

## Glenfield Environment, Open Spaces and Wildlife



### AIMS

The Parish Council will endeavour to maintain the 'green' acreage within the village and preserve the green wedges between the village and neighbouring communities.

To this end the Parish Council will;

- actively promote bio-diversity within Glenfield, deploying bird and bat boxes around the village and encourage others to do likewise.

- protect all areas of its own land recognised for its wildlife importance and use such influence as it may have on other to preserve and enhance the wildlife within the village for future generations. [

- protect trees against damage whether inadvertent or otherwise on its own property and influence landowners to protect existing trees on other land

- promote the planting of new trees by third parties to see more and healthier trees in Glenfield;

- encourage Blaby District Council and the Leicestershire County Council the ensure green spaces and trees as planning considerations

- acquire more amenity land where ever possible

provide corridors for both people and wildlife to move about without involving the built environment.

Green spaces generally, offer numerous benefits both to wildlife, local people, and visitors, effectively providing a bridge to the countryside; a health centre; an outdoor classroom and a nature reserve. These and the vegetation in them can provide a buffer zone, enhance air quality and give a habitat suitable for many creatures.

To support the care for our trees we have created a comprehensive set of guidelines supporting the Council's policies, which is to be regularly reviewed and updated.

## **GLENFIELD OPEN AREAS**

### **USE OF AREAS FOR SPORT & RECREATION**

An assessment of our outdoor recreation need was undertaken by the LCC Planning and Transportation Department for the Glenfield Local Plan in 1974 which indicated a theoretical need for twelve pitches for soccer, rugby, hockey and cricket, for the population as it then was. The Local Plan, however, allocated space for significantly less than that number, and continued the longstanding situation of under-provision in the village,

The population has grown considerably since then.

Subsequently club soccer pitches were developed behind 'The Forge' public house and the Parish Council purchased (£47,000 of which £10,000 was a grant) the old 'Dunlop' Sports Ground north of the old A50 with sufficient space for cricket and soccer pitches and opportunity for further development which was constrained and finally thwarted by the Leicester Western By-Pass. One further private soccer pitch was brought into use at County Hall.

An updated assessment was carried out at the Parish Council's request, on the basis of the East Midlands Sports Council's methodology for calculating demand in smaller communities in 1983 based on the population, age and sex structure of the village, related to participation rates in sport in Central Leicestershire. It was estimated that the then total requirement for the population of the village was a minimum seven soccer pitches plus three cricket squares and one pitch each for rugby and hockey.

The rugby and hockey pitches need not necessarily have been met at the local level and clubs elsewhere - for instance at Leicester Forest East or Groby - may well have fulfilled the then demand. It was thought possible that there could have been enough latent interest to stimulate the growth of a rugby club locally, however, it would be normal for such a club to use community college pitches in the first instance, later buying its own site, and consequently it was improbable that there would be any particular demand on the Parish Council.

Excluding County Hall facilities there were then, five soccer pitches in the village, though one of these was subsequently lost. There was expected to be a deferred demand for two more good quality pitches, though the long tradition of very little space for football would have tended to divert demand to clubs in surrounding areas.

Cricket was established in the village but the constraints on space artificially repressed demand and many village cricketers would have found clubs elsewhere. Nevertheless, with the availability of space for cricket it could be anticipated that demand would grow steadily in the village, probably to an eventual maximum requirement of three pitches. Back in 1984, a report pointed out that on the basis of National Playing Fields Association then guidelines there should

have been far more public open space in Glenfield at that time. We had confirmation from the Leicestershire Playing Fields Association in 1990 that the then guidelines suggested that we should have 6 acres per 1000 residents meaning that to service the present population and growth anticipated over the next few years we should have 70 acres. We fall well short of that and the area of land available in Glenfield clearly could not meet this target. Ellis Park has been used for some junior football but is not level enough and proximity to housing would make the noise of much such usage unpopular. There are no changing facilities either. The uneven field includes historic ridge & furrow.

Back then the Parish Council were therefore advised to consider seeking an alternative site and subsequently acquired the Sports Ground off Gynsill Lane which was still inadequate but all that could be acquired. It had been and is still hoped that we might eventually expand this over Rothley Brook. Given that that was not then possible it was decided to pursue a major new recreation area and a further report was forthcoming from LCC. It identified several areas within the Parish which were level enough to produce sports pitches with little or no earth moving, but all of them did have certain constraints, generally in terms of access or potential flooding. They did not investigate whether any of them would be available for purchase, or whether planning permission would be granted by the District Council.

The village has also during this period been trying to find a site for a burial ground and many of the considerations for use of land for sport and recreation would equally apply to land for that purpose.

In discounting the land we now have as a wildlife meadow, the Highways Authority would not allow vehicular access and it was deemed too far from our sports pavilion to be used for senior games and would need a separate pavilion which was a cost which could not be justified. We looked at the land between it and the Sports Ground which would be level with relatively little earth moving required, however, much of this area is either essential or non-essential wash land and did flood regularly. The siting of pitches would have to be chosen carefully to avoid those areas most prone to flooding but it was felt two senior pitches could be created acceptably near to our changing rooms and the flooding issues have reduced after drainage works. It was thought it was possible to operate pitches in such land with the loss of only a few days play each season, provided that very good under-drainage was installed to carry away excess water as quickly as possible. It was pointed out that Mowmacre St. Margaret's F.C. was operating reasonably satisfactory on land subject to these constraints.

In the long term, vehicle access could only be from the A46 or A50 and the Highways Authority have several times indicated that permission is highly unlikely leaving the only option, servicing it by a bridge over Rothley Brook from the sports ground. This does however seem to remain our only option

Turning to casual and informal access rather than organised sport, in 1987 the commissioned commercial feasibility study stated that should the Parish Council have chosen to regard the matter of trespass as one of concern or wished to encourage the use of Rothley Brook as an area for public recreation, it would have been open to the Council to try to negotiate a formal access agreement with the farmer and assist with any necessary improvement or fencing works. It was felt it would be possible to create pleasant and attractive walks in this area of Glenfield creating links to existing rights of way and using new potential linking routes - mainly following existing popularly made tracks.

The Parish Council would have had to approach appropriate landowners informally to ask consent to tidy and plant alongside existing footpaths. It was thought landowners ought to have little objection to a properly controlled work on overgrown vegetation. Similarly there should be no problems with properly located tree planting, provided the Parish Council agreed to carry out

any necessary maintenance. On the more urbanised part of any route, occasional benches may have been appropriate. The results of successful negotiations could vary from a public path creation agreement to a 364 days per annum access agreement (Permissive Path) in return for a small annual payment. Perhaps £150.00 p.a. should have been the very highest payment on such a scale. The advantages to a landowner, apart from any direct payment should be some degree of 'direction' of people who were then walking randomly over farm land.

On the strength of these reports a successful campaign was launched to have a new footpath created along part of Rothley Brook largely utilising the old railway line.

Members of the Parish Council worked with the Stepping Stones team on the general enhancement and protection of Rothley Brook corridor discussed with the County Councils Rights of Way team as to what other steps could be taken to secure rights of access along the other parts of the Brook. These areas are privately owned but have enjoyed de facto access for many years. A LCC Rights of Way Officer has taken photographic evidence of usage but rather than make a claim the Parish Council approached agents acting for the landowners to try and negotiate and were rebuffed. A decision whether to proceed with a claim by virtue of usage has been deferred but if to be made must be within 20 years of the farmer's advice that he did not want these paths used by the public. Unfortunately Stepping Stones has now been disbanded.

Another anomaly in this area which will need addressing is that of access to the path along the old railway line. The County Council own and maintain this route and have installed pedestrian steps up onto it at both ends of West Street. However West Street is a private road and technically nobody has the right to access those steps. Again as there has been unhindered usage of West Street for this purpose for well over 20 years a claim for legal footpath status has been made.

Quite apart from organised sports, there is increasingly strong evidence of the health-benefits of walking. e.g. the fact that brisk walking improves circulation and the performance of the heart and lungs. Walking can lower blood-pressure; it can reduce risk of stroke and of heart disease. It can improve control of blood sugar in type-two diabetes and it has an important role in cardiac rehabilitation. Walking and riding also promote mental health and general well-being, and have the potential to be as effective as anti-depressants or psychotherapy in treating depression. Widespread take-up of walking generally could massively lighten the economic burden on the NHS caused by physical inactivity and Glenfield Parish Council wishes to encourage informal walking.

To this end it has published twenty suggested walks in and around Glenfield and 18 further afield within then Charnwood Forest area. They are of varying lengths and some are easier than others

Housing demands are a threat to all the green wedges around the village but if any development is imposed the Parish Council will seek more amenity land including if possible more sports pitches/play areas, parks, allotments and a burial ground.

## **Casual Recreation**

Apart from organised sport and play areas Glenfield has numerous areas where wildlife is afforded some protection and people can enjoy spotting these as they take gentle exercise walking the many grass paths provided

Glenfields open spaces are detailed on the website and on natu7reSpot.

## THE WIDER AREA

Glenfield is just outside the Charnwood Forest Regional Park area which is itself, now part of the developing National Forest, and footpaths afford opportunities to walk out into it

Our ecology will to an extent, reflect that of the nearby Charnwood Forest which contains rocks laid down during the Precambrian Period and date from around 560-600 million years ago. At this time, what is now England lay within the southern hemisphere and material erupting from volcanoes accumulated forming the tough rocks of the 'Charnian Supergroup', which is at least 3.5 km thick and has been subject to much quarrying activity on our doorstep.

Primitive life began to evolve about this time; the fossils of which can be found throughout Charnwood Forest. During the later Cambrian Period the volcanoes were worn down by erosion allowing the sea to advance and Swithland Slates represent the muddy material laid down on the sea floor then. The collision of two continental plates approximately 420 million years ago caused the formation of mountains, the remnants of which today form the Charnwood hills.

Over more recent millennia sediments were laid down in seas which covered part of the area giving us some Carboniferous Limestone. As the seas receded they were replaced by a large delta, containing humid swamps and rainforests, in which the Coal Measures accumulated. The very existence of old coal workings which needed restoration played a major part in bringing the new National Forest to our neighbourhood and the continuing quarrying does provide grants which we can utilise to fund our environmental actions. In less distant times the development of rivers has formed flood plains floored by clay and silt, and later sand and gravel extraction has also tailored the nearby landscape.

The topography of Charnwood Forest is distinct and varied. The central area is high and rocky. Land in the rest of the area is gently rolling or undulating and small streams and brooks transect the area creating localised changes in topography. Rothley Brook flows into the River Soar and also forms a flat floodplain that separates the south-eastern extent of the Charnwood Forest area from the urban area of Leicester and smaller communities including Glenfield. A number of smaller brooks and streams carve their way through fields and woodland from the higher land of Charnwood Forest and while small they provide ecological interest and influence the character of the landscape surrounding them. These are largely unpolluted, fast flowing and well oxygenated. Species include brown trout, minnow, crayfish and much invertebrate life. To our side of Charnwood we have Groby Pool which is an SSSI, as are the nearby Swithland and Cropston Reservoirs; all of which are important nature reserves for wetland birds and support a rich population of aquatic flora and fauna, making a major contribution to the needs of wildlife and bird life.

Charnwood Forest contains a wealth of ecological habitats and species which, because of the upland topography, wetter and cooler climate and poorer soils, are rare in other parts of Leicestershire. These include heath and acid grasslands and heathers. Cross-leaved heath and bilberry are prevalent and a wide variety of associated vertebrate and invertebrate species are common. These habitats are at risk however from natural woodland regeneration without some intervention by man. Meadows are to be found with fragrant orchid, meadow buttercup, meadow saxifrage and many other associated species

The area has many valuable woodlands. There are areas of semi-natural ancient woodland, as well as some woodlands which are known to have been present since the Domesday Book of 1086. This is largely because they sit on the pre-Cambrian spine which has made the area unsuitable for agriculture.



Within the Forest here are 20 Sites of Special Scientific interest; both ecological and geological, covering what equates to almost 12% of the area (according to English Nature's Charnwood Forest Natural Area Profile). There are also locally designated wildlife sites including three Local Nature Reserves, Woodland Trust sites, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust sites and the Country Parks. Charnwood Lodge is designated as a National Nature Reserve due to the pre-Cambrian rocks which are visible as jagged peaks protruding through the overlying Mercian Mudstones.

The proximity of these nature areas does give a gene bank from which Glenfield's natural corners can be populated. If this is to remain the case it is essential that the green corridors and green wedges be maintained. Whilst we are just outside this area the wildlife it supports is accessible to us and does allow for spreading into the green wedge areas which border our village and our gardens experience a very diverse population of wild life as a result.

## **WILDLIFE**

If we wish to see strengthening of the gene pool of creatures other than birds then it is essential they can migrate into and across our areas. There are sizeable pockets of green space within reasonable distance of Glenfield which, whilst not always open to the general public do provide some facility for wildlife but they are mostly isolated making migration of creatures, other than flying ones, near impossible. Areas with large gardens do help to an extent but some housing infill is eating into these. Western Park, Braunstone Park, Castle Hill Country Park, Charnwood Forest, and the National Forest woodlands around and beyond Ratby together all afford space for wildlife as do the Kirby Muxloe Golf Course and the former Western Park Golf Course with the adjoining Kirby Frith designated Local Nature Reserve. To whatever extent it is possible we must encourage the provision of migration routes between them.

Rothley Brook is one invaluable wildlife migration route. It is edged by tangled shrub and mature trees, providing cover and a corridor for all manner of wildlife. In the gravel beds, crayfish have in the past been found and various species of fish inhabit the waters which themselves attract kingfishers. There have been two sightings of otters in recent years as these creatures make something of a comeback. They do migrate over substantial distances and these were probably just passing through. Mink have been seen but not for some time and water voles were present but not apparently now. These two issues are probably related. Great crested newts have been seen in two nearby locations.

Numerous species of bird have been seen, including some less usual species such as tree creepers, woodpeckers, bullfinches and little and tawny owls.

It is some years since we were aware of any sightings of field voles but in the recent past, bats, hedgehogs, foxes and a weasel have been seen in this area. There are 18 species of Bats found in the UK, all being insectivores. The Parish Council is not aware of any scientific survey of species present in the village but sightings, or the lack of them, suggest a significant decline in the past fifty years, presumably due to loss of, and damage to, roosting sites. Loss of suitable insect-rich feeding habitats such as wetlands and deciduous woodland cannot have helped and neither can modern agricultural practices.

A major problem for them is the removal of commuting routes between roosts and feeding areas. They like to follow features such as tree-lines and hedgerows making another case for protecting our green corridors. Bats being difficult to locate, makes assessing our bat population very tricky. Some species hang in obvious locations, such as the timbers near to the apex of a roof; others roost in cracks and crevices, such as the gaps under tiles, and as such can be very difficult to spot. The Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre previously at Holly Hayes had details of identified roosts and species but some recent sightings have been positively identified as either common pipistrelle or soprano pipistrelle. Unfortunately with the cuts these

central records are no longer being maintained making our own inventory even more important. We are to site some bat boxes round the village.

Hedgehogs are seen fairly regularly but the perceived wisdom is that they are scarcer than they used to be. Whilst they can climb surprisingly well, householders could assist them by ensuring small gaps in fences wherever possible.

Gardens do make up the major source of habitat for most species and fortunately many properties within the village have very large gardens. We are however seeing infill development at an increasing rate and this will have an impact on suitable habitats for wildlife

Residents are encouraged to report sightings of creatures and more unusual flowers to natureSpot who maintain an inventory of locations in the village valued for wildlife and record species seen. A link to natureSpot is on the Parish Council website

## **SUMMARY.**

### **Amenity Land –**

Blaby District and Glenfield are both under provided for with public accessible green spaces under national guidelines. We have nowhere to bury our dead and have an under-provision of allotments. There may be solutions to be had within Glenfield for both these problems provided that additional public amenity land could be obtained elsewhere to compensate for the change of use this would entail. We have gained considerably more amenity land recently as part of the trade off for the new commercial developments.

### **Wildlife Corridors –**

There are sizeable pockets of green space within reasonable distance of Glenfield which, whilst not open to the general public (farms, school fields etc.), do provide some facility for wildlife but they are mostly isolated making migration of creatures, other than flying ones, near impossible. Areas with large gardens do help to an extent but some housing infill is eating into these.

### **Identity –**

Glenfield as a community is in danger of losing its identity. The west, north-west and south-west are the only green divides and, under whatever classification, the population wishes to see this separation maintained.

We have no discernible border with Leicester City and have for years resisted the pressure to become part of Leicester. We have no discernible border with Braunstone Frith and the very entity of Glenfield is only preserved by the green wedge keeping us apart from Groby, Kirby Muxloe, Ratby and Anstey and this must be preserved. The land between Anstey and Glenfield on the south side of Rothley Brook is being developed but the brook corridor still affords some separation.

The purposes of Green Wedges are set out in the East Midlands Regional Plan. They are not a landscape designation, but seek to influence the form and direction of urban development. The primary functions are to prevent coalescence of distinct settlements and to contribute towards recreation opportunities in areas that are often mainly 'built up'.

### **Health & Wellbeing –**

Recommended guidelines suggest that all people should be able to access some form of open countryside within 500 metres of their home, be it urban or country parkland, wood, or agricultural land with public full or partial access by rights of way.