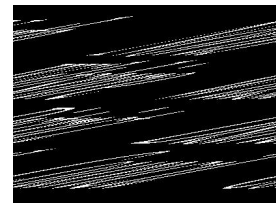


*Our environment has the potential
to enrich people's lives.*



**COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN
SPACE STRATEGY
2004 – 2008
(Revised February 2007)**



NORTH WILTSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

CONTENTS	PAGE NUMBER
Summary	1
Background	
1 Introduction	2
2 Vision and Rationale	4
3 Aims and Objectives	5
4 The North Wiltshire Open Space Study	6
5 Scope	7
Consultation	
6 General	9
7 People's Voice	10
General Principles	
8 General Principles	14
Landscape	
9 Landscape Character Areas	18
10 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	19
11 Great Western Community Forest	20
12 Cricklade Country Way	21
13 Wider Landscape	22
Recreation	
14 Access to the Countryside	23
15 Wilts & Berks and Cotswolds Canals	26
16 The Cotswold Water Park	27

Open Space

17	General Open Space	28
18	Park Provision	30
19	Allotments	30
20	Play Areas	31

Biodiversity

21	Legislation	33
22	Major Biodiversity Initiatives	34
	Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan	34
	Wildlife Sites Project	36
	Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre	36
	Rebuilding Biodiversity Project	37
23	Other Conservation Initiatives	38
	Designated Sites	38
	Conservation Volunteering	39
	Biodiversity on Open Space	40

Taking the Strategy Forward

24	The First Steps	42
25	Reviewing the Strategy	42

Appendices

26	Appendix 1 - Acronyms	43
27	Appendix 2 - Interested Parties	44
28	Appendix 3 - Summary of Policies	45
29	Appendix 4 - Action Plan	49
30	Appendix 5 - POS Planning and Adoption Process	51

Summary

The Countryside and Open Space Strategy sets out how the Council will work with partner organisations, and by itself, in managing the landscape, recreation, open space and biodiversity of the District. It is set against a background of rural regeneration – one of the Council's key priorities – as many of the policies will go some way to sustaining the rural economy.

The document is divided into sections corresponding with the following subjects:

Background – sets the context for the Strategy, why it has been written, the relationship to other Council documents, and what it hopes to achieve.

Consultation – details the methods used to ascertain views and opinions of a wide background of people including Members, the public, statutory agencies and other interested parties.

General Principles – lists five overarching principals that filter through to the other sections of the document.

Landscape – covers the North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment, the North Wessex Downs and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Great Western Community Forest and woodland, the Cricklade Country Way, and policies to ensure that the landscape of the District is conserved.

Recreation – looks at policies that will promote access to the countryside, the Wilts & Berks and Cotswolds Canal and the Cotswold Water Park.

Open Space – This section is based on the North Wiltshire Open Space Study which gives recommendations as to how the open space in the District can be managed to improve the accessibility and quality.

Biodiversity – outlines the initiatives that can be used to increase the biodiversity of the District.

Background

1 Introduction

There has been a significant amount of recent research, which has resulted in an increasing awareness that the countryside and open spaces contribute significantly to people's well being, in terms of both physical and mental health, by improving the 'quality of life'. The industrial revolution brought with it a massive shift in the demographics of the country with migration from rural to urban settlements, and along with this the process of rural decline started. The majority of the population still reside in the urban settlements, but there is also a growing trend of migration from urban and suburban areas back to the countryside, with a net increase of 125,000 people a year doing so (Countryside Agency, 2004). At the same time there has been growing demand for recreation opportunities in the countryside. There are a number of reasons for this demand, perhaps the most important has been the success of conservation groups such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildlife Trusts, who have purchased significant tracts of land and promoted access to the countryside. Of course, the perceived increase in leisure time has also played its part in promoting the countryside with activities such as cycling and walking increasing, especially for short trips near the home, for the latter.

These mechanisms place increasing pressure on the landscape, wildlife and the infrastructure at a time when a more far reaching and potentially much more damaging process is underway – global warming. Global warming will have many negative effects¹ including an increase in cases of sunstroke and burning, an increase in water supply issues, higher pollution, a loss of natural assets, increased risk of damage to utilities and transport infrastructure, and a change in agricultural crop regime with effects on wildlife.

Many of these issues will affect the natural resource in North Wiltshire and people's ability to enjoy it.

¹ Impacts of headline climate change. UK Climate Impacts Programme.

After many years of decline the management of open spaces is, once again, high on the national and local agenda, with the realisation that open space is playing an increasingly important role. This may be especially the case in built up areas where it may act as a substitute for the wider countryside for people who are unable, or who have no wish, to access remoter areas. The term open space is open to interpretation and can include such diverse areas as semi-natural greenspace, allotments and cemeteries. The opportunities offered by these areas are as diverse as the space itself. Parks that are well managed and offer a variety of activities are always popular, and tend to be extremely busy on a sunny weekend day. With the increase in concern over the quality of food produced by modern agriculture, there has been a resurgence of interest in allotment holding, and these have other benefits apart from food production such as sustaining the local (and often hidden) economy, and providing wildlife habitats. And the areas of land left between development areas, which often consist of semi-natural vegetation, provide a refuge for wildlife, as well as a 'green lung' for the human population near by.

However, if these areas are managed badly, or are in an inappropriate place, then they will not realise their potential, and create problems rather than contribute to solving them. This creates a spiral of decline. It is essential then, that whilst recognising the huge potential benefits possible from the countryside and open spaces, resources are targeted effectively to ensure that conflicts between conservation issues and development are minimised, facilities are provided in the right place, are what people want, and at a cost that is sustainable.

National Government has recognised that there are pressures on the countryside and the need to be pro-active in developing policies that meet the requirements of the 21st century. Consequently, various working groups have looked at the issues and made recommendations as to how to work towards a better future.

North Wiltshire District Council has also responded to increasing public desire and supported various external initiatives for both leisure access, and recreational use of the countryside. These include the North Wiltshire Rivers Route and Cricklade Country Way (both of which form part of the National Cycle Network), restoration of the Wilts and Berks and Cotswold Canals, and several wildlife projects such as those centred around the Braydon Forest and, Cotswold and By Brook Valley, as well as the Cotswolds Water Park. However, these have been individual schemes, and have not so far formed part of any clear overall strategy.

This Strategy then, seeks to redress this. It will seek to ensure that wildlife, landscape and public open space are protected and enhanced, and that the community can attain the greatest benefits from them, but in a sustainable way.

The Council led the process of preparing Community Strategies for North Wiltshire and there is now a strategy for each of the Community Areas as well as an overarching Strategy. These strategies aim to improve the quality of life of local communities through action to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of an area and its inhabitants. It is intended that the Countryside and Open Space Strategy will play a part in addressing these objectives for North Wiltshire. A Wiltshire Local Area Agreement is in the process of being written which includes an environmental 'block'. This would put biodiversity and sustainability at the heart of the local decision making process.

The Strategy supports access to the countryside for all, including non-car methods, and measures that enhance biodiversity.

2 Vision and Rationale

The Countryside and Open Space Strategy is a 'working' document, intended to be used by the Council to guide its work in the District. There are several reasons why the Council has developed this Strategy:

- § The Leisure Facilities Strategy 2001–2007 recognised that a Countryside and Open Space Strategy be developed for the District to ensure that a more strategic approach would be adopted for developing projects, rather than the more piece-meal approach being used;
- § There is ever increasing pressure on the countryside and open space (for development purposes) which can, without any method of making an informed judgement, result in the loss or degradation of important local amenities;
- § Ever increasing competition for limited financial resources make it more important to target that resource effectively. Supply led provision is far

less effective than demand led provision, but the latter is more difficult to achieve;

- § There is a moral obligation to ensure that protection is given, not only to designated sites, but the wider countryside as well, to ensure that the landscape and nature conservation value of the District are enhanced, not degraded, and biodiversity increased whenever possible.

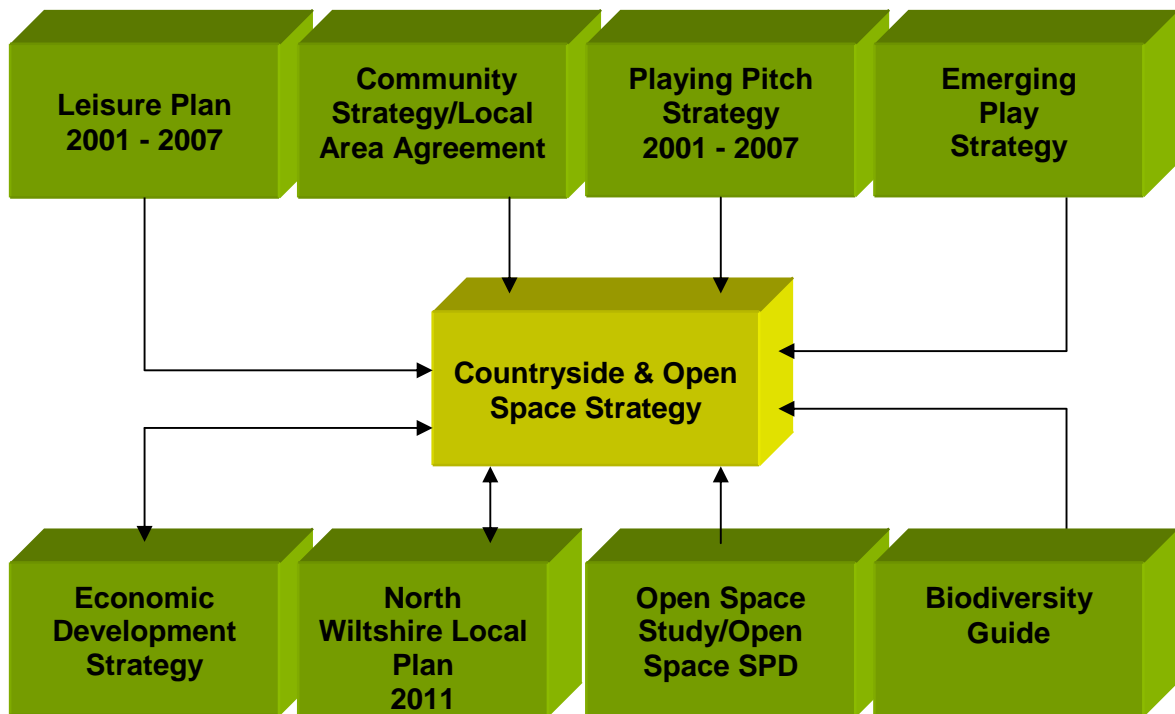
3 Aims and Objectives

The aims of this Strategy, therefore, are:

- To ensure that maximum protection is afforded to a valuable resource. This will be achieved by following the procedures and guidelines set out in PPG17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation), PPG9 (Nature Conservation) and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 amongst other policies;
- § To establish a framework for current and future projects, both within the countryside and open space, to allow optimal leisure use of the natural environment of the District, whilst protecting and enhancing its value for wildlife;
- § To enable the direction of a limited financial resource, support funding applications to external sources, and benefit from planning gain;
- § To link into the Community Planning Process so that the citizens of North Wiltshire have an input into the provision and management of countryside leisure facilities; and,
- § To complement the Council's Economic Development Strategy, and other policies, regarding social well-being and the economy in rural areas. The relationship between this Strategy, and other key Council documents, is shown in the diagram opposite.

4 The North Wiltshire Open Space Study

The Council has completed a study of open space in the District, which is a task recommended by PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation. This Study identified and audited publicly accessible open space including allotments, semi-natural greenspace, parks and gardens. A hierarchy of open space was developed and the open space audited classified within this. The spaces were also assessed as to their quality and given a rank based on the score. From the results it was possible to determine areas of deficiency of open space both in terms of accessibility and quality. The Study then makes recommendations for the planning and management of open space. The key recommendations are detailed in the Open Space section of this Strategy.



The Open Space Study will be updated during 2007 as it will form the basis of a new Supplementary Planning Document. There will still be a strong link between the two documents.

5 Scope

Open space is defined in the North Wiltshire Open Space Study, whilst for the purpose of this strategy, countryside refers to the landscape and wildlife (biodiversity) of the District. It should be borne in mind that within this Strategy there is a strong bias towards leisure and recreation, and this will have an impact on the resultant policies. One of the Council's key objectives is rural regeneration, and this is recognised in the Strategy – most of the policies will go some way to benefiting the rural economy. However, there is also a strong commitment to protecting the natural resource of North Wiltshire, and this Strategy aims to ensure that the leisure and recreation policies do not adversely affect this aspect. With this in mind, the Strategy has four key themes:

- § Landscape;
- § Biodiversity;
- § Recreation; and,
- § Open Space.

It is apparent that there are many overlaps between these categories, and many subjects could be discussed in two, or sometimes three of them. Where this is the case, subjects have been discussed in the most appropriate section.

The Strategy also needs to be considered with regard to the Council's statutory obligations, and within the planning framework. Whilst there is a legislative framework regarding landscape and nature conservation, there are little regarding the provision of leisure facilities or recreational opportunities. However, in line with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council is committed to ensuring that the residents of North Wiltshire have a good quality of life, and can benefit from the excellent natural resource that the District enjoys.

In many cases the Council is a partner, rather than the lead organisation in projects and initiatives.

The Strategy puts forward policies in five sections – General Principles, Landscape, Recreation, Open Space, and Biodiversity. The policies are linked to the relevant section by a system that identifies the subject. This system is explained below:

Subject	Identification (example)
General Principles	General Policy 1 (GP1)
Landscape	Landscape Policy 1 (LP1)
Recreation	Recreation Policy 1 (RP1)
Open Space	Open Space Policy 1 (OSP1)
Biodiversity	Biodiversity Policy 1 (BP1)

Consultation

6 General Consultation

Consultation, both with the community and interested parties, has become an integral part of strategy development. Therefore, throughout the development of this Strategy, consultation was undertaken with a variety of interested parties including town and parish councils, partner organisations and the wider community. The results of the consultation process have influenced the resulting policies. The consultation process is detailed below in chronological order.

- Throughout the process elected Members were involved in the development of the strategy.
- Spring 2002. An initial 'scoping' document, outlining what the Council wished to achieve through the Countryside and Open Space Strategy, was sent out for consultation in to all town and parish councils in the District, as well as key partners, a full list of which can be seen in Appendix 1. Many useful comments were received and these shaped the progress of the document.
- A variety of methods were used to gain the opinions of the wider community on countryside and open space issues. The February 2003 Peoples Voice included a questionnaire on these subjects, and a web version of the same questionnaire was put on the Council's web site. Previous People's Voice surveys were also used to gather information, as was the Council's community database - Mission Impossible. The consultation exercise was publicised in the North Wiltshire Newsletter.

Some of the issues highlighted during this consultation process are listed below:

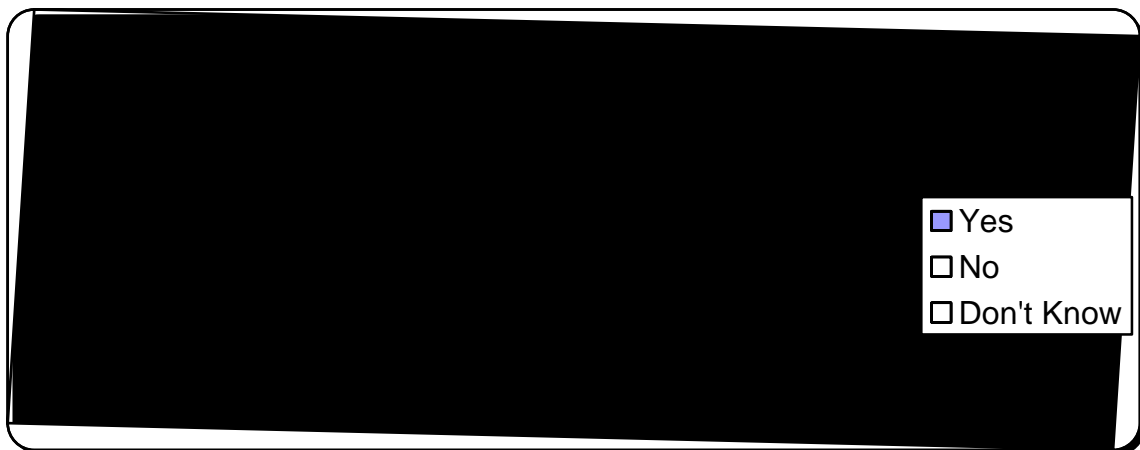
- The Strategy should promote closer working with partner organisations;
- As landscape and wildlife does not recognise borders then the Council should work with adjoining Local Authorities;
- The Strategy should address social issues and 'access for all';

- Powers for compulsory purchase of land should not be used to complete projects, rather negotiation should be used;
- There should be links to the Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan;
- The health agenda should be included in relation to walking and cycling;
- The Strategy should lead to improvements of the Rights of Way network;
- Remember that most of the countryside is private land.

7 People's Voice

People's Voice is the citizen's panel through which consultation is undertaken with the public in Wiltshire, and helps to gather information on their needs, opinions and priorities

Results of the People's Voice Survey questions relating to the countryside are shown in graphical form below. The results, and of those questions pertaining to open space, are discussed more fully in the North Wiltshire Open Space Study.



Yes
 No
 Don't Know

Yes
 No
 Don't know

Yes
 No
 Don't Know

Yes
 No
 Don't Know

Yes
 No
 Don't Know

Yes
 No
 Don't Know

People's Voice shows that there is overwhelming concern for the protection of the landscape and control of pollution, whilst there is also great support for increasing the tree cover in the District. Just under half of the respondents thought that protection was more important than the recreational use of the countryside, indicating that whilst people feel the countryside deserves protection, they also wish to make use of it for recreational purposes. This may be borne out by the high number wanting to see more designated sites, and the creation of more cycling and walking routes. The number who can access the countryside is surprisingly high, and could reflect the high level of car owners in North Wiltshire or, simply the fact that North Wiltshire is a predominantly rural district, and therefore a great number of people are generally considering themselves to already be in the countryside.

The views illustrated above are incorporated into this Strategy.

General Principles

8 General Principles

It is recognised that North Wiltshire's wildlife and landscape has been, and still is, subject to pressures that may lead to the decline in semi-natural habitats, populations of rare species, visual amenity and recreational opportunities. Accordingly, North Wiltshire District Council supports a number of projects that seek to conserve and enhance wildlife biodiversity and landscape heritage, alongside other objectives that seek to improve opportunities for recreation and economic development. Some of these initiatives are cross-border projects that cover a distinct geographical area such as the Great Western Community Forest (GWCF) and the Cotswold and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's), whilst others are more localised. It is important that the Council continues to work in partnership with many organisations and neighbouring local authorities. This will ensure that the Council is involved in projects that not only take place within the District, but also those that take place on the edge of the District, and could therefore, impact upon it.

The Council has developed the following five General Principles (GP's) that set the framework and outline the most appropriate and realistic methods for the Council to adopt to achieve its goals. These General Principles are:

- § **GP1. Maintain and enhance the quality of the countryside, through influencing land use, design, and management.**
- § **GP2. Manage existing and new partnerships effectively, both financially and in terms of the partnership meeting the aims of this Strategy, and implement any changes accordingly.**
- § **GP3. Widen opportunities for recreation and leisure use of the countryside in ways compatible with nature conservation objectives, whilst raising awareness of land management issues.**
- § **GP4. Seek to raise awareness of the countryside and countryside facilities and ensure that the promotion is co-ordinated, both**

internally and with partner organisations, to ensure that the maximum benefit is realised, without causing detrimental effects.

§ **GP5. Planning for and the management of the open space resource in the District will be undertaken in a manner that will ensure that maximum community benefit is obtained.**

Each of the General Principles will now be discussed in more detail below. The Principles will be expanded upon in later sections where they relate to relevant policies.

GP1. Maintain and enhance the quality of the countryside, through influencing land use, design, and management.

North Wiltshire District Council has many responsibilities, both statutory and non-statutory, for promoting biodiversity, and conserving the landscape (including the built environment) and open space. This can be achieved through a variety of measures including managing its own land holdings to benefit wildlife and people, establishing Local Nature Reserves (LNR's), by using the development control process, by advising others about potential impacts of their plans, and by supporting external partnerships and projects.

GP2. Manage existing and new partnerships effectively, both financially and in terms of the partnership meeting the aims of this Strategy, and implement any changes accordingly.

Much of the work proposed in this Strategy can be carried out through continuing partnership work with other organisations. The District Council already works with the AONB's, Natural England, the GWCF team, and voluntary bodies such as the

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and BTCV, amongst others. Careful management of these partnerships will realise many benefits and ensure value for money.

GP3. Widen opportunities for recreation and leisure use of the countryside in ways compatible with nature conservation objectives, whilst raising awareness of land management issues.

As a component part of the North Wiltshire Leisure Plan 2001-2007, North Wiltshire District Council has developed a Leisure Facilities Strategy for all leisure services, including countryside & open space. This outlines existing facilities in the District, details consultation undertaken, and makes eight recommendations, the first of which is to develop this Strategy. It also recommends:

- § Increasing promotion of existing countryside facilities;
- § Implementation of projects which have an emphasis on cycling, walking and nature conservation;
- § Education of users and the minimising of conflict;
- § Liaison with relevant partners over physical improvements to access on public rights of way and countryside facilities and sites; and,
- § Continuing consultation with interest groups representing disadvantaged and mobility impaired groups on ways to improve access to the countryside;

The District Council has in the past supported a number of countryside initiatives such as the Cotswold and By Brook Project, which was almost entirely focused on nature conservation, to the Cotswold Water Park, wherein nature conservation and recreational usage are more equally balanced. Whilst it is recognised that encouraging more visitors to the countryside is not acceptable at all sites, there is an increased demand for access, and the Council is in a prime position to work towards meeting this demand.

The relevant statutory authorities will be consulted prior to a project starting to ensure that all the issues are realised and accounted for.

GP4. Seek to raise awareness of the countryside and countryside facilities and ensure that the promotion is co-ordinated, both internally and with partner organisations, to ensure that the maximum benefit is realised, without causing detrimental effects.

With virtually all projects and initiatives it will be beneficial to publicise the results so that people are aware of a new facility, or the efforts being undertaken to conserve the wildlife of the District, for example. A good example of this is the town and district cycle network and the associated maps, which are available free of charge to the public. Opportunities for access to the countryside and open space will be publicised by appropriate means, including leaflets, the Council web site, and signage.

GP5. Planning for and the management of the open space resource in the District will be undertaken in a manner that will ensure that maximum community benefit is obtained.

The North Wiltshire Open Space Study (2004) makes several recommendations regarding public open space (primarily parks, amenity greenspace, play areas and allotments) in the District and the way that the resource should be managed. These recommendations should be followed so that the above aim can be realised.

Landscape

9 Landscape Character Areas

In 2004 the Council commissioned consultants to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment for the District from which the following information is derived.

The landscape of the District is varied ranging from the wide-open expanse of downland in the south east, to the flat river valley of the Avon and the deeply incised valleys of the By Brook valley in the south west. The Report identified areas of fourteen different landscape character types, based on the national landscape typology. These types and their corresponding areas are:

Landscape Character Types	Landscape Character Area
Alluvium River Terrace Farmland	Thames Valley Floor
Lowland Caly Farmland	Thames Valley Lowland
Urban Fringe Scarp	Swindon Fringe
Lowland Clay Woodland	Braydon Wooded Plateau
Lowland Clay Farmland	Minety & Malmesbury Rolling Lowland
Settled Farmland Valley	Upper Avon Valley
Lowland Limestone Farmland	Sherston Dipslope Lowland
Lowland Limestone Farmland	Hullavington Rolling Lowland
Wooded Lowland Valley	By Brook Valley
Rolling Settled Lowland	Corsham Rolling Lowland
Lowland River Farmland	Avon Valley Lowland
Wooded Parkland Hill	Bowood and Bowden Parkland
Settled Hill Farmland	Lyneham Hills
Lowland Caly Farmland	Hilmarton Rolling Lowland
Rolling Chalk Farmland	Cherhill Down
Chalk Scarp Farmland	Liddington Scarp
Chalk Plateau Farmland	Avebury Plain

Within these character types are localised areas of high landscape value. These include the Braydon Forest, the Cotswold and By Brook Valley, the Bowood and Spey Park Estates, and of course, the two AONB's in the District – the Cotswold and the North Wessex Downs AONB's.

For each of the Character Areas the Report sets Management Guidelines to ensure that the key characteristics of the areas are maintained and enhanced.

LP1. The Management Guidelines identified in the North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment should be adopted and where possible, practical solutions found to achieve them.

10 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's) are areas of high landscape value. They are protected by law (National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) to ensure conservation and enhancement of their natural beauty, not just for the present, but also for future generations. They have their origins in the post war movements to protect the countryside. There are now 37 AONB's nationwide.

In line with the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2002 the Council has contributed to the funding of management plans for these two AONB's, and continues to fund the work that they undertake. The Council has adopted the two respective management plans for the AONB's which are currently under review.

The Cotswolds AONB

The Cotswolds AONB, designated in 1966, is the country's largest AONB. 3.15% of the Cotswolds AONB is in North Wiltshire, which equates to approximately 18% of the land area of the District.

The AONB is managed by a Conservation Board which has the powers and functions to enable it to undertake a key role in shaping the future of the AONB, building upon

the success of the previous Partnership. The Board is a robust, flexible and multi-purpose organisation, operating on the basis of accountability and partnership. It undertakes a wide range of activities including countryside management, environmental education, special projects and provide an AONB perspective on development plans and significant development proposals.

North Wessex Downs AONB

The North Wessex Downs was designated as an AONB in 1972 and is the third largest AONB in the country. 1.5% of the North Wessex Downs AONB is in North Wiltshire, or approximately 7% of the land area of the District.

In late 2001 a Council of Partners was formed to bring together key partners with interests in the area. The Council is an advisory partnership consisting of government agencies, local authorities and community, conservation, farming, landowning, business & voluntary organisations. The Council of Partners is the accountable body for the AONB. It has a strategic input and is responsible for setting priorities and objectives.

LP2. The Council will continue to support the work of the two AONB's, by providing appropriate funding, Member and Officer support, and seek ways to work more closely.

11 The Great Western Community Forest

The Great Western Community Forest was founded in 1994 alongside eleven other Community Forests across England, in part as a result of priorities for environmental protection and sustainable living, established in the Rio Earth Summit Agreement of 1992. Whilst the Forest is centred around Swindon its western boundary incorporates the Cricklade (including the Cotswold Water Park) and Wootton Bassett areas of North Wiltshire, some 11,250 ha in total.

The Forest is guided by a Partnership, of which the Council is a member, the aims of which are to:

- § Create a multi-purpose Forest embracing Swindon and its environs, with a rich mixture of woods, farmland, open spaces, towns and villages;
- § Increase tree cover within the Forest area until it reaches an average of 30%;
- § Encourage community involvement in the creation and maintenance of the Forest, and instil a strong sense of local identity within the region;
- § Maintain and enhance biodiversity within the Forest;
- § Maximise public access to the Forest for work and leisure;
- § Encourage sustainable development within the Forest area, including employment opportunities that make use of the Forest itself;
- § Improve the overall quality of the landscape within and surrounding Swindon in particular, so that people from the town and its surrounding villages will want to use, cherish and enjoy the area.

There is a growing concern about the expansion of the urban conurbation of Swindon and its impact on the towns and parishes in the north east of the District. The Community Forest activities could well mitigate this impact through green infrastructure planning. The work of the Forest also addresses many issues raised in the People's Voice consultation and so joint working with them would go a long way to achieving the aspirations of the communities of North Wiltshire. Whilst the current boundary, and hence work area, of the Community Forest is limited, there may be more flexibility in this in the future as funding arrangements change.

LP3. The Council recognises the importance of the Great Western Community Forest and the contribution it makes to the well-being of the District. Therefore the Council will continue to work with the Community Forest make a commitment to sustained funding, and identify new joint projects to further the aims of both organisations.

12 The Cricklade Country Way

The Cricklade Country Way (CCW) is a major lottery funding-led project focusing on a narrow corridor of land stretching from Swindon to Cricklade and beyond to the

Cotswold Water Park. There are a number of discrete plans including creating walking and cycling opportunities, the restoration of the Cricklade - Swindon Railway and the Wilts & Berks Canal, and the creation of new forests and wildlife habitat through green infrastructure planning. To date £250,000 has been offered by the lottery to allow feasibility studies and further investigative work to be undertaken. If the project proceeds to Stage 2 funding then £12,000,000 (with a further £3,000,000 provided by partners in varying forms) will be awarded to undertake the works. The Council is the lead organisation (with Swindon Borough Council, Cricklade Town Council, the GWCF, the Swindon and Cricklade Railway Society and the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust, amongst others) and is currently hosting a project team.

LP4. The Council will lead the Cricklade Country Way Project during the lifetime of the Lottery bid through staff time and financial contribution. At the end of the lottery bid period the project will be reviewed.

13 Wider Landscape

Woodland

There is general support from the public for the planting of trees and the creation of woodland. The Great Western Community Forest and the Woodland Trust both undertake woodland creation as well as manage existing woodland. Whilst the Woodland Trust is a landowner, the Community Forest works with landowners and farmers to promote woodland and the benefits associated with it – landscape, conservation, wood products, recreation and health. As well as the creation of new woodland, existing woodland, and in particular ancient woodland, should be protected (and restored where possible) due to its high value. Veteran trees are also recognised for their value in the landscape and high biodiversity interest.

LP5. The Council will work with partner organisations to promote the creation of woodland (where this will not be to the detriment of existing semi-natural habitats), and the protection and management of existing woodland and veteran trees.

Recreation

14 Access to the Countryside

For the purpose of this Strategy the definition of recreation refers mainly, but not exclusively, to walking and cycling – essentially access to the countryside by sustainable methods.

There are a number of factors that have, and will continue to increase the demand for access from town to countryside, and vice versa. The population in the District is increasing at a rate of 1.3% annually, as is its average age: the proportion of over 45 year olds is predicted to rise from 39% to 45% in the next 10 years. Added to an increase in tourism trips, these factors will cause the desire for countryside leisure to rise. Walking, cycling and horse riding are all increasing in popularity nationally.

The Best Value Review consultation undertaken in 1999 was consistent with the above. The need for increased promotion, access and the improvement of existing countryside facilities, in particular footpaths and cycle paths (North Wiltshire Rivers Route Survey, 2002), was also consistent. There is also a significant minority of people (particularly young people) who do not have access to a car or public transport.

It is clear that whilst the car is still by far the preferred form of transport for what is a comparatively affluent local population, there is a latent demand for new cycleways and footpaths, as confirmed by a recent Greenways Study¹. Where these have been provided they are popular and show increasing use (North Wiltshire Rivers Route Survey 2002). This Strategy will concentrate on providing access by cycling and walking to countryside facilities, appropriately balanced with a provision for vehicles where this is desirable and practical.

¹ Greenways are a network of largely car-free off-road routes connecting people to facilities and open spaces in and around towns, cities and to the countryside. The Countryside Agency are leading on the Greenways Project and recently undertook a Study into the feasibility of linking Swindon to the Cotswold Water Park.

It is indicated too, that education plays a part. Despite its clear health, social and environmental benefits, many people are reluctant to cycle because they lack confidence, and, or believe it to be unsafe. A new, safe, cycle/footpath linking popular destinations in an attractive way can help overcome these barriers and encourage people to integrate walking and cycling into their lives.

The encouragement of walking and cycling features strongly in the Local Transport Plan as well as several local initiatives. There are several schemes, for example the North Wiltshire Rivers Route, which have a strong focus on transportation, and where appropriate recreation, economic development, and wildlife restoration.

Sustainable transport also includes public transport. The Council is keen to see people access facilities by public transport and supports this method, as well as other community transport initiatives. Every endeavour will be made to promote (in partnership with Wiltshire County Council and others) public transport as a method of accessing the countryside.

The North Wiltshire Rivers Route

The North Wiltshire Rivers Route (NWRR) is part of the National Cycle Route 4, which when complete will run from Fishguard to London. Approximately 28 miles of the route runs through North Wiltshire. Starting at Avebury the route enters the District near Yatesbury and then continues through Cherhill and Calne and on to Chippenham along the old railway track. From Chippenham the route continues onto Reybridge, near Lacock, following the old Wilts and Berks Canal for a while. A significant amount of funding has been provided by the Council (along with partner organisations) to enable the creation of the NWRR, including three bridges which were specifically designed to enhance their intended locations. A survey of users of the route undertaken in 2002 indicated that it was extremely popular with 68,000 'uses' per year. The survey was undertaken before the opening of the latest section – from Chippenham to Reybridge. The survey also indicated that links to other facilities of a similar nature would be popular.

Town and District Cycle Network

Recently the Council has published several leaflets publicising the different 'stages' of the town and district cycling network. This network highlights ways to negotiate

the major settlements of the district, and between these settlements, on foot or by cycle. It comprises some off-road routes, but the majority of routes are on quiet roads.

RP1. Provision for the creation of walking and cycling routes to existing and new areas of open space, and countryside facilities, will be investigated and implemented where possible. Any new measures will incorporate the philosophy of 'access for all'.

RP2. Opportunities to extend the North Wiltshire Rivers Route and the town and district cycling network will be identified, offering recreational opportunities, as well as the possibility of increased use of cycles for travel to and from places of work.

Public Rights of Way

Within North Wiltshire there are approximately 980 miles of public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways and byways. Also within the area for a short distance is the Thames National Trail, which runs across the north east of the District for some miles as well as the MacMillan Way in the By Brook Valley. This network forms part of our heritage and is a major recreational resource as well as contributing to the rural economy.

All of the above routes are in varying states of repair, with some virtually lost from the map altogether. The CRow Act has obliged the Highways Authority (Wiltshire County Council) to undertake a Rights of Way Improvement Plan by 2007. The Improvement Plan will be the main mechanism for identifying changes to be made to meet the Government's aim of better provision for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and people with mobility problems.

RP3. The Council will continue to support projects that promote the use of the rights of way network, working in partnership with the County Council, town and parish councils and the Thames National Trail, amongst others.

15 The Wilts & Berks and Cotswold Canals

Two of the major projects planned in the District are the restoration of the Wilts & Berks and Cotswold Canals. It is hoped that this will bring strong community involvement and identity as each section is worked on, creating enjoyable leisure opportunities for many users such as walkers, cyclists, boaters and anglers. It will enhance and enrich the social fabric of smaller rural communities, and bring appropriate low level small business and job opportunities. It will also increase access to the countryside in a managed way, linking with existing cycleways and footpaths, such as the North Wilts Rivers Route and the Cricklade Country Way, and offer the opportunity to create new links.

Away from the canals there are also possibilities to link existing sites by way of public rights of way, and new cycle routes, and these should be investigated with the intention of creating a network of sites throughout the District, easily accessible by non-car methods.

The restoration of the canals also offer the potential to provide new wildlife habitats, contributing to the targets of many Biodiversity Action Plan's, as well as bringing back many derelict buildings and structures from potential loss from the landscape.

RP4. The Council will support the restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal and the Cotswolds Canal, seeking complete restoration, through the appropriate targeting of resources.

16 The Cotswold Water Park

The Cotswold Water Park (CWP) is the country's largest water park with over 133 lakes created by gravel extraction, covering over 40 square miles. A significant proportion of the Park is in North Wiltshire, in the north east corner near Cricklade and Ashton Keynes. The Water Park is a nationally recognised area for wildlife, with particular importance to wetland bird species. The recreational opportunities include angling, sailing, windsurfing, canoeing, cycling, kayaking, canoeing, jetskiing, horse riding, waterskiing, as well as a comprehensive network of footpaths, cycleways and bridleways. As gravel extraction is still continuing then the Park is still expanding, offering further opportunities for recreation and habitat creation.

The Council supports the activities of the CWP and provides substantial funding in support of its activities.

RP5. In recognition of the strategic importance of the Cotswold Water Park the Council will continue to support its work, and provide appropriate financial support.

Open Space

Within the District there is a huge amount of open space, both in the public domain, and in private ownership, that adds to the character of the District and provides opportunities for leisure. However, it has not been known, until now, exactly what open space there is, its value, or quality. The planning system should ensure that there is sufficient open space, and in the right place. However the companion guide to PPG17: Assessing Needs and Opportunities (ODPM, 2002) suggests that it should go beyond this and look at ensuring that provision is of a high quality, attractive to users, and well maintained. This is a highly desirable approach, which should result in:

- § A network of high quality recreational facilities that are valued by the communities that they serve, and are economically and environmentally sustainable,
- § An appropriate balance between new provision and the enhancement of existing provision,
- § Offer landowners and developers clarity in relation to the requirements and expectations of the District Council as the local planning authority.

To achieve this, the companion guide recommends that a local assessment and an audit, are undertaken first to determine need and existing provision. This work has been undertaken and constitutes the North Wiltshire Open Space Study, which has been approved by the Council. The Study makes several key recommendations pertaining to different types of open space, which are summarised below.

17 General Open Space

If an increase in the quality of Public Open Space (POS) is to be achieved then closer links between Council Business Areas will be required. This includes the Cleansing and Amenities, Asset Design and Regeneration, and Legal Teams, as well as Planning Services. Two key aspects of the Board's role will be the implementation of a new process for the planning and adoption of open space (see Appendix 4) and the development of a public open space Supplementary Planning

Document, as part of the Local Development Framework process. The 'process' covers the various stages from initial developer contact through to the management of POS following its adoption by the Council (if that is the route taken). It details who will be involved at each stage and the relevant documentation and policies to be used.

OSP1. An open space 'Board' should be created from across various Council teams that will take a strategic and unified approach towards open space planning and management.

The Open Space Study created a hierarchy of parks ranging in size and facilities. The Study also identified many sites that did not fit into the open space hierarchy, but may still perform some useful function. However, there is a perceived lack of management of many spaces leading to a misconception that the open space is 'wasteland'. These sites may have a high conservation value, or be valued by the community.

OSP2. To allow the improvement of facilities all open space should have a positive management regime, ideally supported by a management plan or statement.

It is good practice to involve the community in the management of open space, especially the larger parks where people feel that it is 'their' park. Informal meetings with users of park is a good way to canvas opinions about management options.

OSP3. User Panels or 'Friends' groups should be established for the major parks owned by the Council to inform the management of these areas. These could be created for a short term period, for example when changes to the management are planned.

18 Park Provision

There are certain areas in the District where there is a shortfall of park provision, or the existing provision does not meet the expected standards and work should be undertaken to remedy this situation.

OSP4. Working with the town and parish councils and developers, utilising the planning process, the Council will seek to improve the current provision of open space, targeting the worst affected areas, as identified in the Open Space Study first.

The Council owns significant tracts of land which are either used as open space (but in need of improvement) or are not promoted as open access and are under utilised. Two of these sites are Morningside Farm near Wootton Bassett and Castlefields in Calne. Both have huge potential both as public open space and for nature conservation. Indeed Morningside Farm's interest is mostly biodiversity related (58% of the land area is a County Wildlife Site), but also has added value due to the line of the Wilts & Berks Canal running through it as well as footpaths and its close proximity to the town of Wootton Bassett.

OSP5. The Council will be more proactive in its management of key sites, particularly Morningside Farm and Castlefields, working with partner organisations and community groups to identify suitable and sustainable solutions for their management.

19 Allotments

Within the District there is a deficiency of allotment provision and a growing demand for plots, therefore protection and improvement should be afforded to the existing provision. New allotment sites should be identified where possible and the availability of information increased.

OSP6. Development proposals should be monitored so that opportunities for new allotment facilities can be identified. Where appropriate, planning gain should be used to provide new facilities where there is a proven need, or improve the facilities on an existing site.

OSP7. Given the benefits associated with allotment gardening, the activity should be promoted. Along with the town and parish Councils, the District Council should promote plot holding and pursue the minimum standards as set out in the Open Space Study.

As statutory allotments have more protection than non-statutory sites it would be beneficial to know which sites have this higher level of protection.

OSP8 Investigation should be undertaken to identify which, if any, allotment sites are classified as statutory sites. A decision should then be made to consider designating those that are not currently statutory sites. This will ensure that allotments have a higher level of protection.

20 Play Areas

Opportunities for play are an important part of the development of children and young people, so it is crucial that adequate opportunities are available. The role of the Council in this area of work is less clear as there are no statutory obligations to provide play facilities. However, there is a strong desire to provide for all sections of the communities, a feeling supported by the community. . However, a more open-minded approach should be taken to the provision of play facilities so that the current provision is improved and a wider range of experiences, not just formal play, are

available. It is not always desirable to provide play areas on new developments, particularly if another facility is near by. In this situation a developer contribution should be secured to allow an alternative approach.

OSP9 Play provision should be an integral part of developer proposals and should link to a wider network of opportunities.

The standard of existing facilities should be improved where necessary to ensure that they are adequate, safe and accessible to all. This may mean devolving some facilities to town or parish councils (who may be in a better position to maintain them) and introducing a comprehensive inspection and maintenance regime for those left with the Council.

OSP10 Establish a comprehensive, contractor based, inspection and maintenance regime for all play areas to ensure that safety and repairs are dealt with promptly, and that will ensure a high standard of facility.

Biodiversity

21 Legislation

Biodiversity has become increasingly important over recent years as species and habitats have declined and fragmented, and will continue to be so with the current threat of global warming and the potential impact on wildlife. Recently, new legislation has been enacted which has strengthened the protection of designated sites and placed new responsibilities on public bodies with regard to biodiversity conservation, so that they now have to have regard for biodiversity in all of their operations and activities. National policies derived from this legislation sets out how positive action for biodiversity can be achieved. The main relevant legislation is listed below:

Act	Main Points
National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1947	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made provision for the setting up of National Parks and AONB's • Gave local authorities the power to create Nature Reserves • Established Sites of Special Scientific Interest
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle mechanism for the legislative protection of wildlife in Great Britain • Contains lists of 'protected' species • National and Local Nature Reserves • Improved Sites of Special Scientific Interest process and protection
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced protection for badgers and badger sets (some operations can be undertaken by license)
Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations. (Habitats Directive), 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides for the protection of sites of European value
Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthens the Wildlife And Countryside Act 1981 • Introduces open access land • Improvements to public rights of way legislation
Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the first legislation to put a 'duty' on local authorities to have regard for conserving biodiversity outside of designated sites • Created Natural England and the Commission for Rural Communities (previously English Nature, Rural Development Agency and the Countryside Agency)

The Council has, over the years, supported many projects aimed at safeguarding and increasing the biodiversity of the District, such as the Braydon Forest Project and the By Brook Project, two projects which have now come to an end. The intention is to continue to support appropriate projects in various ways. The role of the Council in the biodiversity field is often that of a project funder, or in the undertaking of its statutory duties of protecting wildlife sites through development control and the Local Plan process. However, a wider role is possible through the closer support of projects with officer time as well as funding.

Whilst biodiversity is the main focus of most projects, many extra benefits are realised through them. There is a close link between conservation and agriculture and other land management disciplines. The rural economy is supported by financial payments for management of the countryside for conservation purposes, whilst recreational opportunities provided by conservation also contribute to the local economy through tourism. There is also growing evidence of the benefits to humans from being in natural spaces and from being in contact with nature. The potential health benefits are impossible to measure financially.

22. Major Biodiversity Initiatives

The following list gives the main projects currently underway in the District, and the lead partner, which in most cases, understandably, is the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. There are also many smaller projects being undertaken by community groups, and by organisations that appear in other sections of this Strategy.

Project	Lead Partner
Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan 2002	Wiltshire BAP Forum
Wildlife Sites Project	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
Swindon and Wiltshire Biological Records Centre	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
Rebuilding Biodiversity in North Wiltshire	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2002

The Wiltshire BAP is the main conservation document for the county, bringing together many years work by a range of organisations. The Council is a partner in

the BAP process and has, therefore, 'signed-up' to its principles and targets. The Wiltshire BAP sits within a hierarchy of BAP's, from the UK and South West BAP's down to BAP's targeted at more specific areas such as the Cotswold Water Park.

The BAP consists of habitat and species actions plans which serve to:

- § Provide baseline information on current knowledge;
- § Identify current conservation issues;
- § Set out targets to work toward;
- § Co-ordinate and focus action for biodiversity;
- § Raise awareness in all sectors; and,
- § Provide a monitoring framework.

Currently, action plans have been developed for the following habitats and one set of species:

- § Woodland
- § Wood-pasture
- § Rivers, streams and associated habitats
- § Standing open water
- § Arable farmland
- § Hedgerows
- § Lowland calcareous grassland
- § Unimproved neutral grassland
- § Urban areas
- § Bats

The dominance of habitat action plans is due to the fact that it is accepted that management of habitats is usually sufficient to ensure the requirements of individual species. Bats are included because of their dependence upon buildings and therefore their close contact with humans. A recent review of the BAP has showed good progress towards achieving the targets.

BP1. As a member of the Wiltshire BAP Forum the Council has signed-up to the principles of the BAP. The Council will continue to support these principles and work towards achieving the targets set out in the action plans.

Wildlife Sites Project

Planning Policy Guidance 9: Nature Conservation, states that Local Authorities should have policies in the Local Plan to take into account the importance of sites which have a nature conservation interest, but do not have any form of statutory designation. These sites, which are known as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, Local Sites or Wildlife Sites, are second only in importance to national and European designations. The work of the Wildlife Sites Project is fundamental to identifying and monitoring these sites. The aim of the project is:

‘to safeguard and enhance North Wiltshire’s wildlife through surveying and advising the owners of the most valuable areas of land outside statutorily protected sites and to give good quality management advice to landowners’.

BP2. The Council will continue to support the work of the Wildlife Sites Project through financial support and by taking into account the recommendations that the Project makes with regard to individual sites.

Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC)

It is a statutory obligation that relevant wildlife checks are undertaken prior to any planning consent being given (or obligations placed upon that planning consent). This ensures that populations of certain species such as bats, great crested newts and badgers are protected, along with protection of Wildlife Sites and other environmentally sensitive situations, for example, barn conversions. However, there needs to be a comprehensive database of information that developers and local authorities can refer to. This is where the WSBRC provides a service.

The aim of the WSBRC is to:

“provide local authorities, statutory agencies, private sector environmental consultants, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and other voluntary organisations with the information they need in order to make

environmental decisions, plan and prioritise their own environmental activities and fulfil the statutory requirements of environmental legislation”

This Council is one of the largest local authority users of the services provided by the WSBRC.

BP3. The Council will continue to support the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre, ensuring that an adequate financial contribution is made, to ensure that up to date information is available and sites of biological interest are not affected detrimentally, through inappropriate development.

Rebuilding Biodiversity in North Wiltshire

Rebuilding Biodiversity is a relatively new project summed up by the following statement:

‘Imagine the wildlife that has been squeezed into increasingly small, fragmented and isolated pockets over the last few decades, overflowing back into its former haunts amongst a revitalised landscape. This is the vision of Rebuilding Biodiversity’.

Whilst much has been achieved in recent years to improve the biodiversity of the countryside, it is now recognised that there is a wider issue – most conservation sites are too small and isolated to ensure the success of the population of plant and animals that live there. These pockets of biodiversity are often surrounded by a hostile environment rarely offering the chance for migration, and frequently leading to extinction.

The project aims to re-create larger areas of land suitable for conservation by identifying core areas – those areas that are already valuable in biodiversity terms and have the potential to provide a gene pool for surrounding areas. By changing

the management of surrounding areas then isolated populations will be able to spread and colonise more easily.

In North Wiltshire the area of the old Braydon Forest has been identified as having great potential for piloting the Rebuilding Biodiversity approach, and also is an area where BAP targets could be achieved.

BP4. The Council will support the work of the Rebuilding Biodiversity project through appropriate measures including financial support.

23 Other Conservation Initiatives

Designated Sites

Most successes in nature conservation have been due to the creation of a hierarchy of designations for sites following a raft of legislation since the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. Designations include National and Local Nature Reserves (NNR's and LNR's), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), Special Areas for Conservation (SAC's), Special Protection Areas (SPA's), and of course County Wildlife Sites. As at January 2007 there is one NNR (North Meadow), three candidate SAC's, 30 SSSI's, 420 CWS's, and three LNR's in the District.

There are many benefits to designating areas as LNR's including:

- § increasing people's awareness and enjoyment of their natural environment;
- § provide an ideal environment for everyone to learn about and study nature;
- § build a relationship between the Council, national and local nature conservation organisations, and local people;
- § protect wildlife habitats and natural features;
- § offer a positive use for land where it is preferred that it is left undeveloped;
- § make it possible to apply bye-laws which can help in managing and protecting the site.

The North Wiltshire Open Space Study identified several sites which may have the potential to be designated as LNR's. These sites are:

- § Conygre Mead, Malmesbury;
- § Corston Pond;
- § Mortimores Wood, Chippenham;
- § Box Common;
- § Castle Park, Calne;
- § Ashton Keynes Millennium Green;
- § Jubilee Lake, Wootton Bassett.

The Council can either designate LNR's itself, or give authority to a town or parish council to do so. In either case Natural England is a statutory consultee. Three of the above sites (Conygre Mead, Corston Pond and Mortimores Wood) have been declared as LNR's. It is likely that Jubilee Lake will be declared at some point in the future, but it is uncertain at this point if the other sites will progress.

BP5. Working with Natural England and landowners, the Council will designate as Local Nature Reserves those sites that are appropriate, if there is the support of the local community and funding is available for management, and consider other sites as they come forward.

Conservation Volunteering

Conservation volunteering has a long history and is now a very popular pastime with people spending days, weekends and even weeks undertaking practical conservation tasks, ranging from hedgelaying and tree planting to pond and footpath clearance. The main organisations involved in organising this type of activity are the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), the Wildlife Trust and the National Trust, although there are many smaller groups whose interests lie in just one site. These local groups are especially interesting as they have a wealth of knowledge about individual sites and can often be involved in managing adjacent areas as well.

Conservation volunteering has many other benefits, apart from nature conservation, for example it can help tackle social exclusion issues, it provides people with extra skills, and contributes to the rural economy.

Conservation volunteering should be welcomed and supported by the Council for the contribution it makes to issues described above.

BP6. The Council should support conservation volunteering via appropriate mechanisms, including financial support where possible.

Biodiversity on Open Space

The North Wiltshire Open Space Study recognised that there is great scope to improve the biodiversity on public open space. Specific recommendations include:

- § Where suitable, management of open space could be more biodiversity orientated with the creation of a more diverse range of habitats such as wildflower meadows or woodland.
- § Work be undertaken to identify a 'green network' which could link sites via footpaths and cycle ways (or other smaller sites).
- § The mapping of habitat types e.g. woodland, scrub etc., present on sites. This would be a useful addition to help with management and should be undertaken as part of any plans to improve individual sites.

Where new open space is to be created, thought should be given to the creation of 'alternative' open space, where this is suitable. For example, a new woodland could be created instead of the traditional grassed area with a few trees and shrubs. This could be especially the case where the site in question is next to an existing woodland. These recommendations would lead to an increase in biodiversity of public open space that is in the ownership of the Council, and may well contribute to Wiltshire BAP targets.

BP7. Land in the ownership of the Council with a value in terms of biodiversity, or where there is the potential to increase the biodiversity, should be identified, and management plans drawn up and implemented, so that the site is safeguarded and managed sympathetically.

BP8. If a change of use is planned for Council owned land with a high level of biological interest, then that interest should be at least maintained, and ideally enhanced.

BP9. As a last resort, and if feasible, the Council should safeguard land of a high landscape or wildlife value, by purchasing that land, or helping others to do so.

BP10. A system will be established to ensure better cross-team working within the Council, so that land holdings are better managed, and opportunities for improving those holdings are not missed.

Taking the Strategy Forward

24 First Steps

As set out in the Aims and Objectives it is intended that the document will be a 'framework', setting out the areas of work and type of projects that the Council will support, and to a certain extent how it will support them. Some of the Policies will result in considerable work, whilst for others no change will be required. For the former activities more thought will need to be put into considering the resources necessary to achieve results.

Action Plans have been developed for some of the Policies in the Strategy – generally those where progress can be made and measured in some way – whilst the other Policies will be monitored and Action Plans implemented at an appropriate time if necessary.

It may also be necessary to determine any budget implications at this stage, although in most cases it is more likely that external funding will be required. Prioritisation of the Policies may be necessary to fit in with Council priorities and resources.

25 Reviewing the Strategy

The Strategy will be valid for four years from the date of adoption (November 2004), at which point a major review of countryside and open space issues will be undertaken. However, an annual review will also be undertaken to ensure that the document remains up to date and relevant.

Appendices

26 Appendix 1 - Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BANES	Bath & North East Somerset Council
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BTCV	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
BW	British Waterways
CARP	Castlefields Canal and River Project
CCW	Cricklade Country Way
CPRE	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
CRoW	Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2002
CWP	Cotswold Water Park
GP	General Principles
GWCF	Great western Community Forest
LA	Local Authority
LP	Landscape Policy
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
NCP	Nature Conservation Policy
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NWRR	North Wiltshire Rivers Route
OSP	Open Space Policy
OPDM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Ps & Qs	Purton's Qualities
RP	Recreation Policy
RPSB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Area for Conservation
SNCI	Site of Nature Conservation Interest
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WS	Wildlife Site
WSBRC	Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre
WWT	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

27 Appendix 2 - Interested Parties

The following is a list of organisations that may have an interest in the Strategy.

Organisation
Ashton Keynes Millennium Green Trust
BANES
British Horse Society
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
British Waterways
CARP
Cotswolds AONB
Cotswold Canal Trust
Cotswold District Council
Cotswold Water Park
CPRE
Cricklade Footpaths Group
Environment Agency
Forestry Commission
Great Western Community Forest
Kennet District Council
Malmesbury Civic Trust
Malmesbury River Valleys Trust
Mortimores Wood Volunteers
Natural England
National Farmers Union
National Trust
North Wessex Downs AONB
Open Spaces Society
Ps & Qs
Ramblers Association
Swindon Borough Council
Sustrans
Thames National Trail
Town and Parish Councils
West Wiltshire District Council
Wiltshire County Council
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
Wilts & Berks Canal Trust
Woodland Trust

28 Appendix 3 - Summary of Policies

Policy No.	Policy
<u>General Principles</u>	
GP1	Maintain and enhance the quality of the countryside, through influencing land use, design, and management.
GP2	Manage existing and new partnerships effectively, both financially and in terms of the partnership meeting the aims of this Strategy, and implement any changes accordingly.
GP3	Widen opportunities for recreation and leisure use of the countryside in ways compatible with nature conservation objectives, whilst raising awareness of land management issues.
GP4	Seek to raise awareness of the countryside and countryside facilities and ensure that the promotion is co-ordinated, both internally and with partner organisations, to ensure that the maximum benefit is realised, without causing any detrimental effects.
GP5	Planning for and management of the open space resource in the District will be undertaken in a manner that will ensure that maximum community benefit is obtained.
<u>Landscape</u>	
LP1	The Management Guidelines identified in the North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment should be adopted and where possible, practical solutions found to achieve them.
LP2	The Council will continue to support the work of the two AONB's, by providing appropriate funding, Member and Officer support, and seek ways to work more closely.
LP3	The Council recognises the importance of the Great Western Community Forest and the contribution it makes to the well-being of the District. Therefore the Council will continue to work with the Community Forest, make a commitment to sustained funding, and identify new joint projects to further the aims of both organisations.

LP4	The Council will lead the Cricklade Country Way Project during the lifetime of the Lottery bid through staff time and financial contribution. At the end of the lottery bid the project will be reviewed.
LP5	The Council will work with partner organisations to promote the creation of woodland (where this will not be to the detriment of existing semi-natural habitats) the protection and management of existing woodland, where appropriate, and veteran trees.
Recreation	
RP1	Provision for the creation of walking and cycling routes to existing and new areas of open space, and countryside facilities, will be investigated and implemented where possible. Any new measures will incorporate the philosophy of 'access for all'.
RP2	Opportunities to extend the North Wiltshire Rivers Route and the town and district cycling network will be identified, offering recreational opportunities, as well as the possibility of increased use of cycles for travel to and from places of work.
RP3	The Council will continue to support projects that promote the use of the rights of way network, working in partnership with the County Council, town and parish councils and the Thames National Trail, amongst others.
RP4	The Council will support the restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal and the Cotswolds Canal, seeking complete restoration, through the appropriate targeting of resources.
RP5	In recognition of the strategic importance of the Cotswold Water Park the Council will continue to support its work, and provide appropriate financial support.
Open Space	
OSP1	An open space 'Board' should be created from across various Council teams that will take a strategic and unified approach towards open space management and provision.
OSP2	To allow the improvement of facilities all open space should have a positive management regime, ideally supported by a management plan or statement.
OSP3	User Panels should be established for the major parks owned by the Council to inform the management

	of these areas. These could be created for a short term period, for example when changes to the management are planned.
OSP4	Working with the town and parish councils and developers, utilising the planning process, the Council will seek to improve the current provision of open space, targeting the worst affected areas, as identified in the Open Space Study first.
OSP5	The Council will be more proactive in its management of key sites, particularly Morningside Farm and Castlefields, working with partner organisations and community groups to identify suitable and sustainable solutions for their management.
OSP6	Development proposals should be monitored so that opportunities for new allotment facilities can be identified. Where appropriate, planning gain should be used to provide new facilities where there is a proven need, or improve the facilities on an existing site.
OSP7	Given the benefits associated with allotment gardening, the activity should be promoted. Along with the Town and Parish Councils, the District Council should promote plot holding and pursue the minimum standards as set out in the Open Space Study.
OSP8	Investigation should be undertaken to identify which, if any, allotment sites are classified as statutory sites. A decision should then be made to consider designating those that are not currently statutory sites. This will ensure that allotments have a higher level of protection.
OSP9	Play provision should be an integral part of developer proposals and should link to a wider network of opportunities.
OSP10	Establish a comprehensive, contractor based, inspection and maintenance regime to ensure that safety and repairs are dealt with promptly, and that will ensure a high standard of facility.
Biodiversity	
BP1	As a member of the Wiltshire BAP Forum the Council has signed-up to the principles of the BAP. The Council will continue to support these principles and work towards achieving the targets set out in the action plans.
BP2	The Council will continue to support the work of the Wildlife Sites Project through financial support and

	by taking into account the recommendations that the Project makes with regard to individual sites.
BP3	The Council will continue to support the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre to ensure that up to date information is available and sites of biological interest are not affected detrimentally, through inappropriate development.
BP4	The Council will support the work of the Rebuilding Biodiversity project through appropriate measures including financial support.
BP5	Working with Natural England and landowners, the Council will designate as Local Nature Reserves those sites that are appropriate, if there is the support of the local community and funding is available for management, and consider other sites as they come forward.
BP6	The Council should support conservation volunteering via appropriate mechanisms, including financial support where possible.
BP7	Land in the ownership of the Council with a value in terms of biodiversity, or where there is the potential to increase the biodiversity, should be identified, and management plans drawn up and implemented, so that the site is safeguarded and managed sympathetically.
BP8	If a change of use is planned for Council owned land with a high level of biological interest, then that interest should be at least maintained, and ideally enhanced.
BP9	As a last resort, and if feasible, the Council should safeguard land of a high landscape or wildlife value, by purchasing that land, or helping others to do so.
BP10	A system will be established to ensure better cross-team working within the Council, so that land holdings are better managed, and opportunities for improving those holdings are not missed.

29 Appendix 4 - Action Plan 2007 - 2010

Policy	Outcome
<p>LP4. The Council will lead the Cricklade Country Way Project during the lifetime of the Lottery bid through staff time and financial contribution. At the end of the lottery bid the project will be reviewed.</p>	<p>Planning application submitted in April 2007. Lottery final stage application submitted by the deadline of 31 May 2007. Project delivery from 2008 - 2012.</p>
<p>OSP1. An open space 'Board' should be created from across various Council teams that will take a strategic and unified approach towards open space planning and management.</p>	<p>Board to meet every second month starting in May of 2007.</p> <p>Representatives from: Asset, Design and Regeneration, Spatial Plans and Cleansing & Amenities and other teams as necessary.</p>
<p>OSP2. To allow the improvement of facilities all open space should have a positive management regime, ideally supported by a management plan or statement.</p>	<p>Castlefield and Monkton park/River Island to have management plans in place by end of 2007.</p> <p>One other site or 'suites' of POS to also have management plan in place by end of 2007.</p> <p>Produce two Plans in 2008.</p>
<p>OSP5. The Council will be more proactive in its management of key sites, particularly Morningside Farm and Castlefields, working with partner organisations and community groups to identify suitable and sustainable solutions for their management.</p>	<p>Castlefields:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete management plan by end of 2007 • subsequent management in line with plan • undertake monthly 'quality control' visit • attend bi-monthly CARP meetings <p>Morningside Farm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete management plan by end 2008 • Complete annual Single Payment Scheme paperwork • Visit site monthly • Monitor tenant activities quarterly • Ensure that annual hay cut is taken (June/July)

<p>OSP8. Investigation should be undertaken to identify which, if any, allotment sites are classified as statutory sites. A decision should then be made to consider designating those that are not currently statutory sites. This will ensure that allotments have a higher level of protection.</p>	<p>Liaise with town and parish councils to establish which sites are statutory by end of Summer 2007.</p> <p>Work with town and parish councils to designate statutory sites as appropriate by the end of 2007.</p>
<p>OSP10. Establish a comprehensive, contractor based, inspection and maintenance regime for all play areas to ensure that issues are dealt with promptly, and that will ensure a high standard of facility.</p>	<p>System to be in place by August 2007.</p>
<p>BP5. Working with Natural England and landowners, the Council will designate as Local Nature Reserves those sites that are appropriate, if there is the support of the local community and funding is available for management, and consider other sites as they come forward.</p>	<p>Investigate three remaining sites (Castlefields, Box Common and Ashton Keynes Millennium Green) to see if LNR declaration is still desirable and feasible by end of 2007.</p> <p>Search for any alternative sites by end of 2008.</p>