

THURCASTON AND CROPSTON PARISH

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

2015 - 2028



REFERENDUM VERSION

September 2016

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Foreword

Thurcaston and Cropston is a vibrant and attractive parish with a unique heritage. It is a popular place in which to live in and visit. We are very proud of it.

The Thurcaston and Cropston Neighbourhood Plan commenced in 2014. The Parish Council, and the wider community, wanted a bigger say in how the Parish developed and to ensure that any development that takes place reflects the needs and priorities of the community.

The Plan is result of significant input and work involving parishioners, parish councillors and others with a strong interest in Thurcaston and Cropston and led by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. It sets out a vision for the Parish until 2028, together with a small number of objectives such as in relation to new housing, getting around and the built and natural environment that are key to delivering this vision.

The Parish Council would also like to thank those bodies and individuals who gave up their time and expertise in preparing the Plan. I would especially like to thank the Borough Council, the County Council, Leicestershire Rural Community Council, neighbourhood planning consultants *YourLocale*, *Locality* and the Big Lottery Fund as well as the many hundreds of local people that attended the various public meetings, sat on the Steering Groups and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. Without your input and support the Plan would not be the robust and community led document it is.

Mark Charles

Chairman of Thurcaston & Cropston Parish Council.

1. Introduction

This is the Referendum Edition of the Neighbourhood Plan for Thurcaston and Cropston Parish. It has been prepared by the Thurcaston and Cropston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, which brings together members of the local community and Parish Councillors, and has been led by the Parish Council.

A key part of the Government's Localism agenda, a Neighbourhood Plan is a new type of planning document that gives local people greater control and say over how their community develops and evolves.

As the *Plain English Guide to the Localism Act 2011* states, "Instead of local people being told what to do, the Government thinks that local communities should have genuine opportunities to influence the future of the places where they live".

It enables a community to create a vision and set clear planning policies for the use and development of land at the neighbourhood level to realise this vision. This includes, for example, where new homes, shops and industrial uses should be built, what new buildings and extensions should look like and which areas of land should be protected from development.

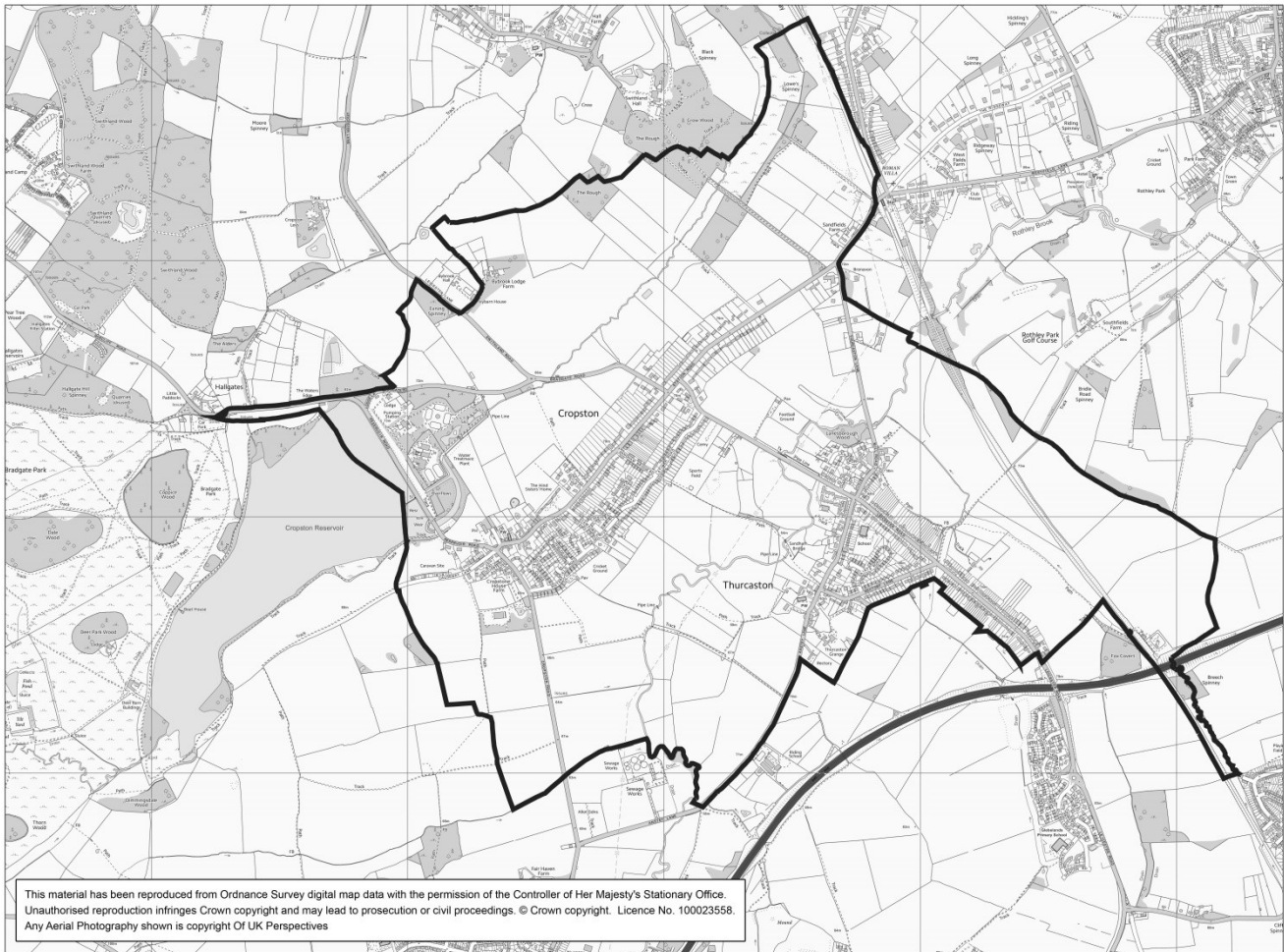
Neighbourhood Plans can be general or more detailed, depending on what local people want. They must, however, be in general conformity with national and Borough-wide planning policies and must be prepared in a prescribed manner.

The Plan is now at the referendum stage. This means that the Parish Council, Charnwood Borough Council and an Independent Examiner are all satisfied that it is a robust document, which meets the 'basic conditions' for preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. This is in accordance with rules covering the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan.

It will be put forward to referendum, where those on the electoral register in Thurcaston and Cropston Parish will be invited to vote on whether or not they support it. At least 50% of those voting must vote yes for it to become a 'Made' statutory planning document.

After being 'Made', each time a planning decision has to be taken by Charnwood Borough Council, or any other body, they will be required to refer to the Neighbourhood Plan (alongside the Borough's own Charnwood Local Plan 2011 to 2028 Core Strategy and other relevant documents) and check whether the proposed development is in accordance with the policies the community has developed.

Thurcaston & Cropston: Neighbourhood Plan Area



2. How the Plan was Prepared

The Neighbourhood Plan was prepared by Thurcaston and Cropston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

This Steering Group comprises members of the local community and Parish Councillors with the support of the Borough and County Council, Leicestershire Rural Community Council and consultants *Yourlocale* and under the direction of Thurcaston and Cropston Parish Council (the Accountable Body for the Plan).

It is based on robust evidence. This includes statistical information gathered through sources such as the Census as well as from community consultation and engagement.

Effective and extensive consultation has been at the heart of the preparation of the Plan. This is key to ensuring that the Plan fully reflects local needs and priorities. There have been a variety of consultation exercises over the last 12 months, in which many hundreds of local

people have taken part. These include public displays; drop-in sessions; surveys; focus groups looking at specific issues and regular meetings and activities with local school children. Full details of the type of consultation and the people and groups consulted are contained in the Consultation Statement (see Parish Council web site).

3. How the Plan fits into the Planning System

A Neighbourhood Plan is an opportunity for local people to create a framework for delivering a sustainable future for the benefit of all who live or work in that community, or who visit it.

The right for communities to prepare Neighbourhood Plans was established through the Localism Act 2011, which set out the general rules governing their preparation.

A Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the statutory Development Plan for the area in which it is prepared. This statutory status means that it must be taken into account when considering planning decisions affecting that area.

A Neighbourhood Plan is not prepared in isolation. It also needs to be in general conformity with relevant national and Borough-wide (i.e. Charnwood) planning policies.

For Thurstaston and Cropston, the most significant planning document is the Charnwood Local Plan 2011 to 2028 Core Strategy. This sets out the strategic planning framework for the District's future development needs up to 2028. It contains a number of policies and objectives which are relevant to Thurstaston and Cropston and which the Plan must be in general conformity with. These policies and objectives span issues such as the provision and location of new housing; providing sustainable transport; promoting design and protecting and enhancing the built environment and green infrastructure. The Neighbourhood Plan is in conformity with the policies contained in these documents.

Also important is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The NPPF requires the planning system (including Neighbourhood Plans) to encourage sustainable development and details three dimensions to that development:

- An economic dimension – they should contribute to economic development;
- A social dimension – they should support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by providing the right supply of housing and creating a high quality built environment with accessible local services;

- An environmental dimension – they should contribute to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

In addition, Neighbourhood Plans must be compatible with European Union (EU) legislation. Relevant EU obligations in relation to the neighbourhood planning process are those relating to Strategic Environmental Assessment, protected European Habitats and Human Rights Legislation.

This Plan and the policies it contains are consistent with the NPPF, Charnwood Core Strategy and relevant EU legislation. Full details of how the Plan complies with these legislative requirements are set out in the Basic Conditions statement (see Appendix 2).

Furthermore, these policies will be specific to Thurcaston and Cropston and reflect the needs and aspirations of the community.

4. The Plan, its vision, objectives and what we want it to achieve

The Plan area encompasses the whole of the Parish of Thurcaston and Cropston and covers the period up to 2028, a time scale which deliberately mirrors that for the Charnwood Core Strategy.

The Neighbourhood Plan is not intended to replace or supersede the Borough-wide Core Strategy, but rather it sits alongside it, to add additional or more detailed policies specific to Thurcaston and Cropston. Where the Core Strategy contains policies that meet the needs and requirements of Thurcaston and Cropston they are not repeated here. Instead, the Plan focuses on those planning issues which consultation shows matter most to the community, and to which it can add the greatest additional value.

It is important to note that when using the Neighbourhood Plan to form a view on a development proposal or a policy issue, all of the document and the policies contained in it must be considered together.

The Plan comprises a number of key elements:

- A simple and clear vision for the future development of the Parish based on local consultation. This is to “maintain and enhance the good quality of life, community spirit and attractive natural and built environment in Thurcaston and Cropston Parish now and for future generations”. This will be realised by a small number of planning policies specific to Thurcaston and Cropston grouped around the key policy issues identified by the community as being of special importance to them. These include policies that:

- Ensure that development takes place in the most sustainable locations;
- Encourage the right types of development that meets local needs;
- Protect and wherever possible enhance important buildings and structures;
- Protect important community facilities that are special to the local community;
- Promote good design;
- Ensure that the community continues to have good access to the surrounding countryside and green spaces;
- Protect open spaces that are important to the community and/or wildlife;
- Seek ways of addressing the problems of traffic congestion and speed on our roads and the lack of parking; and
- Improve pedestrian and cycle connections within the Plan area and into the surrounding areas.

The Plan will be kept under review.

5. About Thurcaston and Cropston

Thurcaston and Cropston is a Parish in the Borough of Charnwood.

Unusually, the Parish comprises two distinct, historic settlements. The majority of its population and services are concentrated in the two villages, while between and surrounding them are large areas of open and generally attractive countryside.

Spanning over 515 hectares, it is mainly rural in nature. Agriculture is the dominant land use.

The Plan area supports a number of sites that provide important habitats for fauna and flora, including rare and declining species. This includes many designated Local Wildlife Sites such as at Swithland Hall Estate and Great Central Railway, Thurcaston to Birstall and Rothley Brook.

In 2011 it had a population of 2,074 (down very marginally from 2,076) in 2001. Reflecting the national trend, it has an ageing population. The proportion of young people in the Parish is below district and national averages.

At 4 persons per hectare, its population density is a third below the Borough average and just below the national average.

There is a limited range of community and service facilities in the Parish. These include two Churches, a Primary School, three pubs, a Village Hall and an electrical shop. Residents have to travel outside the Parish, mainly to the nearby centres of Loughborough and Leicester, to access other retail and community services.

The built environment is generally good. There are a number of buildings and structures that have been identified as having national and historic interest, including over 30 Listed Buildings. There are two Conservation Areas based on the historic cores of the Villages of Thurcaston and Cropston.

The majority of people living in the Parish use a car. 93% of households have access to a car, compared to 74% nationally. There is limited public transport provision.

Its strategic and accessible location in relation to the main road network and the main urban centres such as Leicester means that it is subject to considerable through traffic especially at peak times.

A full statistical profile of the Parish is available on the Parish Council website.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICIES

6. A Sustainable Thurcaston and Cropston Parish

6.1 A Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

The purpose of the UK Planning System as set out in the (National Planning Policy Framework) NPPF is to achieve sustainable development.

This means ensuring that providing for the needs of the current generation does not make life worse for future generations.

This Neighbourhood Plan has the need to secure sustainable development at its heart. This includes how much new development is required to meet the needs of the local community, where it should best go and how it should be designed, both for now and in the future. This encompasses all proposals for development from the very smallest, such as a minor extension to a house, to major housing and employment developments.

The Parish Council will take a positive approach to the consideration of development proposals that contribute to sustainable development. This includes working with the Borough Council, County Council, local community, developers and other partners to encourage the formulation of development proposals, which clearly demonstrate how sustainable development has been considered and addressed, and can be approved without delay.

POLICY T&C1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT -
When considering development proposals, the Plan will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

This Plan is not intended to replace the policies contained in the Charnwood Core Strategy and the NPPF. It sits alongside these documents, to add additional, more detailed Thurcaston and Cropston specific policies and help achieve the community's vision. Where suitable policies already exist in the Charnwood Core Strategy or NPPF, they are not duplicated in the Plan.

6.2 Directing Development to the most Sustainable Locations

One of the key ways in which the planning system can ensure sustainable development is to direct significant development, such as new homes and employment, to the most sustainable locations.

In support of this, Charnwood Borough Council has developed a hierarchy of settlements. This hierarchy is set out in, and is at the heart of, the Charnwood Core Strategy, which the Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with.

This hierarchy categorises settlements based on their size and the level of facilities such as shops, schools and employment, they have to meet residents' everyday needs. The Core Strategy then directs development to those settlements with the highest level of services and facilities as these are considered to be the most capable and sustainable locations for future development – for example, development in these locations should help to avoid the need to travel, especially by car, to access jobs and services.

Generally, the higher up a settlement comes in the hierarchy the more suitable it is considered for future development in the most sustainable way. All the main settlements in the Borough were reviewed as part of this hierarchy, including Thurcaston and Cropston.

More specifically in terms of Thurcaston and Cropston it places Thurcaston in the second to bottom of the hierarchy of settlements in terms of development potential – ‘Other Settlements’. This means that it is considered that “it may be suitable for some small scale infill development to meet local needs. To be considered small scale, a development should be appropriate in size for the village they are in and the character of the site’s location and surroundings”. It also considered that “development that increases the need to travel by car will not be considered to be acceptable small-scale development” (p. 27).

Cropston was placed in the lowest tier of settlement – ‘Small Villages and Hamlets’. This means that it has few or no services and facilities, and the people who live in Cropston, and similar villages, rely on larger settlements for their day-to-day needs. In the Core Strategy Cropston and other settlements placed in this tier were considered “poor locations for new development”.

The consultation shows that the community is generally comfortable with the very modest scale of development suggested for the villages of Thurcaston and Cropston, as envisaged in the hierarchy and resulting Borough-wide growth strategy as articulated in the Core Strategy. It also recognises that development can sometimes bring benefits, such as helping to support local services and facilities, and creating more diverse and mixed communities. Any development, however, will need to reflect and complement the distinctive character of the Parish, meet a clearly identified need, be sustainable and not have an adverse impact on the amenity of this predominately rural area.

6.3 Thurcaston Limits to Development

Limits to Development are a commonly used tool in planning documents such as Neighbourhood Plans and local plans/core strategies. They are used to define the extent of a built up part of a settlement. They distinguish between areas where in planning terms development would be acceptable in principle such as in the main settlements and where it would not be (generally in the least sustainable locations) such as in the open countryside.

The Neighbourhood Plan proposes to designate Limits to Development for Thurcaston. This will update and supersede the existing one for Thurcaston introduced by Charnwood Borough Council. Limits to Development is designated on the Proposals Map and was developed following consultation and is based on best practice.

Focusing limited development in Thurcaston may help to support the existing very limited services and facilities in the Villages and the wider Parish, such as pubs and the primary school, and protect the countryside from inappropriate development.

The introduction of defined Limits to Development for Thurcaston is in accordance with the Core Strategy for Charnwood, which recommends that they are introduced for the main settlements in the Borough. As Cropston is not identified as a main settlement in the Core Strategy it would not be appropriate to introduce a Limit to Development for the Village as this would be contrary to Borough-wide policy, and may encourage development in a location, which is generally not considered suitable.

Within the defined Limit to Development identified in this Plan small scale, sustainable development will be viewed sympathetically. This development will mainly comprise infill – the filling of a restricted gap in an otherwise built-up frontage or the conversion of an existing building. Any development will be required to demonstrate that it meets an identified local need, and is well designed and located.

In addition, much of the built-up parts of Thurcaston (and the wider Parish) have developed at relatively low densities. There are substantial areas of pavement, verge and green spaces in the man villages, and many properties are set within relatively large grounds and gardens. These spaces between and around buildings contribute significantly to the distinctive character of these villages and the wider Parish and maintaining residential amenity. When considering development proposals, it is also important therefore to have regard to the impact the proposed development will have on the setting and layout of the surrounding area.

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect and where possible, enhance special views and vistas. As the approved Conservation Area Appraisal for Thurcaston underlines, the settlement enjoys important and delightful views which are important to the special and distinctive character of the Parish. The consultation process also demonstrated that these views, such as those along Anstey Lane in Thurcaston, are highly prized by the local community.

POLICY T&C2 THURCASTON LIMITS TO DEVELOPMENT - Within the defined Limits to Development for Thurcaston as shown on the Proposals Map, development proposals for infill development and the conversion of existing buildings will be supported. A proposal should demonstrate that they have taken into account the following that it:

- a. Is small scale, and reflects the size, character and level of service provision of Thurcaston;**
- b. Meets a clearly identified need for Thurcaston or the wider Parish.**
- c. Retains existing natural boundaries such as trees, hedges and streams which either contribute to visual amenity or are important for their ecological value;**
- d. Considers important views and vistas, especially those identified in the Thurcaston Conservation Area Appraisal;**
- e. Considers the distinctive qualities of the special and attractive landscape in which Thurcaston is situated;**
- f. Considers the conservation of heritage assets, including their settings, in a manner appropriate to their significance.**
- g. Does not reduce garden/green space to an extent where it adversely affects the distinctive character of the Parish or the amenity of the proposed occupiers of the new development or adjacent properties/uses;**
- h. Considers the amenity of neighbouring occupiers by way of privacy, daylight, noise, visual intrusion or amenity;**
- i. Does not increase the need to travel by car; and**
- j. Any traffic generation and parking impact created does not result in an unacceptable direct or cumulative impact on congestion or road and pedestrian safety.**

6.4 North of Birstall Sustainable Urban Extension - Broadnook

The Charnwood Local Plan 2011 to 2028 Core Strategy identifies a major 'direction of growth' area to the north of Birstall as part of its development strategy.

The planned development spanning over 400 acres of land, commonly known as Broadnook, will comprise a new sustainable development including 1,500 new homes, employment, shops, and community facilities set within large areas of open space.

It is situated south and west of Broadnook Spinney, to the north of the A46, west of the A6, and east of the Great Central Railway line. The railway crosses Thurcaston and Cropston Parish close to its eastern corner, meaning that a small section of the Broadnook development, comprising three fields, is situated in the Parish to the east of the railway line.

As the development has been identified in the Charnwood Local Plan 2011 to 2028 Core Strategy, it would not be appropriate, nor do the rules governing the preparation of a neighbourhood plan allow, for the Plan to seek to change or amend the 'strategic' elements of the development such as those detailed in the Policy CS 1 of the Local Plan. Equally, as Broadnook is likely to be the biggest development in and around the Parish for many decades to come it is imperative that the community plays its part in ensuring that this reflects local needs and priorities.

The consultation shows that the community generally understands the concept of the development and the need and requirement for it to be reflected in the Plan.

Local people are, however, concerned about its impact on the landscape and the wider environment. That part of the Broadnook development in the Parish is in a prominent and landscape-sensitive location, on rising ground in the sightlines of valued views from the main settlements of Thurcaston and Cropston, on open land currently in agricultural use. Studies, including those done as part of the Neighbourhood Plan, also show that much of that part of the site in the Parish is

important for nature conservation, with the railway line and adjacent land acting as a wildlife corridor. Indeed, one of the fields was initially proposed as a Local Green Space in view of its importance both for wildlife and to the local community.

There is also the issue of vehicular access and traffic, a long-standing issue for local residents and a top improvement priority of the Plan. The master plan for the development of Broadnook proposes that vehicular access should be onto the A6 to the South of Rothley and

thence onto the A46. The Plan supports that access should be onto the A6 as this would enhance highway safety and would not have significant adverse impact on highway safety and congestion in the Parish. However, the Plan would be concerned about any further additions or changes to road entry plans that would focus any traffic entry onto the already over-stretched Leicester Road Thurcaston.

There is also a need to ensure that any housing development that takes place helps to meet the housing and other development needs of the Parish as set out in policies contained in this Plan.

POLICY T&C3: Broadnook Development – For that part of the Broadnook Development within the Neighbourhood Area, the Plan requires:

- a) A landscaping area, including tree planting, of at least 25m depth should be provided between the railway line and new housing to provide a soft landscaped edge to the development and to preserve and enhance bio-diversity as well as acting as a wildlife corridor;**
- b) Important ponds, trees and hedgerows should be retained;**
- c) The density of the dwellings to the edge of the residential development adjacent to the open landscape should be reduced and no more than two storeys in height to create a gradual transition from built area to more open green space and should generally be designed to be sensitive to the existing and adjoining uses and minimise visual impact;**
- d) A mix of housing types and sizes to meet the current and future needs of people in the Parish and the wider area be provided; and**
- e) Vehicular access and movements should be via and along the A6.**

6.5 Development in the Countryside

Thurcaston and Cropston Parish is predominately a rural area with the two settlements of Thurcaston and Cropston surrounded by open, generally attractive, countryside.

It lies within the High Leicestershire National Character Area as defined by Natural England. The landscape of this Character Area is typified by broad, rolling ridges and secluded valleys and has a quiet, remote and rural character with small villages and scattered farms. It has a

predominantly rural character, comprising undulating fields with a mix of pasture on the higher, sloping land and arable farming on the lower, flatter land.

In planning terms, land outside the main built up areas is treated as countryside. This includes any small groups of buildings or small settlements that may be found there.

It is national and Borough planning policy that development in the countryside should be carefully controlled. To support “the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it” is identified as a core planning principle in the National Planning Policy Framework”, for example.

This approach is also supported by this Plan; in particular, as it helps ensure that development is focused on more sustainable locations, protects the countryside for its own sake as an attractive, accessible and non-renewable natural resource and preserves the visual and physical separation of Thurcaston and Cropston.

7. Housing Development

7.1 Introduction

Thurcaston and Cropston is a very popular place to live. It is easily accessible from major towns and cities such as Loughborough and Leicester, and has a very good natural and built environment. This means that there is a strong demand for housing in the Parish.

This strong demand for housing is reflected in above average house prices (£275,000 in 2015) as well as pressure to build more homes in the Parish.

7.2 New House Building

The Parish has seen a small increase in the number of dwellings in the Parish, primarily as a consequence of new house building. Between 2001 and 2011, for example, the number of dwellings in the Parish increased by roughly 3% by 16 to 886, a trend which continues including the recent building of 32 dwellings (an old people's home) in Cropston and the major development (which will include over one thousand homes) at Broadnook, part of which is in the Parish.

The Plan recognises that some new housing development could bring benefits to the Parish. These include the support and enhancement of local facilities, shops and services, the redevelopment of redundant buildings and helping to create a more balanced and sustainable community by for example, providing more affordable homes.

The consultation, however, shows that the vast majority of parishioners do not wish to see major new housing developments in the Parish, especially as this would result in a significant change in the character of the Parish and lead to an increase in the need to travel by car.

The Charnwood Core Strategy seeks to provide for at least 13,940 new homes between 2011 and 2028 across the Borough. The Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the Core Strategy and its contents. This includes ensuring that the Parish makes its full and proper contribution to meeting this housing target having regard to its role and function.

The Core Strategy also provides an approach on how this target will be met. This focuses development in the main towns in the Borough as well as major development such as Broadnook, with villages such as Thurcaston being expected to make a very modest contribution to this overall target. It states "These villages may be suitable for some small scale infill development to meet local needs", adding 'to be considered small scale, a

development should be appropriate in size for the village they are in, and the character of the site's location and surroundings. Any development that increases the need to travel by car will not be considered to be acceptable small-scale development'. The Core Strategy does not consider that the rest of the Parish, including Cropston, is a suitable location for new housing and is not expected to make a specific contribution to the overall Borough-wide housing target. An approach this Plan supports.

The Core Strategy also includes a methodology for determining how the minimum of 13,940 homes should be developed across Charnwood.

This includes a minimum target of new homes to be built across the identified rural settlements, including Thurcaston, between 2011 and 2028. This is at least 500 new homes - a target which has already been significantly exceeded taking into account the 887 dwellings that have already been built or are in the pipeline.

The Plan recognises, however, that this is a minimum target and that there may be opportunities for further small scale, limited housing development in suitable and sustainable locations.

These are small infill or redevelopment/conversion sites that come forward unexpectedly and which have not been specifically identified for new housing in a planning document. These sites often comprise redundant or under utilised buildings, including former farm buildings, or a small gap within an existing frontage of buildings and can range from small sites suitable for only a single dwelling to areas with a capacity for several houses.

Such sites have made a regular contribution towards the housing supply in the Parish at an average of under 1 new dwelling a year. This is a trend which is expected to continue. Though these sites cannot be identified, the high land values in the Parish coupled with the level of vacant and underutilised land and buildings mean that they will continue to provide a source of housing supply. However, if not sensitively undertaken and designed, such development can have an adverse impact on the character of the area. In addition, such new development will generally increase car ownership and there is a need to ensure that it does not worsen traffic and parking issues.

The Plan recognises that there is scope for further small infill or redevelopment/conversion within the built-up area of Thurcaston, as defined by the identified Limits to Development.

This will also provide adequate provision for new housing to meet identified local need. In 2015 Midlands Rural Housing undertook two independent housing needs studies. One for the

parish of Thurstaston and the other a more detailed study for the settlement of Cropston. The studies concluded that for the settlement of Cropston: “There is an identified need for 3 open market homes in Cropston for those with a local connection” and for the wider parish “there is an identified need for 1 affordable home and 3 open market homes in Thurstaston for those with a local connection”. - a total of seven dwellings.

It is expected that windfall sites based on current trends and expectations over the lifetime of the Plan together with Broadnook development will more than meet the local housing need identified in these studies.

Consultation shows that the community is generally supportive of small scale windfall sites subject to any proposal being within the defined Limits to Development for Thurstaston and in-keeping with the distinctive character and established form of development in Thurstaston and generally in accordance with Policy T&C3 and other relevant policies contained in this Plan and Borough plans and policies.

POLICY T&C4: SMALL INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT SITES - Development proposals for small (5 or below) infill and redevelopment sites for new housing within the defined Limits to Development for Thurstaston as shown on the Proposals Map will be sympathetically considered.

It also recognised that proposals for infill and redevelopment sites may come forward outside the defined Limits to Development for Thurstaston, for example, the conversion of a no longer used barn in the countryside. In these instances, they should be considered in accordance with Policies T&C2 and T&C4 except where they relate to the Broadnook development where they will be considered in accordance with Borough-wide planning policies.

7.3 New Housing Mix

It is important that any local housing growth helps to meet the changing population and needs of the Parish.

This is especially important as there is some evidence that the housing type of the Parish is unbalanced. In particular, there are relatively larger properties and relatively less small dwellings. There is also evidence of under-occupancy of properties.

People living in the Parish are more likely to be living in dwellings with 4 or more bedrooms. Results from the 2011 Census show over 45% of residents live in housing with more than 4

bedrooms which is significantly higher than the borough (23.2%), regional (8.3%) and England (19%) averages. There is also an under representation of smaller type housing units with less than 20% of dwellings having fewer than 2 bedrooms against 72% for the region and 40% England average.

In addition, while the average household size in the Parish at 2.4 people per household was (according to the 2001 Census) in line with the national average, the higher average number of bedrooms per household means that there is evidence of widespread under occupancy (having more bedrooms than the recommended number). 63% of households have two or more spare bedrooms and a further 28% had one spare bedroom. This is higher than district, regional and national rates.

The Census data shows that older person households are more likely to under occupy their dwellings. Almost three quarters of older person households have an occupancy rating of +2 or more (meaning there are at least two more bedrooms that are technically required by the household). This represents 74.2% of older person households compared with 60% for non-pensioner households. Further analysis indicates that under occupancy is far more common in households with two or more pensioners than single pensioner households.

At the same time, reflecting the national trend, the Parish is seeing a growing demand for small properties as people live longer or alone. At 24% the number of people aged over 65 in the Parish is about half again the national average.

This analysis strongly suggests that there is a need to significantly increase the number of smaller properties (less than 3 bedrooms). The low proportion of smaller homes available makes it difficult for older people who want to downsize, as well as younger people (and people on low incomes) who want to find their first home.

This analysis is also supported by the findings from consultation. When asked about what type of housing is most needed in the villages of Thurstaston and Cropston as part of the Housing Need Survey undertaken by Midlands Rural Housing in 2015, of those that believed more homes were needed, the preferred type were small family homes and homes for young people in Thurstaston and small family homes, homes for young people and homes for elderly people in Cropston. This view was echoed in consultation undertaken as part of the development of this Plan.

The findings from the consultation and the statistical analysis reinforces the need and support for a more balanced housing stock that helps create more diverse and sustainable

communities. In particular, the need for smaller homes for elderly villagers wishing to downsize and remain in the Parish and for young people and families.

POLICY T&C5: HOUSING MIX - New housing development proposals should provide for a recognised housing need in the Parish. The provision of smaller homes, especially for young families and young people and for older people who wish to downsize, will be supported.

7.4 Affordable Housing

Housing Affordability is an issue within the Parish. There is a high and above average disparity between average house prices (both for sale and rent) and average income.

Average house prices in the Parish at £275,000 in 2015 are well above the Borough and National Average, and have been increasing at an above average rate. As a consequence, many people who wish to live in the Parish, including those with a local connection, are unable to do so as they cannot find suitable accommodation either to buy or rent.

These were also the findings of the two independent housing needs surveys undertaken in 2015. The first looking at the settlement of Cropston and the second Thurcaston. The findings of these studies underlined that housing affordability is an issue in the Parish. More specifically they concluded that while there was not a particular need for affordable housing in Cropston there was a need for 1 affordable home in Thurcaston to meet housing need for those with a local connection.

Furthermore, there is concern that those with a strong local connection are not given preferential access to affordable housing, when it comes available.

Borough-wide planning policies require that all new housing developments, especially those involving five or more dwellings, including the Broadnook development, should provide at least 30% affordable homes in Thurcaston and 40% affordable homes in Cropston, reflecting their position in the hierarchy settlement developed by Charnwood Borough Council. This Plan supports the provision of affordable housing that clearly reflects and meets local housing need.

8. Community Facilities

8.1 Introduction

Community facilities include important land and buildings that meet the health, welfare and social needs of the residents of Thurcaston and Cropston Parish.

This includes a wide range of facilities, such as shops, schools, community centres, places of worship, public houses and medical facilities that are important for good health and well-being, sustainable development, and act as a focus for community life and engagement.

They are especially important for rural areas such as Thurcaston and Cropston, where the number of community facilities is very limited, and as a consequence residents have to travel, primarily by car, outside the Parish to access important and everyday facilities and services.

8.2 Important Community Facilities

The Parish has lost most of its community facilities. It used to have two post offices, one in Cropston and one in Thurcaston, but both were closed many years ago. There was a garage in Thurcaston selling fuel and garage services, but this closed many years ago, as did the 'King William' pub in Thurcaston.

There is a Church and a Chapel. There is also the Richard Hill Primary School and the Memorial Hall, which is used for the Parish Council Office in addition to being a well-used community resource. There are three pubs and one shop (electrical).

It lacks, however, the range and number of shops and community facilities that you would typically expect to find in a Parish of its size. It does not, for example, have a convenience store or a post office. The bus service is also infrequent.

This means that many people have to travel, overwhelmingly by car, to the nearby centres such as Leicester and Loughborough to meet their basic shopping and community facility needs.

The need to travel outside the Parish to access basic services is one of the main reasons for the high levels of car ownership in the Parish. It also creates challenges for those residents that do not have access to a car – compounded by the limited bus service.

Consultation shows that the protection and enhancement of shops and community facilities is a top priority of residents, including young people, and they wish to see them protected and enhanced wherever possible.

POLICY T&C6: COMMUNITY FACILITIES - Development proposals that result in the loss of, or have a significant adverse effect, on a community facility will not be supported, unless the building or facility is replaced by an equivalent or by better provision in terms of quantity and quality in an equally suitable location or it can be clearly demonstrated that the service or facility is unviable or is no longer required by the community.

POLICY T&C10: Small scale proposals to enhance the provision of community facilities to meet an identified local need will be viewed positively.

8.3 Assets of Community Value

The designation of a community facility as an Asset of Community Value provides the opportunity to give it added protection from inappropriate development.

The Localism Act 2011 defines an 'Asset of Community Value' as "a building or other land (whose) main use has recently been or is presently used to further the social well-being or social interests of the local community and could do so in the future". The Localism Act states that "social interests" include cultural, recreational and sporting interests.

Where an asset is 'Listed' the Parish Council or other community organisations will be given the opportunity to bid to purchase the asset on behalf of the local community, if it comes up for sale on the open market. Its 'Listing' can also be taken into consideration when determining a planning application for a development proposal, which would affect the reason why it was listed.

Assets of special importance to the well-being of the Parish and to which local people have a strong affinity and wish to protect may come forward over the lifetime of the Plan.

COMMUNITY ACTION 1: ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE – The Parish Council will support the listing of Assets of Community Value and once listed, will work to support their longevity

9. Design

The Parish's long history means that it has a rich and diverse variety of buildings of differing styles and design, and generally of high quality. This adds greatly to the distinctive character and charm of the Parish.

Many of the buildings have been recognised as being of national importance, including over 30 structures that have been granted 'Listed Building' status by the Government. These include the Church of All Saints and Bybrook Farmhouse as well as Sandham Bridge and the Pumping House at Cropston Reservoir Water Works.

Much of the traditional core of the villages of Thurcaston and Cropston is protected by Conservation Area status reflecting their special architectural and historic interest. In 2012 Charnwood Borough Council produced Conservation Area Character Appraisals for Thurcaston and Cropston. These set out the special characteristics of these two Conservation Areas and how these can be safeguarded and enhanced.

Outside of the Conservation Area there is no dominant style of design. There are many styles, including some of modern look. Virtually all are of one or two storey in height, and the vast majority set back from the road. Many properties are set within relatively large grounds and gardens.

Generally, the design of buildings (including new build) in the Parish is good and is sympathetic to its distinctive character and appearance. There was concern, however, that some of the development, including housing extensions, which had taken place were of indifferent design.

The Plan seeks to ensure that all development proposals (including minor works) are of good quality and designed sensitively to ensure that the generally good quality built environment of the Parish is maintained and enhanced, particularly where they are located within or in close proximity to the Conservation Areas and/or a Listed Building or its setting. New designs should respond in a positive way to the local character through careful and appropriate layout use of materials and detail. Proposals should also demonstrate consideration of height, scale and massing, to ensure that new development delivers a positive contribution to the street scene and adds value to the distinctive character of the area in which it is proposed to be situated.

Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy seeks to require that new developments make a positive contribution to Charnwood resulting in places where people would wish to live through high

quality, inclusive design and, where appropriate, architectural excellence. The Plan supports and reinforces this Policy, which is set out below.

POLICY T&C7: DESIGN - Development proposals should respect local character, having regard to scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout, materials and access, as appropriate. It should take into account the amenity of neighbouring occupiers. Where appropriate, development proposals should provide safe and attractive public and private spaces, and well defined and legible spaces that are easy to get around for all, including those with disabilities. Proposals within a Conservation or its setting should have regard to the guidelines set out in the Thurcaston and Cropston Conservation Area Character Appraisals.

10. The Natural and Historical Environment

10.1 Introduction

Thurcaston and Cropston is an unusual two-settlement parish. This is the result of the 12th-century development of Cropston as a new township, probably connected with the newly established deer park of Bradgate, as an outlier of the much older (at latest 8th or 9th century) village of Thurcaston. Each of the two villages, standing as they do on high ground on opposite sides of the valley of Rothley Brook, now provides the rural view for the other. Two areas of open fields bisected by water meadows have separated and connected the two settlements for more than 800 years, and this special geographical relationship is a highly valued, distinctive component of the Plan Area, and one which residents strongly wish to protect.

Until the Enclosure of 1798 the two villages practised a form of the three-field, open field farming system. Although land toward the edges of the Parish has been converted to arable during the past 50 years or so, that in the central strip is still mostly permanent grassland. The relative absence of ploughing here since 1798 allowed much of the medieval ridge and furrow to survive into the late 20th century, but there are now only twelve well-preserved examples of this characteristic, historically and culturally significant, landscape feature.

Natural woodland in the Parish appears to have been cleared early and comprehensively; and fairly intensive medieval and post-enclosure land management means that there are few areas of woodland, almost all survivors being ornamental or covert woods less than 200 years old. However, the rarity of woodland gives the few survivors high importance as landscape features and as sites for wildlife. There are also no identified semi-ancient hedgerows, and most of roads and footpaths/bridle ways are 'old ways', bordered by ancient, species-rich hedges, so the few species-rich hedges are therefore worthy of protection in addition to that provided by general legislation.

Because of its unusual landscape history, the Parish has relatively few sites and habitats of local and borough importance for biodiversity. Some of these are recognised in existing national designations and surveys, but others have been identified in a Parish-wide environmental and ecological survey (fieldwork and desk study) carried out during 2015 in preparation of this Plan. The result of the survey, which also included all extant historical environment records, is an inventory of all 118 bounded parcels of land outside the built-up areas as of September 2015. This inventory has provided part of the evidence base for this Plan's proposed designations, including Local Green Spaces and other Important Local Sites.

Although not intrinsically habitat-rich, the Parish's position between the ancient upland 'waste' of Charnwood and the agricultural lowlands of the river Soar valley coupled with its unique area of ancient heath-grassland, woodland and streams, punctuated with outcrops of Precambrian rocks makes it notably species-rich, particularly for farmland birds. This section therefore also includes provision for Thurcaston and Cropston's contribution, in compliance with national and European legislation, to the protection of threatened and declining species and habitats.

The combination of historic rural landscapes, unusual twin-settlement geography, and a network of well-used, interconnecting and circular footpaths and tracks are highly valued by local people. Conserving and enhancing Thurcaston and Cropston's characteristic and distinctive historic and natural environment is important in its own right, but it also underpins the health and well-being of residents and the sustainability of the community.

10.2. Local Green Spaces

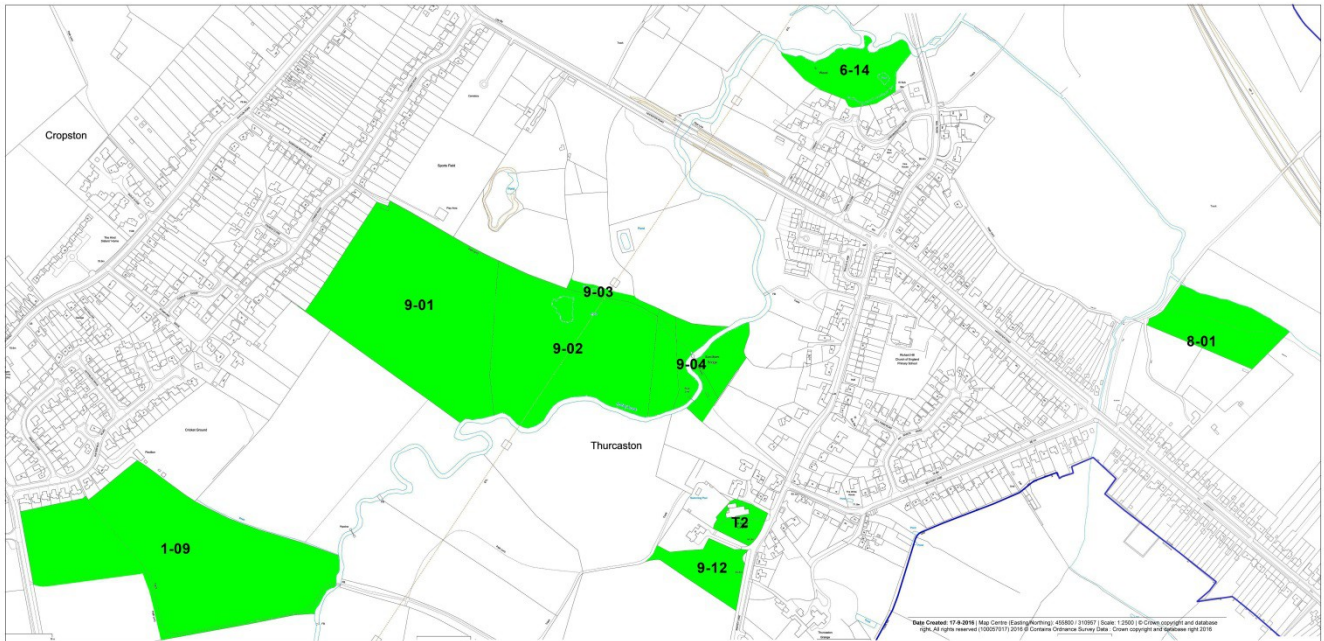
The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) enables a Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance, where they meet specified criteria.

The designation should only be used where the land is not an extensive tract, is local in character and is reasonably close to the community it serves; and, where it is demonstrably special to a local community, for example, because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or the richness of its wildlife.

The need to maintain and improve the open spaces was heavily supported through the consultation, including with young people, which took place as part of the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

An extensive environmental inventory of all significant sites and features in the Parish was carried out using fieldwork and desk-top study. Sites were identified, and were scored based on the NPPF criteria for Local Green Space selection and designation.

Following this environmental inventory and based on the methodology set out in the NPPF, a number of key sites were identified as being of outstanding significance and as important, highly-valued community assets.



POLICY T&C8: LOCAL GREEN SPACE – Within the areas of Local Green Space (mapped above, and on the Proposals Map, p. 46), development is ruled out other than in very special circumstances.

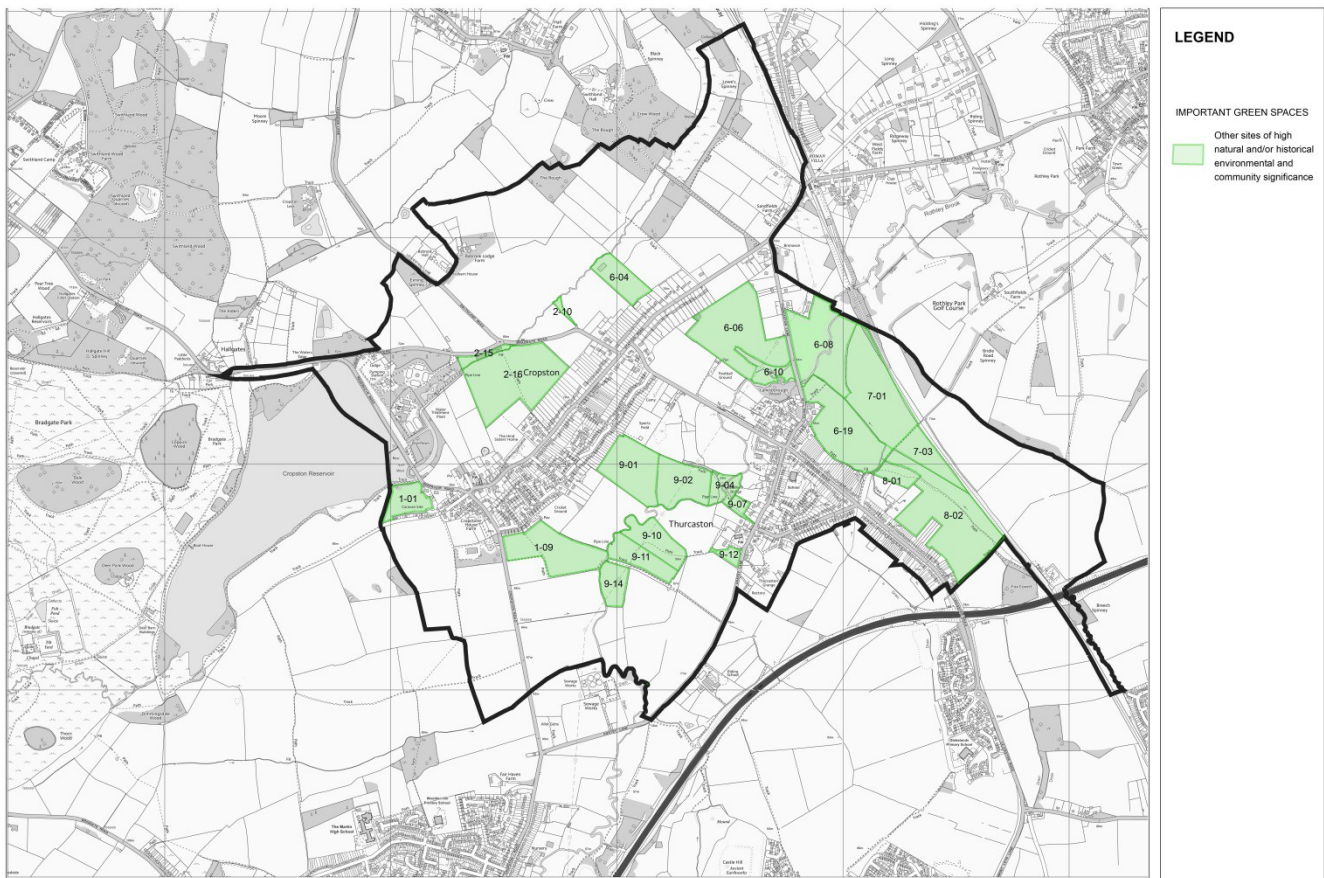
10.3. Other Important Green Spaces

In addition to the Local Green Spaces highlighted above, the Plan also identified several other sites of historic, ecological and nature conservation interest within the Parish.

Although not ranking amongst the sites identified above, they are nonetheless part of the distinctive character of Thurcaston and Cropston and merit consideration for protection and enhancement.

POLICY T&C9: OTHER IMPORTANT GREEN SPACES – The protection and enhancement of the identified significant features of sites shown below (next page) and on the Proposals Map as “Other sites of high environmental and community significance”, and detailed in the Environmental Inventory (available on the Parish Council website) will be supported.

Thurcaston and Cropston Neighbourhood Plan: Other Important Green Spaces



10.4 Ridge and Furrow

A particular feature of Thurcaston and Cropston is the twelve Ridge and Furrow fields that can be found across the Parish.

Like almost all other rural settlements in midland England (and across lowland north west Europe) Thurcaston and Cropston was, until the late-18th century, largely surrounded by such medieval plough lands

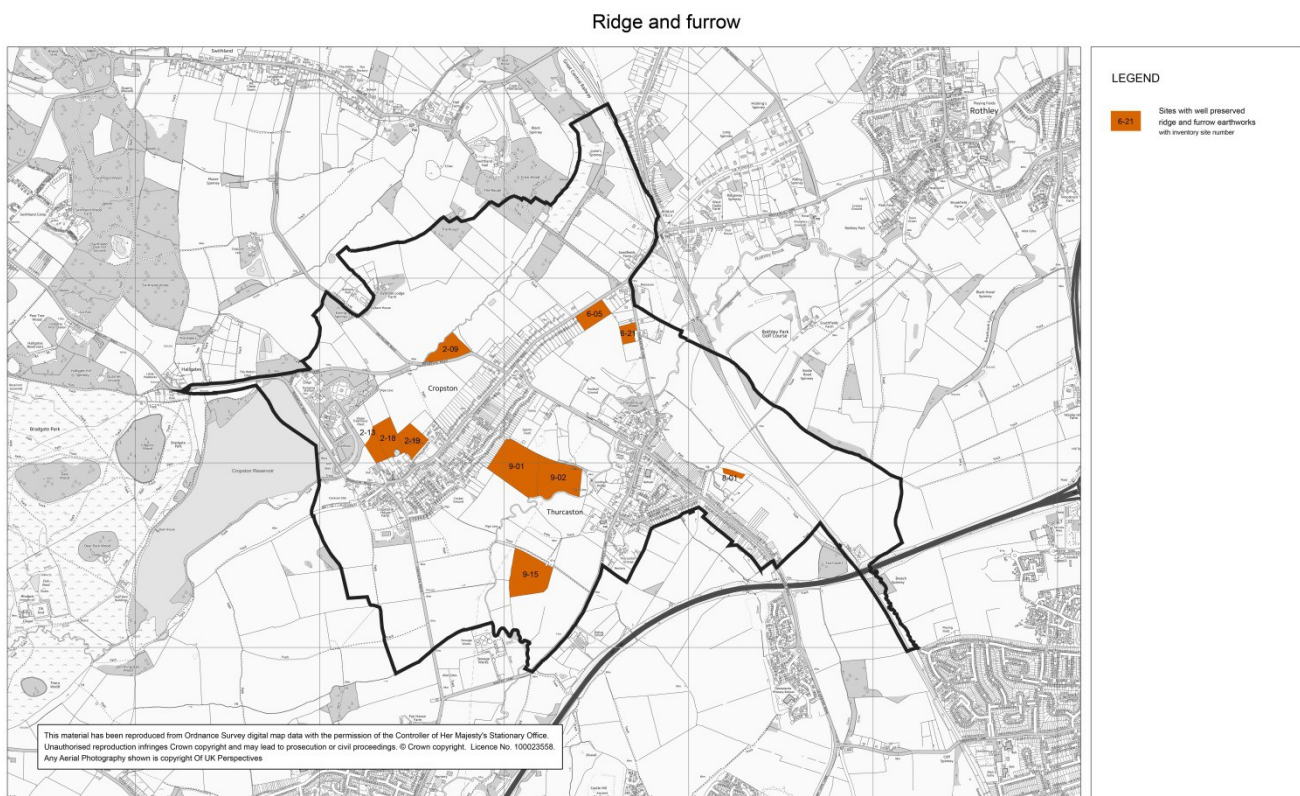
Reflecting a national trend, the Parish has seen a dramatic decline (of about 95%, mostly since 1940) in ridge and furrow fields. Only twelve of the c.118 fields in the Parish retain well-preserved traces of the ridge and furrow pattern of medieval farming.

The importance of the remaining Ridge and Furrow sites has been highlighted nationally. Two studies for English Heritage (now Historic England) (Hall, D 2001. *Turning the Plough. Midland open fields: landscape character and proposals for management*. English Heritage and Northamptonshire County Council; Catchpole, T & Priest, R 2012 *Turning the Plough: Update Assessment 2012* English Heritage and Gloucestershire County Council) are of particular rel-

evance. The 2012 authors' view of the loss of 90% of the original area of Ridge and Furrow in England is that “as the open field system was once commonplace in NW Europe, these [surviving] sites take on an international importance”.

The retention of Ridge and Furrow sites was also highlighted as a priority within the resident consultation. This is particularly true of the two groups on the hillsides bordering the water meadows of Rothley Brook, which are both good examples of Ridge and Furrow but also traversed by well-used interconnecting footpaths.

The Plan not only seeks to protect the remaining Ridge and Furrow fields from development through the policies contained in it and their identification as non-designated heritage assets in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, but also to highlight their importance to the community, especially bearing in mind that many of the threats to Ridge and Furrow fields often involve types of development and practices that do not necessarily require planning approval.



POLICY T&C10: RIDGE AND FURROW FIELDS – The nine surviving area of well-preserved Ridge and Furrow fields, as mapped above (previous page) are non-designated heritage assets and any harm arising from a development proposal will need to be balanced against their significance as heritage assets.

10.5 Other Historical and Archaeological sites

Thurcaston and Cropston has been inhabited since at least Roman times, probably earlier. The two villages, which are of 'Dark Ages' and medieval age, preserve much of the form of the ancient settlement, while in the open country between them are other, equally important, remains.

Fieldwork for the environmental inventory has confirmed the survival of a small number of sites and features, previously identified by the Parish Heritage Warden and in research by Thurcaston and Cropston Local History Society, Leicestershire University and County Archaeologists (see e.g. Hartley R.F.1989), where extant remains of the houses, fields and track ways of past inhabitants of the Parish can still be seen as 'earthworks'.

These non-designated heritage sites are historically important in their own right at County level, but are also significant and characteristic landscape, historical and cultural features of the Area, and are highly valued by residents. Following consultation and detailed fieldwork, the Parish Council will seek to identify these sites as non-designated heritage assets in accordance with national planning policy, and will work to safeguard their future.

10.6. Biodiversity

Despite its location close to the encroaching Leicester City boundary with its associated housing and other development, Thurcaston and Cropston retains a diverse range of habitats and wild life corridors including significant areas of open grassland, a largely unimproved (semi-natural) riparian corridor and good quality woodland.

The consultation shows that the community is strongly appreciative of the bio-diversity to be found in Thurcaston and Cropston, recognising that the Parish is a wildlife-rich area that needs protecting.

These factors emphasise the community's responsibility for and interest in protecting the natural environment and enhancing its biodiversity. In a wider context, biodiversity enhancement

(species and habitats) is supported by the NPPF, which is itself compliant with the European Habitats Directive 1992 (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora). Protection of local biodiversity under this legislation will only be achieved by local action.

POLICY T&C11: BIODIVERSITY –

- a) Development proposals that cannot avoid (through, for example, locating to an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigate, or, as a last resort, compensate for, the loss of a locally or nationally identified site of biodiversity value should not be permitted;**
- b) Development proposals that conserve or enhance biodiversity, and incorporate biodiversity in and around them, will be encouraged; and**
- c) Where a development proposal will affect a protected species, a suitable survey should be undertaken prior to development.**

COMMUNITY ACTION 2: BIODIVERSITY –

- a) The Parish Council in conjunction with other relevant bodies will prepare and keep updated an environmental inventory list of known sites of biodiversity interest; and**
- b) The Parish Council will actively seek to work with community groups, landowners, funders and other organisations to enhance the biodiversity of the Parish by creating and/or managing habitat sites (e.g. wild flower meadows, woodland) on suitable parcels of land.**

10.7 Zones of Separation

This desire to preserve the integrity of the villages and to maintain separation between them and from surrounding villages and towns was the most heavily supported issue in the resident consultation and was also highlighted as an important issue in the stakeholder consultation that took place.

There is open land between Cropston and Thurcaston which has both connected and separated the two settlements for over 800 years, since the foundation of the former township; and it

still acts as well-used, semi-public green space that preserves the separate identities of the two villages.

In addition, the encroachment of development from Anstey toward the parish boundary between Anstey and Thurcaston and Cropston is a major concern for residents.

Any development in either of these zones could destroy the precious rural character and the geographic autonomy of Thurcaston and Cropston and risk them being merged with neighbouring settlements.

This Policy is also supported by Policy CS 11 Landscape and Countryside in the Charnwood Local Plan 2011-2018 Core Strategy which requires “new development to maintain the separate identities of our towns and villages” and generally supports the introduction of areas of separation where justified.

The consultation also revealed that residents strongly wish to see the preservation of the area of green space between Thurcaston and the built-up part of Leicester. This plays an important role in maintaining the identity and history of these distinct communities, and prevents Thurcaston being subsumed into the greater Leicester city conurbation. While the concerned area of land lies outside of the Parish, and therefore the rules governing the preparation of a neighbourhood plan means that the Plan cannot specifically designate it as a Zone of Separation, the Parish Council would like to emphasise the important role and function it plays, and the strength of local opinion that it should remain in open use to retain the physical and visual separation between Leicester and Thurcaston.

POLICY T&C12: ZONES OF SEPARATION - To retain the physical and visual separation between the Villages, the following areas of open land between:

- **The built-up areas of Thurcaston and Cropston and the Anstey parish boundary;**
- **The built-up areas of Cropston and Rothley; and**
- **The built up areas of Thurcaston and Cropston**

will be designated as Zones of Separation as shown on the Proposals Map. Development proposals in the identified gaps between villages should be located and designed to maintain, and wherever possible, enhance the separation of the villages.

10.8 Trees and Hedgerows

The history of Thurcaston and Cropston has led to a relative paucity of woodland and hedges. This means that those that do survive have disproportionate significance to the landscape and biodiversity of the Parish, and are highly valued by the local community as well its wildlife.

The environmental inventory fieldwork identified a number of species-rich hedges. Notable trees are protected under TPOs, as are three areas of woodland (as area TPOs), but there are some seven other wooded areas in the Parish, all of them of landscape and biodiversity significance, which do not have statutory protection.

POLICY T&C13: IMPORTANT TREES AND HEDGEROWS – Trees and hedgerows of good arboricultural, biodiversity and amenity value should be protected from loss or damage as a result of development. Wherever possible, they should be integrated into the design of development proposals and their enhancement will be supported. Proposals should be accompanied by a tree survey of at least (currently) BS5837 standard, or the standard inforce at the time, that establishes the health and longevity of any affected trees.

11. Transport

11.1 Introduction

The Parish comprises two settlements, the Villages of Thurcaston and Cropston each of around 400 houses. The Parish is located approximately 8km north of central Leicester and is strategically well located in relation to the national road network; but the primary road transport system within the confines of the Parish largely comprises rural roads.

The Parish has only limited public transport provision by bus, but is well served by walking routes with a number of recreational cycling routes. The functional cycling routes, however coincide with the primary road system.

At peak times daily there are significant pressures on the Parish road transport network. This occurs for two main reasons:

- (1) The geographical centre of the Parish is around 3.5km from four large 'service centres' and their housing conurbations (namely Rothley, Anstey, Birstall and Beaumont Leys). Evidence shows that during peak periods, extending over a circa 5 hours on weekdays, the volume of 'through traffic' can be in excess of 3000 vehicles per hour. Indeed, this 'through traffic' out-numbers 'local traffic' (i.e. which originates from or terminates in either Thurcaston or Cropston) by an order of magnitude. Furthermore, without remedial traffic management actions this ratio will continue to increase dramatically; because urban extensions of around 5000 new houses are already planned over the next 3 years, in various locations within 1.5km of the Parish boundaries. That growth coupled to evident speeding and parking issues will place enormous future stress on the Parish transport network thereby inducing significant additional safety risks; and
- (2) Within the Parish there is a high level of local car usage and ownership by parishioners. Within the Parish there are no general shopping facilities, no health care services and few employment opportunities, which means there are generally better more sustainable locations for new development. 7% of the population work from home compared to 3.5% nationally; but 54% travel to work in a car or van compared to 40% nationally. Thus 93% of households in the Parish own a car compared to 64% nationally. This dependency on the car is compounded by the recent reduction in the public transport system which has seen two of three bus routes withdrawn.

The importance of transport related issues to residents of the Parish is reinforced by the results of the numerous consultation exercises that have been undertaken through the process of preparing this Neighbourhood Plan.

At the community engagement events that took place in September 2014, traffic and transport related issues attracted 81 comments – over 30 more than for the issue with the next highest number. Similarly, in the youth consultation that took place in July 2015, the section on traffic generated far more comments than any other issue.

Numerous comments were also received through Stakeholder consultation and through a youth questionnaire. The Open Events in November 2015 also generated more comments relating to transport than any other single issue.

This response demonstrates the importance of traffic and transport related issues to the residents of the Parish.

11.2 Need for Improved Traffic Management

The demand for effective transportation must be balanced with a need to retain the Parish's treasured rural characteristics not least because the Neighbourhood Plan has a duty to conform to Charnwood Core Strategy which seeks to 'sustain its village cultures'. Maintaining such a balance will be harder to achieve in Thurstaston and Cropston because of the unprecedented recent housing growth, which is to be followed by a further 5000 new homes many related to the nearby Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs). It is calculated (based on car usage per head of population) and other factors that before 2018 the new housing growth will lead to a further circa

1800 cars travelling daily through the Parish; further congesting an already failing transport network.

Despite already established and future planned vehicular growth, no significant or effective traffic management action has been taken within the Parish for over a decade.

Consultation has shown that this is a serious concern for many of our residents. They are especially concerned about road safety, linked to growing volume and speed of traffic as well as inconsiderate and dangerous parking, at a time of deteriorating public transport alternatives. Mitigating negative impacts of our critical traffic problems is therefore of major importance.

COMMUNITY ACTION 3: TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT - The Parish Council will seek to assess the benefits and costs of improved traffic management schemes. These are available on the Parish Council website. The schemes proposed seek to (i) establish 20mph speed limits on roads central to both villages; (ii) slow traffic entering the Parish to establish safe travel; (iii) re-route traffic near to the Primary School; and (iv) minimise safety impacts from on-road parking. The Parish Council will develop and commission projects that implement such schemes bearing in mind the need for synchronism with scheduled programmes for new development in neighbouring parishes.

11.3 Congestion, Parking and Traffic Management

Figure 1 characterises the current congestion problem within the Parish; by showing the results of July 2015 traffic flow measurements taken between 0800 and 0900hrs on a typical weekday morning. The Parish Council website contains a description of the study rationale and measurement methods and how 3000 vehicles were observed to be travelling through the Parish during this single hour alone. Less than ten percent of that traffic was 'local traffic', with remaining vehicles taking a 'short cut through the Parish towards other destinations'. The number of vehicles simultaneously observed on each main road segment is also depicted in Figure 1 in order to highlight prime routes taken by the 'through traffic'.

Consequently on these heavy traffic flows, bottlenecks have begun to frequently occur on many of our Parish roads. Those bottlenecks are amplified by lack of suitable parking places causing queues through both villages. Recent observations show that these queues have fast increased in length as new housing in nearby SUEs is progressively developed. Parking and vehicular movements are therefore a particular issue in the Parish. The stakeholder consultation undertaken in December 2014 highlighted the problem of parking in terms of parking illegally on pavements; causing congestion such as outside of the School. Detrimental impacts occur to pedestrian and driver safety; and the ease by which traffic, including emergency and service vehicles, can travel within the Parish.

Critical impacts of these flows on our country roads (not designed to be heavily loaded) should be interpreted in the context of Figure 2 (next page); which summarises findings of complementary speeding studies. Those studies show that significant speeding is normal

practice as vehicles pass through both Thurcaston and Cropston between destinations such as Anstey, Rothley, Beaumont Leys, Birstall, and Bradgate Park and beyond. Neither Thurcaston nor Cropston can readily accommodate the combination of excessive, growing and speeding traffic volumes that have and will further induce unacceptable levels of risk to people and challenge the successful operation of the road system. This is in turn reflected through the consultation that has been undertaken that shows that increased volumes of speeding traffic represent a major concern for residents and stakeholders alike.

Generally, congestion (and related queuing) is mainly at village road junctions (but also on sections of road with significant on road parking), whilst speeding is generally on the entry and exit to junctions.

POLICY T&C14: CONGESTION, PARKING AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT - Travel plans are to be provided for any new residential development in excess of 5 units.

COMMUNITY ACTION 4: CONGESTION, SPEEDING AND PARKING –

- a) The Parish Council will liaise with the Leicestershire County Council Highways Department to consider the reduction of speed limits within the centre of both villages; changes to the routing of traffic around the Primary School; and the provision of parking restrictions in key areas of both villages; and**
- b) A promotional campaign will be undertaken by the Parish Council to educate residents about the potential dangers of inconsiderate parking.**

11.4 Traffic Safety.

Consultation has shown that there are many areas of significant safety concern in Thurcaston and Cropston; amongst which those of apparent greatest concern are labelled A through M in Figure 3.

The Parish Council website considers in some detail critical safety issues at each of these areas and proposes enhanced traffic management solutions which relevant authorities can appraise.

Arguably of greatest concern is the impact of vehicle threats to the safety of primary school children (labelled E in Figure 3) as well as other road users. This concern is exacerbated by inconsiderate and unacceptable (as defined via the Highway Code) parking on pavements and on blind bends; particularly at School pick-up and drop-off times. Many residents are therefore concerned of the danger to children and other pedestrians from vehicles travelling too fast through the Parish, including HGV's using the Parish as a through route. Clear evidence is included on the Parish Council website which shows that speeding in the Parish is the norm rather than the exception, and this is backed up by consultation.

COMMUNITY ACTION 5: HIGHWAY SAFETY. In order to address highway safety concerns:

- a) Speed management measures will be developed by the Parish Council to reduce road casualty risks, to discourage drivers from using residential streets for through movement, involving a regular review of vehicle speeds and pressing for lower speed limits where appropriate, supported by enforcement measures as necessary; and**
- b) The provision of traffic calming or shared space features such as those itemised on the Parish Council website will be supported.**

11.5 Public Transport

The need to maintain and improve the public transport system for the Parish was highlighted as a priority through resident and stakeholder consultation. The single biggest consultation response was in relation to issues concerning the poor and diminishing public transport situation. However, satisfying that need will require a particularly innovative solution, because:

- (1) The two villages share a relatively small total population, with homes spread over distances of up to 2km; and where our populace requires travel via multiple routes to many locations;

- (2) Following significant reductions in local authority funding there has been an ongoing withdrawal of bus routes/services in the Parish as they have not been financially self-standing;
- (3) The route of the one and only remaining bus service is shown in Figure 4. This passes through the centre of both Thurcaston and Cropston Villages; although the bus stops are relatively remote for a significant minority of parishioners. This route continues also to serve many villages within the Charnwood Forest. Yet its convoluted and limited route does not directly connect parishioners to Rothley, Beaumont Leys, Anstey or Leicester nor does it provide frequent and timely transportation to Loughborough. This heavily constrains its deployment as a timely means of accessing workplaces and key services such as healthcare. Such factors have discouraged bus usage. Now only circa 1 in 40 parishioners regularly use this means of transportation; and
- (4) It follows that reversing the current downward trend in bus usage will require innovative solutions amongst a number of stakeholder interests. Potential partial solutions to this issue are itemised in the appendices.

COMMUNITY ACTION 6: PUBLIC TRANSPORT – The Parish Council will liaise with Leicestershire County Council Highways Authority and transport operators to encourage better availability of public transport.

11.6 Footpaths and Cycleways

Thurcaston and Cropston has a rich and varied network of footpaths through attractive open countryside. These are an important way of connecting people and places and of reducing the carbon footprint through diminishing reliance on the car as a primary mode of transport. This easy access to open countryside along the footpaths and other rights of way that both connect the two settlements and lead out of and around the Parish is an important aspect of the distinctive character of Thurcaston and Cropston. These paths were originally part of an ancient network of tracks used by villagers to walk to the open fields, to market or between neighbouring villages, but they are now used almost exclusively for leisure activities. As such, they are an appreciated and well-used community asset that contributes to health and well-being.

The desire to maintain and enhance the network of footpaths was highlighted through consultation – with stakeholders; residents and young people alike. For example, consultation through the Open Spaces and Environmental Sub-Group which involved over 10 local people has identified the need to maintain and improve the Parish’s footpaths. This aim was reflected in the community consultation where the provision of footpaths and cycle ways was recognised as being important. The youth questionnaire revealed a high level of support amongst the young people in the Parish for cycleways, with this solution to the traffic problems of the Parish scoring highly alongside wider roads and the introduction of traffic lights.

It is important that Thurcaston and Cropston’s rich heritage of footpaths is not further diminished by development, and that where possible the existing network is extended, improved or formalised (designation of permissive and ‘unofficial’ paths) to encourage walking, both for leisure and as an alternative to car use. It is also considered that development of a new cycle-way, at the location labelled D in Figure 3, would have potential to avoid a significant and growing safety hazard.

The Parish is close enough to Leicester and other centres of employment, and to neighbouring settlements with shops and schools, to encourage cycling as a means of transport. However, the interconnecting and radiating roads, which are both busy with motor traffic and narrow, are neither conducive to nor safe for cycling.

POLICY T&C15: FOOTPATHS AND CYCLE WAYS – The provision of a new cycle way on Cropston Road will be supported.

COMMUNITY ACTION 7: FOOTPATHS AND CYCLEWAYS - The Parish Council will work with other relevant bodies to:

- a. Encourage opportunities to achieve the addition to the present network of footpaths and cycleways;**
- b. Encourage walking and cycling, including enhanced provision for those with mobility impairment; and**
- c. Promote, protect and maintain the local footpath and recreational cycleway network thereby encouraging walking and cycling for leisure for residents and for visitors to the area.**

12. Developer Contributions

Development can bring significant benefits to the local community, including new homes and jobs. It can also have negative impacts, for example, where additional demand is placed on facilities and services which are already at or near capacity. Planning obligations (also known as Section 106 agreements) may be used to secure infrastructure or funding from a developer. For example, a planning obligation might be used to secure a financial contribution towards improving existing recreational facilities or affordable housing. However, planning obligations can only be sought where they are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

A new system is also being introduced alongside the use of planning obligations. This is known as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and it will require developers to make a payment to the Borough Council based on the size and type of development that is proposed. The proceeds of the levy will then be used to provide the infrastructure necessary to support growth across the Borough. A proportion of these CIL receipts will automatically be devolved to the relevant Parish Council for allocation to neighbourhood priorities. This proportion is set at 25% in areas where there is a Neighbourhood Plan in force. At this time Charnwood Borough Council is still considering whether to replace Section 106 agreements with CIL.

Through the preparation of the Plan, the Parish Council in conjunction with the community and other stakeholders has identified a small number of priority projects they wish to secure funding for (either in whole or in part) through the use of planning obligations.

COMMUNITY ACTION 8: DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS – The Parish Council will seek to prioritise the use of financial contributions, whether from Community Infrastructure Levy or negotiated obligations, for improvements to and enhancement of community facilities; improvements to traffic management; and enhancement of footpaths and cycleways.

13. Monitoring and Review

It is anticipated that the Neighbourhood Plan will last for a period of 13 years. During this time, the circumstances which the Plan seeks to address may change.

The Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored by Thurcaston and Cropston Parish Council in conjunction with Charnwood Borough Council on at least an annual basis. The policies and measures contained in the Plan will form the core of the monitoring activity, but other data collected and reported at the Parish level relevant to the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan will also be included.

The Parish Council proposes to formally review the Neighbourhood Plan on a five-year cycle or to coincide with the review of the Charnwood Core Strategy if this cycle is different.

Thurcaston and Cropston Neighbourhood Plan: Proposals Map

