



## LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET – 25TH JUNE 2002**

### **REVIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAMME AND PROPOSED LANDMARK PROGRAMME OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES 2002/2003**

### **REPORT OF THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION**

#### **PART A**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to consider the overall direction of the Environmental Action Programme and the proposed Landmark Programme of environmental improvement schemes for 2002-2003. A summary of the works undertaken during the previous financial year forms part of a separate report, which will be circulated as a Members' Information Item.

#### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that:
  - a) the overall programme and objectives of the Environmental Action Programme and the proposed Landmark Programme set out in Part B to this report be approved;
  - b) officers be authorised, in consultation with Cabinet Lead Members for the Environment, to negotiate and agree a service level agreement with Environ to service the Eco Schools project; and
  - c) the Acting Director of Planning and Transportation be given delegated power, in consultation with the Cabinet Lead Members for the Environment, to finalise the details of the new Asfordby Grants scheme and subsequently approve grant applications.

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

3. The programme set out in Part B continues the Council's policy of undertaking a wide range of environmental improvement and sustainable development

works, developed through partnerships with parish/town councils, voluntary groups and the private sector

4. The engagement of ENVIRON on a consultancy basis has proved invaluable in the past in progressing the Eco Schools programme.
5. The closure of the Asfordby Mine requires the off site landscaping agreement to be renegotiated.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

6. The expenditure proposed is based upon the 2002/2003 Environmental Action Programme. However, some of the schemes are to be developed in phases and will therefore extend into other financial years.

### **Policy Frameworks and Previous Decisions**

7. The County Council at its meeting of 20th February 2002 approved the Environmental Action Budget which included a saving of £50,000.

### **Resource Implications**

8. The approved revenue budget for 2002/03 includes £184,170 for the Environmental Action Programme and £471,840 for SHIRE Environmental and Historic Building Grants. All expenditure on projects described will be contained within this provision after taking account of external funding.
9. The County Treasurer has been consulted on the Resource Implications section of this report.

### **Circulation Under Sensitive Issues Procedure**

None.

### **Officers to Contact**

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## **Part B**

### **Background**

10. The Landmark Programme was established in 1988 to provide a basis for the co-ordination of a wide range of County Council led environmental improvement and sustainable development initiatives. Almost all the County Council funding for these initiatives comes from the Environmental Action Revenue Budget.
11. The Environmental Action Team within the Environmental Management Group implements the majority of the Landmark Programme, as well as managing all Environmental Improvement Grants available through the SHIRE Grant scheme. The Leisure and Access Team manages the cycleway element and the Heritage and Resources Team, the architectural initiatives work.
12. The Environmental Action Revenue Budget in 2002/03 is £184,170. £471,840 is available for SHIRE Environmental and Historic Building Grants.

### **Environmental Action Programme**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>2002/03 budget</b>	<b>Potential Leverage*</b>	<b>Objectives/ Targets</b>
Land Improvement	£4,000	£800,000	Reclamation of derelict land Recreational and access improvements Biodiversity improvements Town and Village Centres
Sustainable development	£24,000	£19,000	Eco Schools programme Support Leicestershire Farms Energy Network Work with Fable and Local Strategic Partnership
Stepping Stones Countryside management project	£23,000	£20,000	Improve Access to the Countryside Enhance the Countryside Improve Awareness Encourage Community Action
Environmental Improvements	£56,070	£20,000	Implementation of Leicestershire Landscape and Woodland Strategy Support Soar-Wreake Initiative Support Tree wardens Support Leighfield Forest Initiative and National Forest Town and Village Centre Improvements

Theme	2002/03 budget	Potential Leverage*	Objectives/ Targets
Biodiversity	£22,000	£3,500	Support implementation of the Leicestershire Biodiversity Action plan Support FWAG and BTCV Declare two Local Nature Reserves Support Leicestershire Nature Conservation Forum
Sites Management	£36,000	£10000	Support Volunteer wardens Develop and maintain sites of quality
Cycleways	£16,000	£20,000	Construct next leg of Leicester-National Forest cycleway
Architectural Improvements	£3,100	£1,000	Support local specialist initiatives
SHIRE Grants (Environmental and Historic)	£471,840	Factor of 15 operated in 2001/02 (i.e. Grant was 1/15 of cost of all projects)	Support community and individuals action to improve the environment.

(\* Apart from SHIRE Grants, the sums shown relate to funds that go through County accounts and do not include all contributions from other partners towards schemes)

13. The Environmental Action Revenue Budget allows the authority to lead on a wide range of environmental improvement and sustainable development initiatives working with a variety of outside organisations on an extensive range of projects. It also triggers the securing of external grant/match funding (over £1,570,000 in 2001/02)

### **KEY ISSUES AND PROGRAMME AIMS**

14. Looked at from the perspective of a list of key strategic environmental issues facing Leicestershire, the Landmark Programme can be set out to tackle a range of issues as follows:

- a. **Tackling Dereliction** The bulk of the perceived dereliction in the former coal fields has been tackled and it is fair to say that the era of large scale colliery reclamation schemes, such as Snibston and Donisthorpe collieries is now largely over. (The only colliery sites remaining in the programme and subject to landowner restrictions are Nailstone and South Leicester). The legacy of dereliction is mainly being tackled on smaller scale sites, mainly in the National Forest context. The above programme is now moving more towards “public realm” schemes within town and village centres (e.g Melton Town Park, Phoenix Green in Coalville and delivering a countywide cycling network).

- b. **Loss of Bio-diversity** This is largely delivered through the BAP Partnership. Leicestershire's BAP was one of the first adopted countrywide and is delivering schemes such as in the Leighfield Forest, the Local Nature Reserve programme and has strong links to the Land Improvement programme and the Soar/Wreake Initiative.
- c. **Improving the environment where people live** The Landmark Programme is increasingly delivering a co-ordinated series of rural centre improvement projects, utilising funding from a range of sources. Such schemes as Sibson Road, Birstall, Ashby Town Centre etc, utilise funding from sources like, EMDA, English Heritage, District and Parish Councils and Highways Programme funding, to deliver quality improvements. The Landmark Programme also supports community based environmental works through the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project and the Ashby Woulds Forum etc, as well as helping target SHIRE Grant monies into these types of work.
- d. **Protecting the best** SHIRE Historic Building Grants help to protect the best of our built heritage, management agreements and Environmental SHIRE Grants help enhance sites. The campaign to protect Charnwood Forest by designating it an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will require concerted action with partners if it is to be successful.
- e. **Agricultural change** The Landmark Programme works closely with the Rural Partnership and particularly with the Agricultural and Rural Business Development Sub Group, in responding to the issues confronting the agricultural sector. Diversification opportunities are pursued with farmers through the National and Leighfield Forests, the Leicestershire Farms Energy Network, Business Buddies, the Soar/Wreake Initiative etc.
- f. **Climate change** The Landmark Programme support moves towards sustainable development in a variety of ways, including support for FABLE, Eco Schools, the Leicestershire Farm Energy Network, National Forest etc.
- g. **Flooding** A considerable part of the county is affected by flood risk. With Global Warming the areas can be expected to increase unless action is taken urgently. The Government in PPG25 has stated that it wishes to see a step change in the way flood risk is managed. In particular there is an opportunity to manage flood risk in a more sustainable fashion by restoring floodplains to a more natural appearance and function. This approach is being delivered regionally through the Strategic Rivers Corridors Initiative and locally through the Soar/Wreake and On Trent Projects.
- h. The following table provides an alternative way of expressing the delivery provided by the Landmark Programme in terms of the priorities set out in the Corporate Medium Term Strategy

<b>Medium Term Strategy Priority</b>	<b>Landmark Programme Delivery examples</b>
Work Countywide	SHIRE Grants, Cycleways/Rights of Way, Town and Village Centre Improvements
Improve Access	SHIRE Grants, Cycleways, Land Improvement, Stepping Stones, Sites Management
Work in Partnership	Soar/Wreake Initiative, Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project, Leighfield Forest, Ashby Woulds Forum
Protecting the best of Environment and Heritage	SHIRE Grants, HERS Programme, Melton Town Park, Town and Village Centres Improvements
Enhance the Rest	Land Improvement Programme, National Forest, Landscape and Woodland Strategy, Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project
Ensure new development delivers improvements to the local environment	Cycleways, Planning Obligations (e.g Asfordby and Donisthorpe), Sustainable Development
Support the National Forest and other woodland areas	National Forest, Leighfield Forest, Landscape and Woodland Strategy, SHIRE Grants
Work towards Sustainable Development	Work with FABLE and Local Strategic Partnership, Farm Energy Network and Eco Schools

## **PROGRAMME REVIEW AND ANALYSIS**

15. The Environmental Action Programme has evolved considerably in the last two years in response to the Authority's changing priorities. For example:

- A. The Landmark North West Countryside Management Project has been wound-up and the funding used to appoint a Community Environmental Project officer who is helping communities countywide to prepare SHIRE Grant schemes, develop other locally based projects and secure match funding from other sources;
- B. The Landscape, SNAIL (School Nature Areas in Leicestershire) and Local Landmark grant schemes monies have been transferred into SHIRE Grants;
- C. The Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme concept has been developed as a national innovation to extend from the traditional single site basis to a Rural Centres scheme based on the Rural Strategy priorities.

16. The Landmark Programme splits the Environmental Action budget into a number of themed areas, shown in the left-hand column of the following table. Officers work to ensure the Landmark Programme and the SHIRES Grant scheme are closely co-ordinated. All of the themed areas support the “Working together to deliver services” and “Caring for our environment” objectives in the Corporate Medium Term Strategy. In addition the table indicates those other Corporate Objectives supported by the Landmark Programme themes and SHIRE Grants programme.

<b>Environmental Action Revenue Budget expenditure themes</b>	<b>Links to the County Council’s Corporate Medium Term Strategy</b>
<b>Land Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Economic Well-Being</li> <li>• Making Communities Safer</li> <li>• Managing Waste Effectively</li> <li>• Supporting Culture and Leisure</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable Developments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Economic Well-Being</li> <li>• Making Communities Safer</li> <li>• Managing Waste Effectively</li> <li>• Achieving Excellence in Education and Learning</li> <li>• Meeting Health Care Needs</li> <li>• Improving our Transport System</li> </ul>
<b>Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making Communities Safer</li> <li>• Achieving Excellence in Education and Learning</li> <li>• Supporting Culture and Leisure</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Improvements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Economic Well-Being</li> <li>• Making Communities Safer</li> <li>• Improving our Transport System</li> <li>• Supporting Culture and Leisure</li> </ul>
<b>Bio Diversity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Culture and Leisure</li> <li>• Promoting Economic Well-Being</li> </ul>
<b>Sites Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Culture and Leisure</li> <li>• Promoting Economic Well-Being</li> </ul>
<b>Cycleways</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving our Transport System</li> <li>• Supporting Culture and Leisure</li> </ul>
<b>Architectural Initiatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making Communities safer</li> <li>• Promoting Economic Well-being</li> </ul>

<b>SHIRE Grants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Economic Well- Being</li> <li>• Making Communities Safer</li> <li>• Achieving Excellence in Education and Learning</li> <li>• Meeting Health Care Needs</li> <li>• Improving our Transport System</li> </ul>
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17. Over the forthcoming year it is anticipated that the County Council's base budget will be supplemented by grant aid from a range of sources including:

Countryside Agency	East Midlands Development Agency
English Heritage	the Forestry Commission
The National Forest Company	The Asfordby Mine grants
The Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund	the Heritage Lottery Fund
English Nature	District Councils
The Coalfields Community Landmarks Scheme	Parish and Town Councils
Other County Council Departmental budgets (for example the Rural Partnership)	Landowners and private sponsorship
Grants from Environment Trusts (Landfill Tax funded)	New Opportunities Fund

18. The Landmark Programme is underpinned by the following principles:

- a) community partnership
- b) sustainability
- c) maximising income from grant and other sources to supplement the County Councils base budget contribution
- d) co-ordination with other County Council programmes.

19. For example, work is being undertaken in Rothley village centre, where a scheme involving highways monies, funding from the District and Parish Councils, together with potential SHIRE and WREN (Landfill Tax) Grants and possible support from the Leicester Rural Partnership and HERS (Heritage and Economic Regeneration Scheme) will be supplemented by a contribution from the Environmental Action Budget.

20. The introduction this year of the revised Asfordby Mine grants and the new Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, will provide additional monies over at least the next two financial years for environmental/community orientated works within selected catchment areas around the county.

21. The development of the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership and the County Council's Community Strategy over the forthcoming year will also provide new opportunities to refocus the Landmark Programme to provide greater and lasting benefits.

## **ENVIRONMENT ACTION PROGRAMME 2002/03**

### **Land Improvement**

22. Action to reclaim derelict land in Leicestershire is set within the context of the County Council's **Derelict Land Strategy and Action Programme**. The programme has been underway since 1974 and has brought extensive benefits in terms of environmental, social and economic improvements. Funding comes principally from the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) but is also provided by the European Union, the National Forest Company, Lottery funds, Landfill Tax, other local authorities and County Council budgets. This year's expenditure is expected to be in the region of £800,000.
23. The EMDA eligibility rules altered last year, resulting in a wider range of sites, across the whole of the county becoming eligible. There will be a particular emphasis on town and large village locations and these works will link well with other County Council programmes, the Rural Partnership, and the developing Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership.
24. The **Derelict Land Strategy** was last updated in 1992 and **the Action Programme** in 1995 and with the changes in EMDA rules, it is now opportune to review it, with the aim of maximising the funding opportunities available and improving overall co-ordination.
25. The programme of work for the current financial year will initially focus on completing work at the following on-going schemes;
26. **Donisthorpe Miners Welfare** - land improvement work is underway as part of the Millennium Commission project to develop a new multi-purpose community resource centre. The work will also provide for improved access and parking for Donisthorpe Woodland Park.
27. **Measham Road, Moira** - reclamation of playing fields and work to provide new access and parking facilities will complement Football Foundation funded improvements to changing facilities.
28. **Ashby Canal** – provision of a foot/cycle bridge to link Sarah's Wood and Conkers and potential extension of the new canal southwards to Donisthorpe Miners Welfare. Continued development of a Transport and Works Act Order for the restoration of the canal between Snarestone and Measham.
29. **Measham Station** - reclamation will involve completion of the Millennium Green together with, subject to specific Cabinet approval, refurbishment of the station building for community use consisting of a community managed workspace and the Measham Museum.
30. Schemes that have recently started or are anticipated to commence later in the year include;

31. **Watermead Country Park** - reclamation of the northern part of the Park to improve wildlife habitats and to prepare the ground for the proposed new visitor centre.
32. **Battram recreation site** – provision of new and improved recreational facilities to complement proposals for a new village hall.
33. **Sileby Incinerator and Tip** – reclamation to provide for a new and improved Civic Amenity Site and potentially public open space.
34. **Town and Village centres** – small scale improvement schemes to complement the Rural HERS Scheme focusing on HERS settlements such as Shepshed and Sileby (selected from the Leicestershire Rural Partnership priority rural centres).
35. Small-scale improvement schemes in the **Ashby Woulds**.
36. **Phoenix Green, Coalville** – Provision of a new foot/cycle rail crossing and derelict land reclamation in the town centre in conjunction with highway improvements.

### **Sustainable Development**

37. All local authorities have been urged by both the UN and Central Government to lead work on Local Agenda 21's for their areas in partnership with the community. The Leicestershire Agenda 21 plan for improving quality of life and the environment has been prepared by the **Forum for a Better Leicestershire (FABLE)** and was launched in June 1998. This document and the review undertaken last year will help provide one of the building blocks in meeting the County Council's new statutory duty to prepare a Community Strategy.
38. The Environmental Management Group provides secretarial and co-ordinating support to FABLE and manages the consultancy input. The latter is provided by a service level agreement (SLA), which is negotiated annually.
39. In order not to duplicate or overlap with the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which has a statutory duty to deliver sustainable development It is anticipated that FABLE may take a purely environmental focus in the future in order to best contribute to the development of the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership. Discussions are underway with the FABLE Steering Group to define a role and direction for FABLE over the next year. In addition a further report will be brought to the Cabinet at a later date to consider the need for a specific County Council **Environmental Strategy**.
40. The Environmental Campaign's (ENCAMS) **Eco Schools** programme will be actively promoted with the day to day work undertaken by Environ under the terms of a new SLA.
41. The Eco Schools programme (leading to accreditation and an award) is a simple but flexible way for schools to extend environmental lessons outside the

classroom and apply them to the running of the school - involving members of the community as well as members of the school.

42. The award scheme improves the school environment, reducing litter as well as waste, lowers fuel and water bills, increases practical/environmental awareness, gains local publicity and creates links with other Eco Schools in the UK and in Europe. Seventeen Leicestershire schools are participating and are at various stages in developing their approach.
43. Blaby District Council and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council supported the project financially last year are willing to do so again this year, the latter increasing the level of support. For the first year, Harborough District Council will also provide funding for the Eco Schools programme. This will enable additional work to be undertaken with schools in its district.
44. Discussions are underway with colleagues in the Traffic and Safety Management Group to investigate collaboration and joint funding for travel planning and transport initiatives in schools through the Eco Schools programme.
45. Provision of secretarial and co-ordinating support to the Leicestershire Environmental Education Network will continue. The Network was established in 1998 and is made up of 39 members from local service providers offering educational resources in the environment field.
46. The **Leicestershire Farms Energy Network** will continue to provide a forum for rural landowners to investigate the opportunities for diversification into renewable energy projects. An application is to be submitted to EMDA for the development of a capital funding scheme to support wood heat installations in Leicestershire.
47. The **East Midlands Woodlands Initiatives Implementation Networking Group** (EMWIING) is a regional partnership chaired by the Forestry Commission that seeks to co-ordinate the sustainable management and expansion of woodlands. It supports the Leicestershire Wood-heat Project and has co-ordinated a successful bid to DEFRA under the Vocational Training Scheme for funding for provision of environmental management and business skills training.

#### **Landscape and Woodland Strategy and Bio-diversity Action Plan Linked Works**

48. The **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy** was adopted by the authority in 2001. It, in conjunction with the Leicestershire and Rutland Bio-diversity Action Plan and Countryside 2000, provides the direction for much rural based environmental work.
49. The Landscape and Woodland Strategy will continue to be promoted through exhibition material and with a mail-shot to those Parish Councils who have not yet taken up the offer of a free copy of the document.
50. Although it is still too early to know the precise details, it is anticipated that the changes in emphasis of European financial support for the farming industry will have a long-term impact on Leicestershire's landscape and its wildlife and plants.

In this respect, the Landscape and Woodland Strategy, will provide a useful platform on which to monitor progress and develop new initiatives.

51. Work will continue on the development, implementation and monitoring of the **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)**. It will remain focused on the implementation of habitat and species action plans such as those for heathland, the barn owl, and the black poplar.
52. Last year the BAP partnership made substantial progress towards the plan's biodiversity targets, including habitat creation and restoration (heathland re-creation at Beacon Hill), field pond creation through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, improved habitat management (coppicing willows around Swithland Reservoir, positive management at Sheet Hedges Wood etc).
53. It is proposed to continue to support the BAP and the work of the BAP Project Manager in conjunction with the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, English Nature and other partners. The work of the Project Manager will focus on practical work with farmers and landowners to increase the awareness of the importance of wildlife sites and provide advice and information on maintaining and improving the value of sites.
54. This work also relates to that undertaken by the **Leicestershire and Rutland Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)**. FWAG provides valuable support for farmers and other rural landowners through both the advice it is able to provide and its sourcing of grant-aid through corridors like Countryside Stewardship. This Authority supports FWAG with an annual grant and, an officer sits on its Steering Committee.
55. Cabinet recently agreed the designation of the former **New Lount Colliery and Tip** as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Following the completion of preparatory survey work further potential Local Nature Reserve sites at Saltersford Valley, Moira Junction and Coalville will be progressed by the preparation of management plans.
56. The **Nature Conservation Forum** comprising local authorities, voluntary groups and Government agencies, is a popular mechanism for information exchange and networking. A meeting of the Forum was recently held on 26<sup>th</sup> April and the next meeting is likely to be held in October.
57. Works will continue, in conjunction with the BTCV (**British Trust for Conservation Volunteers**), to co-fund practical nature conservation works around the County. Requests from other bona-fide voluntary conservation organisations for financial assistance with equipment or core funding support will also continue to be considered.
58. For the past 12 years the Authority has worked with selected landowners to try and ensure that, through sensitive, but positive land management, particularly valuable habitats at County and District level (now called SINC – Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation), which also have public access, are preserved. These works use the provisions of Section 39 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

These powers have been reinforced by the enactment of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

59. This year, at least 3 sites across the county will benefit from this scheme. This work is very much tied in with the BAP and the resurveying of wildlife sites around the county undertaken by Leicestershire Museums Arts & Records Service (LMARS), through its Partnership for Environmental Protection (PEP) work with District Councils.
60. Development work on a monitoring programme for Roadside Verge Nature Reserves, linked to the Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan will continue. Subject to sufficient funding being available, it is hoped to survey any remaining verges warranting possible nature reserve status. These will then be signed accordingly. The long-term maintenance of these areas, possibly using local volunteers, will also continue to be investigated. As a result of the new Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act, additional training may be needed for volunteers working on these areas.
61. The **Soar/Wreake Valley Initiative**, which covers the Wreake Valley, west from Melton Mowbray and the Soar Valley north of Leicester continues to draw support from over 20 organisations. The Initiative's work accords with many of the Countryside Agency's objectives as defined by the Rural White Paper, the work of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy and the Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan. It also ties in well with the East Midlands Strategic River Corridor Project, which recognises the biodiversity benefits that could be gained from more sustainable flood management.
62. Much work, which the Initiative hopes to do in conjunction with individuals and organisations along these two river valleys, is likely to be eligible for funding via the Asfordby Mine grants scheme and the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund.
63. This summer will hopefully see the Draft Action Plan (approved by Lead Members in August 2001) approved by all the partners. It will then be publicised throughout the Initiative's area to gain further support. Thereafter it is intended to develop a range of on the ground projects. First of these is likely to be the adoption, by the partners, of a strategy to selectively develop and improve public footpath and bridleway access along the Wreake Valley. This work will flow from the study commissioned last year by the partnership to assess the potential for improving public access without damaging this valuable wildlife area or compromising farming practices. The success of this work will depend heavily on close co-operation with local landowners.
64. Last year Lead Members agreed to endorse the broad aims of the **On Trent Initiative**. This Initiative is similar to the Soar/Wreake one, but covers the River Trent valley from Stoke on Trent up to the Humber and has a similarly broad range of partners. It is hoped that the two initiatives can undertake joint works in due course in the Castle Donington/Kegworth/Lockington area.

65. The Leicestershire **Tree Warden Scheme** is now 20 years old and is managed by the County Council in partnership with the District and Parish Councils across Leicestershire. Following a recent reviewing of membership, there are 133 volunteer Tree Wardens in Leicestershire, each one registered with their parish or town council.
66. Tree Wardens provide an invaluable service, helping to care for the environment by surveying and monitoring existing trees and hedgerows including those with Tree Preservation Orders. They can also plan and implement new tree planting schemes and research sources of grant aid for tree and hedgerow planting. Tree Wardens are also an important point of contact in the community for local people with enquiries relating to trees. In April 2002, the Chairman of the County Council, hosted a reception at County Hall to thank the Tree Wardens for their contribution to the scheme. In May a training day was arranged specifically for new Tree Wardens and covered topics such as new tree planting, tree management, common tree defects and trees and the law. Further training days have been organised for June and July to cover the subjects of Site Design for Small Woodlands and Small Woodland Management. A social event is also being planned for September, which will probably take the form of a visit to an historic landscape. There will be the opportunity for some of the Leicestershire Tree Wardens to attend the East Midlands Regional Tree Warden Forum to be held at Center Parcs, Nottingham in October.
67. **Leighfield Forest** is located in the High Leicestershire landscape character area and extends from Tilton on the Hill to the Eyebrook reservoir. It is a well-wooded area with 23 ancient woodlands covering 600ha, 16 of the woodlands are designated as SSSI. It is an important area both in the East Midlands and nationally for woodland biodiversity.
68. To maintain and enhance the landscape and conservation value of the forest an Action Plan has been prepared by Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust with financial support from Leicestershire County Council, English Nature and the Forestry Commission.
69. The support of local communities, landowners and land managers is actively sought to implement the following objectives of the plan:-
- To link the fragmented Ancient semi natural woodland sites through planting of new native woodlands.
  - Management of ancient woodland sites, hedges, grasslands and water courses
  - Contribute to the Leicestershire BAP targets.
70. The above objectives are currently being achieved by removing conifers from Owston Wood owned by Forestry Enterprise and Launde Park Wood owned by LRWT. The Forestry Commission has provided extra funding under the Woodland Grant Scheme to enable landowners to plant new native woodland

with the aim of linking ancient semi-natural woodlands together. So far over 30 hectares (72 acres) of new planting has been achieved.

71. To encourage management of woodland a local landowner is in the process of setting up a **Rural Energy Scheme** that will chip thinnings from woodland management operations and burn the chips to provide heat.
72. This year it is intended to produce an information leaflet and a newsletter; set up a deer management group; organise training for local woodland contractors and organise open days to demonstrate best management practices.

### **The Stepping-Stones Countryside Management Project.**

73. The Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project provides support for a range of initiatives and organisations operating in the parishes surrounding Leicester.
74. The Project is a partnership between the County Council, Charnwood Borough Council, Blaby District Council, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and Harborough District Council. The partners have agreed to fund the Project until 2005. A joint Members Group manages the Project. At the end of last financial year Leicester City Council withdrew from the Project for financial reasons.
75. The Project objectives are to; Improve Access for All, Enhance the Countryside, Improve Awareness of the Countryside and Encourage Community Action, which are detailed below.
76. The base budget is increased by income from its partners as well as other organisations such as the International Tree Foundation. In addition to this there is the in-kind benefit of the grants, free-trees and training, which the Project administers. Last year these were estimated as being in excess of £18,360.
77. Following a review of the operation of the member steering group, from May 2002 Parish and Town Councils and community organisations from the Borough of Oadby and Wigston will be invited to attend an annual meeting of the group in order to allow them to contribute to the Project's strategic work.

### **Improving Access to the Countryside.**

78. The Project has recently published two new walks booklets in conjunction with Glenfield Parish Council and Humberstone Village Community Forum. The two booklets - '*Walks in and around Humberstone*' and '*Five Circular Walks in and Around Glenfield*' have been written by local volunteers.
79. The project is now working with groups from Cosby and Braunstone, Enderby and Leicester Forest East to produce two more walks leaflets. These will both form part of the Queen's Jubilee celebrations.

## Enhancing the Countryside

80. The Project will continue to provide grants and advice to landowners, Parish Councils and Community groups under its Private and Community Landscape Grants. It will also assist in the promotion of the SHIRE Grants programme. Last year it financially supported 11 private landscape schemes and 8 community projects.
81. The project aims to continue with the Free Tree Scheme this autumn and winter. Last year the scheme exceeded expectations and provided 3,052 trees to 38 applicants. The Project, the International Tree Foundation and the National Forest Company fund the Free Tree scheme jointly. The International Tree Foundation is considering adopting the Leicestershire Free Tree Scheme as a national model.
82. Good progress has been made with **the Scraftoft Green Wedge Management Plan**, which is being developed jointly with Leicester City Council and Harborough District Council. Consultations with local people have been completed and the plan has been agreed and approved by Harborough District Council and Leicester City Council. Work on delivering the action points from the Plan is proceeding. The proposed creation of a local nature reserve in part of the green wedge, which was reported last year is still going through the designation process.
83. Consultants were appointed to assist with the development of a **Management Plan for the Anstey Green Wedge Area**. Their report covered a wider area than that designated as Green Wedge, since it was felt this would provide a better context for the management plan. The next stage is for the partner authorities to agree the draft report prior to community consultation. This will start in mid to late 2002.
84. Discussions with the partners are taking place as to which Green Wedge Management Plan should be started next. Proposals include Braunstone, Oadby and Wigston and an area of green space in Glen Parva.

## Improve Awareness of the Countryside

85. The Project aims to continue to build on the success of the four previous **Woodland Action Day** events. Considerable preparation goes into these days to try and ensure they appeal to the widest possible audience. Last year's fourth Action Day, in partnership with the British Trust for Nature Conservation, and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, drew between 500 and 600 people to Brocks Hill Country Park and Environment Centre.
86. The Project is committed to working with B.T.C.V. on future Woodland Action Days and this year aims to run another at the end of November as part of National Tree Week.

87. The project will continue to work with the National Farmers Union to promote and advise on School visits to farms, which fulfil the valuable role of helping educate young children understand and appreciate their countryside.
88. Several training events will be organised on countryside management topics that reflect key Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and habitats. Courses will include three 'Hedgelaying weekends', one 'Pond Creation and Management' course and a practical woodland management course. Last year's two hedge laying courses were very successful with 28 people in total attending.

### **Encouraging Local Action**

89. The project will continue to work closely with the Museums, Arts and Records Service on the **Season Watch Project**. Season Watch aims to encourage people across Leicestershire to record events in nature that represent the changing of the seasons. The Project aims to continue to develop work with schools and volunteers in taking part in Season Watch.
90. The project continues to promote wildlife surveys to volunteers and assist with any form of training that may be needed. In particular the project will be linking with the Heritage Project within Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service and the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland B.A.P. to develop training on the key wildlife habitats.
91. The project is assisting with the support and development of the Leicestershire Tree Warden Scheme within its area.

### **Environmental Improvements**

92. There are a wide range of improvement schemes including, those for public open space, village and town centre works and historic landscapes. Wherever possible partnership working arrangements are established as an aid to community interaction, budgetary development/control and smooth working practices. Although some of the projects can be completed within one year, in many instances the process from conception to completion may take between 3 and 5 years.

### **Town and Village Centre Improvements**

93. Staff will continue to be heavily involved in the development of the design for **Hinckley Town Centre** stage two public consultation work and later, detailed design, linked to the highways / environmental improvement scheme. Staff will also be involved in a joint officer steering group to consider and develop the use of public art.
94. In **Ashby de la Zouch Town Centre**, staff will also continue to be heavily involved in the development of the highway options and later, with the stage two public consultation work. Staff will then be involved in further design work and the development of the final option.

95. Work will continue on the development of the environmental improvement schemes at the Regent's Court / Stoney Hollow and the Swift Bridge area of **Lutterworth**, jointly funded by the Town Council, Harborough District Council and the Harborough Highways Partnership. These improvements will tie in with an overall package of highway improvements and traffic calming proposals for the town and will complement the first phase of planting recently completed on the Stoney Hollow embankment. Works here are also benefiting from HERS funding.
96. In **Melton Mowbray**, assistance and support will continue to be given to the Town Estate during the preparation of the parkland restoration management plan by specialist consultants, which is due for completion at the end of June. The County Council will continue to provide support and advice during visits by the Heritage Lottery Board over the summer. The final application will be made to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks Programme in late October.

### **Towns and Villages**

97. In **Shepshed**, working in partnership with the Town Council and Charnwood Borough Council, work will target town centre environmental improvements in response to the results of a report from consultants commissioned by Loughborough Outreach Partnership. This work will form part of the Leicestershire Town/Village Centre Improvements Scheme and will focus on the town's Conservation Area, continuing the adoption of artist-designed street furniture and bespoke artworks throughout the town.
98. Funding will be sought from English Heritage through their 'Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme' (HERS), Leicestershire Rural Partnership as well as through the Landmark Programme and/or Shire Grant scheme.
99. In **Broughton Astley**, working in conjunction with the Harborough Highways Partnership, safety concerns and problems with informal football games causing a nuisance to local residents will be addressed by introducing planting and fencing on one or two adopted highway public open spaces.
100. The crossroads area in **Thurcaston** village centre has recently been improved by the provision of 3 large shrub planters and once the highway improvement works are completed similar works will be implemented outside the public house.
101. **Countesthorpe** village centre will benefit from a comprehensive landscaping scheme in and around the shops on Wigston Street. Works will include shrub planters and a substantial new shrub bed. Further works are possible if Blaby District Council designates a Conservation Area in the village, for HERS funding will then become available.
102. A wide range of projects is under development in **Castle Donington**, including landscape works, financial support for new paving and a series of village entrance roundabout enhancements.

103. In **Glenfield** work is underway with the parish council on railway themed village centre enhancement works. There may also be some joint environmental works with Blaby District Council at the Dominion Road crossroads.
104. **Sileby** is one of a number of settlements, which could benefit environmentally from participating in the Heritage and Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS). A range of sites is under discussion with the Parish Council and it is anticipated that a rolling programme of environmental improvements will be prepared, starting with the replacement of the railings adjacent to the stream on Brook Street.
105. In response to an initial approach from **Earl Shilton Parish Council** and tying-in with the highway local safety scheme works proposed for later this year, officers have begun to develop environmental improvement proposals for local consultation.
106. An initial examination of possible environmental improvements in **Barwell** will start later this year.
107. Work will continue in **Markfield**, in conjunction with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, on environmental improvement works within the HERS area
108. **Rothley** Cross Green will benefit from substantial environmental improvements that include new footpaths, planting, railings, seating and lighting of a war memorial. The scheme is linked to highway improvement works and officers are currently working closely with the Parish and Borough Council on the final design of the project. Funding for the scheme will be sought from the SHIRE Grant scheme, WREN, Parish and Borough Council, Leicestershire Rural Partnership and HERS as well as the Environmental Action Budget.
109. In **Higham-on-the-Hill**, consultations are underway with the local community for the creation of a 'home zone' along Main Street between Barr Lane and Nuneaton Lane. This project is in the conservation area and requires sensitive treatment involving a combination of environmental improvements and traffic calming measures to slow down and deter through traffic in the village.
110. The **Glenfield Millennium Green** was officially opened on 13th April 2002. Officers from the Environmental Action Team will continue to provide support and assistance to The Glenfield Millennium Green Trust in maintaining and developing the site.
111. The **Measham Millennium Green Trust** will continue to receive support from staff in maintaining and developing the site, including the creation of a mosaic and sundial due for installation in September 2002 and the commissioning of interpretative signage.
112. Provision of support will continue to implement the landscape works at the **Brocks Hill Millennium Park**, Oadby. This will include the detailed design and facilitation of Phase III landscape works around the Environment Centre within the 2002-03 financial year.

## Historic Parkland

113. At **Staunton Harold Park**, work will continue overseeing the establishment of the new planting in The Wilderness, which took place in spring 2001.
114. Following a successful bid in principle for funding through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme assistance will be given to the landowners in drawing together detailed proposals for improvements to estate roads within the Park. This is the third phase of the traffic management plan for the Grade II\* registered historic parkland. The estate roads will be restored both to a good condition and to a style more acceptable in the parkland context.
115. Working in partnership with current and future owners of the various land holdings within the Park will ensure it is put in order to further the aims of the Staunton Harold Park Restoration Management Plan.

## Sites Management

116. The Environmental Action Team manages 12 sites covering over 165 Ha (396 acres). Although most of these are within the National Forest, there is one in South Wigston and another in Market Harborough. All have been created as part of the Derelict Land Improvement Programme. Most of these sites have now passed through their initial development stage and as a result an increasingly high percentage of their routine maintenance costs is borne by the Environmental Action Budget.
117. On many of the sites **volunteer wardens** provide an invaluable service, attending to such matters as gate keeping, routine site maintenance and reporting problems. Their works are complemented by the use of specialist outside contractors to undertake such works as grass cutting and tree/scrub management.
118. The staff resources available within the Environmental Action Team and available monies within the Environmental Action budget are insufficient to manage these sites to the standards, which their usage requires. Discussions will therefore continue with the Heart of the National Forest Foundation and the Department of Property over the transfer of some or all of these sites for long-term management. This year the site in South Wigston, which was originally purchased by the Education Committee for additional school playing fields, though never used for that purpose, will be transferred back now that all the landscape development works on it are established.
119. The **Ashby Woulds Heritage Trail** continues to increase in popularity with walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Work is ongoing to designate the nature area at Moira Junction as a Local Nature Reserve.
120. The **Saltersford Valley** and **Donisthorpe New Wood** sites continue to be managed for public access and maintained to improve the diversity of the

grassland flora. It is hoped to designate the Saltersford site a Local Nature Reserve later this financial year.

121. Trees at **Sarah's Wood** are now well established and the number of visitors using the site and in particular the children's play area, continues to increase. Part of the site has been affected by the extension to the Ashby Canal to a new terminus at Conkers and this work will be completed by the summer. New landscape planting alongside the canal will be carried out next planting season.
122. At **Donisthorpe Woodland Park** the trees are establishing well and a programme of tree and grass maintenance will continue. The site continues to be increasingly popular with walkers, cyclists and horse riders and resurfacing of the stone paths is under consideration. A further extension of the Ashby Canal through the site to the Donisthorpe Miners Welfare Recreation Ground, is planned but is awaiting identification of the source of funding. A new car park, part funded by the National Forest Company and adjacent to the new community building, is under construction.
123. Landscape improvement work last year carried out at **Cockspur Bridge**, Donisthorpe will continue to be maintained.
124. **Bagworth Heath Wood** has continued to increase in popularity with local visitors. Further work on heathland creation is planned for autumn 2002 and drainage work in advance of the creation of a permissive bridleway through the site is due for completion this May. The latter has been planned in conjunction with the Leicestershire Bridleways Association, to provide horse-riders with an additional off-road route. Consideration is also being given to the installation of a hard surfaced track for maintenance access and other minor site improvements in 2002/03.
125. Negotiations are underway with the Woodland Trust, who own an adjoining site and are willing to pay an annual sum for shared use of the Bagworth Heath Woods car park.
126. A baseline ecological survey has been commissioned for summer 2002. Some changes to site maintenance regimes are already in hand in order to enhance the developing wildlife value of the site and it is expected that the ecological survey will greatly assist progress in this area.
127. Despite continuing problems of fly - tipping, the standard of maintenance on the site remains high. Following the completion of the Phase 3 maintenance contract later this year, Bagworth Heath Woods as a whole will be covered by one maintenance contract likely to run for a further 3.years.
128. Alongside **the A511 in Coalville**, work will continue managing two sites for public amenity and nature conservation benefit and consideration is being given to seeking Local Nature Reserve (LNR) designation for them.
129. The development of the tranquil **Oakthorpe Colliery** site continues well, with the young woodland planting establishing. There will be an ongoing programme of

vegetation management of rides, footpaths and open grassland areas to improve public access. The Woodland Trust, who own an adjacent site, have agreed in principle to contribute towards the cost of maintaining the Oakthorpe Car Park.

130. Assistance will continue to be given to the Department of Property for ongoing maintenance and improvement works at the **Coleorton/Royal Mail Wood** and **Watermead Country Park**.
131. Last year management works **at Bagworth New Wood** were curtailed due to exceptionally wet weather and the closure of the site (which is partly let for grazing) due to foot and mouth precautions.
132. Management works will continue as necessary at this site. New residential development on the adjoining former colliery site is likely to increase the number of visitors and may result in an increased management input being required. A baseline ecological survey has been commissioned for summer 2002.

### **Asfordby Mine offsite landscape scheme**

133. The Section 52 Agreement was signed by the County Council, British Coal (UK Coal Mining Ltd) and the Countryside Commission (Countryside Agency) in 1980 with the purpose of mitigating the visual impact of the mine and tip. To achieve these objectives British Coal deposited a sum of £188,000 in an interest bearing account with the County Council. The sum was to be spent on the planting off site of woodland to screen the mine and tip and enhancing the landscape within 5km of the mine by providing grants for landowners to plant trees and hedges on their own land. The sum was to be spent within a 75 year period.
134. Following the closure of the mine in 1998 there was no public benefit to be gained in carrying out new screen planting and landscape enhancement work. The Section 52 Agreement having no termination clause any amendments must be agreed between the three parties. The lease agreements allow for termination by the landowners on the closure of the mine.
135. The Development Control and Regulatory Board agreed on the 18 April 2002 to amend the Section 52 agreement as follows:
  - a) to redistribute two thirds of the Offsite Landscape Fund to enable the County Council to carry out or grant aid environmental improvements within 5km of the mine site and the remaining one third to be claimed by UK Coal Ltd.;
  - b) the details of the environmental improvement scheme to be subject to agreement by the Cabinet; and
  - c) to agree to authorise the County Solicitor to commence the termination of the leases on the off site woodland planting at the landowners request.
136. The current position is that the offsite landscape fund stands at £206,975. A sum of £31,192 has been reserved to manage the existing off site woodland planting.

UK Coal Ltd will receive one third of the fund being a sum of £58,594. The remaining two thirds of the Offsite Landscape Fund amounts to £117,188.

137. It is has been agreed, at the request of the partners, that the fund will be held by the County Council but applications for grants will be considered jointly the Section 52 Agreement partners, that is UK Coal Ltd and the Countryside Agency, who will also share in any publicity.
138. The fund will operate within an area of 5km of the mine site and will provide grants for environmental improvement works directly and will also match fund other funding bids. It is proposed that Parish Councils, legally constituted community groups, Melton Borough Council, the County Council and private landowners who can demonstrate a high level of public access and benefit would be eligible to submit applications for grant aid.
139. Any schemes submitted will have to demonstrate that they have public benefit and contribute to the aims of the County Council's Medium Term Corporate Strategy and the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland strategy.
140. The Local Members Mr. B. Chapman, Lt. Col. P. A Roffey, Dr. M.O'Callaghan and Mr. J. B Rhodes, together with Parish Councils within the 5km area and Melton Borough Council have been consulted and are in agreement with the proposals.
141. It is proposed that the details of the scheme, such as the conditions, the maximum level and proportion of grant per application be drawn up by the Acting Director of Planning and Transportation in consultation with the Cabinet Lead Members for the Environment. Cabinet approval for delegated powers to the Acting Director of Planning and Transportation to agree the final grant aid conditions, the application process and the day to day operation of the grant aid programme, in consultation with Lead Environment Members is sought.

#### **Waste Recycling Environmental (WREN)**

142. Last year Hanson Plc sold its waste disposal operations to the Waste Recycling Group (WRG). Hanson Waste Management along with SITA had been the principal funders for the Leicestershire Environmental Action Fund (LEAF), which distributed landfill tax monies to a range of environmental and other works across the county.
143. With Hanson Waste Management selling its assets to WRG, and SITA determining that it wanted to directly control the distribution of its landfill tax money the direct funding base for LEAF ceased to exist and so the organisation was wound-up. However it has been replaced by a similar organisation under WRG's control, Waste Recycling Environmental (WREN).
144. Members of the former LEAF board were retained as an advisory panel conveying views on Leicestershire applications to WREN's board for their final decision. This authority has two representatives on the advisory panel (Mrs L. A

Pendleton CC & Mr J. R. Hockney) and county council officers provide some assistance to the WREN administrative officer when appraising applications. A sum of £500k is allocated for these schemes.

145. Earlier in the year this authority was invited by WREN to submit some in principle bids to the Leicestershire Panel (LEAP) so that consideration could be given to setting aside blocks of money to support more specific bids later on. Bids were prepared for works to Measham Station, village entrance signs, Ashby Canal Shipway and the refurbishment of village/town parks. (Further waste-related bids were also made).

### **Cycleways and Greenways**

146. The recreational cycleways development programme focuses on identifying new opportunities for cyclists across the County and seeks to establish partnerships with relevant organisations to build and promote suitable and safe routes.
147. Working with Sustrans a network of existing and potential new routes, complementary to the National Cycle Network, is being developed with particular emphasis placed upon routes identified in the cycling strategy.
148. The cycleways budget for this year has been allocated to the continued development of the **Leicester - National Forest Cycleway**. It is planned this year to construct the section between Pear Tree Farm (built last year) and Thornton Lane, Ratby.

### **Architectural Initiatives**

149. The architectural initiatives budget will be used to fund a range of specialist conservation issues, for example the purchase of indigenous local building materials like Swithland Slate, for sale and subsequent reuse in the repair of historic buildings in the county. Contributions will be made to assist with specific areas of the conservation of Grace Dieu Priory, a project supported by Heritage Lottery Fund. Other projects to be considered include small-scale feasibility studies for the reuse of historic buildings at risk, and dendrochronological (tree-ring) dating of appropriate buildings.