner of the park away from the underground water tanks, the introduction of a small lake would draw people into this quiet corner. It would provide both a wildlife habitat with seasonal interest and a source of fill material for creating some interesting and subtle variations in landform in the park. The same material would also serve as a low-nutrient soil medium that would be useful for the establishment of wildflower meadows. (The existing grass sward is too rich in nutrients).

The lake would lower the adjacent water table, resulting in drier playing conditions on the pitch. It could also act as an attenuation facility for surface water run-off from the new college roof. Natural seepage into the groundwater would reduce the annual discharge into the street drains, a more sustainable alternative.

Surrounding houses would provide good surveillance of the pond and reedbed edges would direct deter access to the water. Life rings would be provided. Like the nearby canal, the pond would not be expected to present safety difficulties.

There is enormous potential for increasing the population of birds, bats, butterflies, amphibians and invertebrates in the park, if suitable habitats can be provided. In addition, there



are strong Agenda 21 arguments for reinstating some of the wildlife habitats that were present when South Wigston consisted largely of grazing land, until the late 19th century. The wildflower meadow of Area G is proposed to extend around the margins of the football field of Area E2 in order to maximise the total habitat area. This will also reduce the total area of grass-cutting in the park.

(ix.) Southern park entrance (Area H)

The park entrance from the southern end (Landsdowne Grove) is presently understated and uninviting (as described in Section 2). The concept for this area is similar to that proposed for Area A – that is, visually to extend the treatment of the entrance to the park into the adjacent street and beyond. This can be achieved through the use of special boundary treatments, tree and hedgerow planting and street furniture including lighting and signs.

5.3 Pedestrian / Cyclist Circulation

(ref: Fig. 4)

A hierarchical system of circulation is proposed in Figure 4, as follows:

- o "principal" path – it is proposed to simplify the existing path system (see Figure 4) using a single principal route through the park, which divides into a loop around the central activity/sports area (Area E1). Thus it is proposed to remove the duplicated routes and access points described in Section 2 and to reclaim and enhance the land that they presently occupy. In addition to its use as a recreational route around the park, the "principal" path will serve as a through-route (36% of existing use of the park) linking the park with the town centre, the residential areas and the long-distance countryside routes.
- o "secondary" paths are proposed as casual recreational routes around the park, offering escapes from the main through-route and ensuring that no areas of the park remain underused or unsafe. For casual use they should have a low-key design treatment. Maintenance vehicle access will be required periodically along certain paths.
- o "casual" indirect routes through functional areas – these will develop informally as the new path system is implemented, and can remain unsurfaced.

The park will continue to be shared informally by cyclists and pedestrians while old by-laws are not enforced.



5.4 Night-time Access

In many town parks the issue of night-time access causes great debate, and many parks are still maintained under lock and key for good reasons. The issue has been considered carefully for Blaby Road Park and night-time access is recommended to be retained for the following reasons:

- (i) the park is an established through-route used daily by large numbers of people, and the north-south bridleway must remain open;
- (ii) night-time use of the pavilion is recommended, in order to increase access particularly for young people during winter.

5.5 Information Points

It is clear from local history that if the story of the Conservation Area could be told in the park, it would captivate visitors and greatly enhance local understanding of the area's heritage value. In addition, well-designed displays or games of interpretation would appeal to the interests of park users in almost any sphere - from those interested in the growth of London to the fascination of wildlife or just healthier lifestyles. Therefore it is proposed that interpretation information, exercise and resting points are sensitively incorporated into the park. The medium and graphics of interpretation information should be determined with the community during the detailed design stage. Signs giving information will be designed in such a way that they are discrete, robust and identifiable, and do not introduce an unwelcome intrusion in the park.

Blaby Road Park Masterplan

Information provided at the park entrances should have a UNIQUE design treatment perhaps incorporating sitting/leaning opportunities, concealed light sources and lettering in the pavement, for example. Their design should complement neighbouring architecture (of the new college if present) and can extend beyond the legal park boundary into the adjacent pavement.



Information points will identify the site's unique historical, geographical, cultural and social context. This will help give the place distinctiveness and identity."



Generally the information points should serve to:

- (a) indicate the presence and nature of the park;
- (b) summarise the park's functions and facilities, including a map and information describing the heritage and development of the park;
- (c) inform visitors that they have a right to use the park, with interpretive, educational, sports and community information such as charges, procedures, contacts;
- (d) deter undesirable user types, for example motorcyclists;
- (e) serve as occasional vehicle access points (north and south entrances only);
- (g) serve as litter collection points (where appropriate);

5.6 Vehicular access and parking

It is proposed to restrict vehicular access to and parking in Blaby Road Park for:

- (a) authorised sports users
- (b) maintenance vehicles
- (c) disabled users
- (d) deliveries and emergency services.

In accordance with Agenda 21 principles and given that the park is a neighbourhood facility, it is proposed to discourage vehicular access to the park by the general public, and to positively encourage access on foot or by bicycle.

Occasional vehicular access will reach the pavilion from the existing shared pedestrian/vehicle entrance off Blaby Road, along a diagonal path between Areas B and D (Fig. 4). Parking will be restricted to pavilion users displaying OWBC/disabled badges. A wheel-clamping notice will deter unauthorised parking (possibly enforced by a clamping company engaged by the Council). Parking for the general public will continue to be available in residential streets, the neighbouring superstore and in the new college.

5.7 Planting Concept

The planting concept indicated in Figure 4 is quite simple and yet resolves a number of issues identified in this report, particularly those of visual and microclimatic significance.

In broad terms the aim is to introduce a substantial planting structure, which will subdivide the park into functional areas. It will provide shelter from prevailing winds and add botanical value to the park.

Substantial planting of indigenous trees is proposed along the eastern and western park boundaries to soften the neighbouring urban land uses while retaining passive surveillance. Theme gardens are proposed near the Blaby Road frontage as described above.

This will result in a considerable increase in the total tree cover of the site for biodiversity reasons (e.g. providing movement corridors and cover for wildlife). Aided by reduced grass cutting in marginal areas, it will begin to eliminate the barren feel of the grassy open spaces.



The park will also be the seedbed for fertile exchange between teachers and students, not only in its social spaces but perhaps also in its planting areas. The new college will teach alternative therapies, many of which use medicines and substances (e.g. ointments) that take their ingredients from plants. The park should be a place where students can see the plants that yield medicines and ointments they use.

materials to touch, and even tastes will be available from seasonal vendors, the college refectory or the pavilion kitchen.

5.8 Major vistas / views to focal points

The major vistas indicated in Figure 4 are proposed to draw the visitor through the park and through a series of viewpoints, thereby creating walks with points of interest. This recognises the popularity of the site for strolling (15% of all visits). Vistas include the lake, woodland and distant countryside.

5.9 Disabled Access

All areas of the park are either already accessible or (following new works) will be accessible by disabled users. Use of the park and in particular the bowling green by disabled visitors will be encouraged. For example, there will be no path gradients greater than 1:12 or without regular ramps and rest stops, all steps will have integral ramps and rails, all seats will have bays beside them for wheelchair users and new paths will be wide enough for a wheelchair and a person to pass each other.

The proposals will add new sensory interest to the park – scented and colourful planting with medicinal properties, the music of events, the textures of different walking surfaces and



6. MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT

"Too often, the people who design and construct buildings and parks don't worry about whether they will work properly or what they will cost to run. But the public has to live with badly designed buildings and spaces; and taxpayers often have to foot the bill for putting them right." The Cost of Bad Design, CABE, 2006

6.1 Park management

It is proposed that a review of the current management of Blaby Road Park be undertaken and a management agreement be entered into by the new college, in order to resource the following essential requirements for the success of the plan:

- (a) to ensure that the investment is protected (from damage, theft and cyclical decline); and that both the park and college facilities are available to the public at a consistently high standard;
- (b) to provide project management by both the Council and its partners to support the implementation of the plan over the coming years;
- (c) to ensure that a high standard of maintenance is achieved on the site which meets or exceeds the level of general contract maintenance;

- (d) to publicise a point of contact at the Council and college for park users, caterers and sports / events organisers;
- (e) to promote actively and market the shared park and college facilities to all sectors of the Borough community;
- (f) to organise volunteers in planting and other contributory work, including day-to-day maintenance and educational pursuits;
- (g) to organise joint activities and events in the park throughout the year (e.g. growing medicinal plants by college students, fun days, sports leagues, etc);
- (h) to enforce responsible dog ownership in the park on a day-to-day basis;
- (i) to set out the operation of income-generating facilities (i.e. sports/bowls/youth club/college use of the park, franchises and events);
- (j) to carry out weekly inspections of children's play areas and undertake emergency repairs;

6.2 Grounds Maintenance

It could be argued that the success of any public facility lies in the attention given to its upkeep. Current maintenance costs for the park will inevitably increase as new treatments are proposed for the large tracts of mown grass. For example, variations might include the bi-annual cutting and raking off which is required for the success of wildflower meadows (mainly to suppress nutrient levels), and the litter-picking and



close mowing of a narrow margin to these areas to ensure that they do not look unkempt.

These variations should have only minor financial consequence if the existing "blanket" specification for maintenance can be rationalised for specific areas of the park. For example, maintenance regimes should be downgraded for some areas (e.g. less frequent maintenance of wooded areas where there was once grass), and upgraded for other areas (e.g. more frequent maintenance of herbaceous beds, etc.). Thus it is proposed that certain new maintenance practices are adopted for the park.

The need to minimise any maintenance and management upgrades has been foremost in all of the recommendations. There simply isn't any extra funding available. However, budgets can be managed cleverly and changes negotiated with the in-house maintenance team. Many improvements need incur no extra cost, for example, rationalising grounds maintenance regimes via a management plan, obtaining funding from other sectors such as education, new grounds maintenance practices and some re-training. For example, after Parklife assisted with its upgrade, The Green in Castleford, Yorkshire achieved a Green Flag in 2006 while its annual maintenance cost was lower.

A zoned *maintenance plan* should be produced illustrating specific maintenance regimes for different areas of the park. The maintenance plan will show the type and frequency of operation in each area, for example, number of grass cuts, amount of litter picking etc. and may be used as the basis for calculating detailed operational cost increases and rotas.

We have observed currently that the maintenance standard of the park is *above average* and believe that Green Flag standards could be attained quite easily.

- o With recommend that OWBC aspires to achieving Green Flag standards at Blaby Road Park within 2 years of the completing the first phase of improvements. We believe that adequate management resources are already in place to implement the recommendations herein, and to achieve a nationally recognised Green Flag award, without significant additional resources.
- o We recommend that the in-house maintenance team be tasked to be proactive in identifying improvements and efficiencies (in addition to identifying and carrying out routine repairs).

6.3 Sports Management

If *sports bookings* are to continue so that sports areas become accessible to all and not dominated by a particular user group at any one time (e.g. college students), then bookings need to be enforced and reorganised. The following improvements are recommended:

- o *Signage* installed on sports court and pavilion explaining booking procedure, leagues, etc and facilities available.
- o *Booking schedule* kept up-to-date inside the pavilion. Equipment available for (free) hire with security deposit (not necessarily cash, could leave mobile phones).



- o *Sports bookings* should be managed in consultation with users of the pavilion e.g. block bookings by clubs.
- o *Sports equipment* including tennis nets should be stored in a locksafe box on the court or inside the pavilion at night.

6.4 Staff Presence

There is no single person who works solely at Blaby Road Park. All staff work in the park at different times of the day and year and sometimes these times overlap, while at other times there is no presence on site at all.

Grounds Maintenance Staff

It is common practice for maintenance staff to opt to work in parks during quiet periods to minimise disturbance to the public and for health and safety reasons. However, if contractor presence is to be improved in Blaby Road Park, then this It is common practice for maintenance staff to opt to work in parks during quiet periods to minimise disturbance to the public and for health and safety reasons. However, if contractor presence is to be improved in Blaby Road Park, then this practice should be reversed. We recommend that grounds maintenance staff be instructed to plan their routine maintenance work in the park to complement peak periods as much as possible. (As they are expected to work in accordance with Health and Safety guidelines, it is accepted that some maintenance operations will still need to be carried out during quiet periods.)

6.5 Interpretation, Education and Signage

A programme of interpretation and education based on the proposed nature areas and plant displays should be implemented to increase public enjoyment and awareness, and to promote the park as an educational resource. Information about the area's heritage, and advice or demonstrations should be available on new plant species, gardening styles and alternative medicinal uses of plant-based remedies. This could be implemented in conjunction with the new college.

A system of theme (i.e. pertaining to South Wigston's regeneration) signs and furniture is proposed for strategic locations in the park, as described above, with signage extending into the surrounding highway and footpath network of South Wigston as appropriate, to direct people to the park. This will help to identify the South Wigston conservation area.

6.6 Dog Control

It is proposed that the existing practice of encouraging the use of 'poop-scoops' and bins be continued. Dogs will be kept on leads in areas A – D. While this is hard to enforce, park maintenance staff should be instructed to remind dog walkers politely of this requirement. In time, habitual dog walkers will get the message and feel uncomfortable contravening it. Occasional promotional efforts would improve public awareness of the danger to children of *Toxicara* infection from dog faeces and the importance of using the dog bins.

We believe it is vital that OWBC's in-house contractor be seen to be doing things within the park to build strong supportive